

Why mental health counts

BY BISHOP CHRISTOPHER

MENTAL health is a live topic in our society. We rightly talk about it more and more, especially among children and young people. This is vitally important not just in preventing the waste of lives and talents, but also in seeking to make space for people to speak with one another about their experiences – and be heard.

As Christians this is a part of our common life that we should seek to understand more deeply, as our mental health is one important aspect of our human createdness. That's why I've chosen mental health as the theme for this year's Lent Appeal.

One of the most notable aspects of the way Scripture talks about being human is in its being integrated. Whereas some ancient philosophers saw the physical and spiritual as separate, the Bible understands all aspects of human life as being part of one interconnected whole.

In Deuteronomy, the human response to God should be to love with all our heart, soul, and strength, and Jesus puts this in terms of heart, soul, mind, and strength. In reality the meaning stays the same, because both are ways of describing the whole person. It is not that we can neatly split up our lives into these different parts, but rather that the love of God must flow from our whole being in all its interconnected complexity.

And indeed it is complex, more so than I can describe here, but we can at least say this reminds us not to focus on one part of our lives at the expense of another. Heart, soul, mind, and strength relate to one another, they are all important parts of our humanity and all need our care.

All are cared for by God as well. There is a sense in Scripture in which the character of human love is called to mirror the character of God's love for us. God loves creation with his whole being, but also loves every aspect of our being too. If we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, this is because God loves every one of those parts of us, and longs for our flourishing in all those ways.

The focus of our Lent Appeal is in supporting charities that promote mental health and wellbeing, and this focus will go beyond Lent and beyond our donations. I hope we think how our church communities can become more welcoming, affirming and accepting, places where we can be open with one another. Following the vulnerability of our Saviour, I hope that wherever we find ourselves and whatever difficulties we face, we may be communities of compassionate mutual love.

Thank you for your generosity in the Lent Appeal 2019, and for your part in making our churches and society affirming of all people.



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