



ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

OPERATION BARNABAS CHAPTER

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

September is *Suicide Prevention Month*. In recent news releases, the Veterans Administration identified suicide as a national public health issue, with more than 45,000 Americans dying by suicide each year and rates increasing among people ages 10–75. New data shows a similar increase in deaths by suicide among Veterans. According to a Suicide Prevention Coordinator, signs of an emerging crisis may include appearing sad or depressed most of the time, feelings of hopelessness, and mood swings. As an example of the positive steps that may be taken to prevent suicide through education, training and awareness, 'John Doe' told his wife about his suicidal thoughts, and she found resources to help him. Confidential support is available 24/7 from the Veterans Crisis Line (call 1-800- 273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat).

Despite some claims that Veterans are at higher risk of suicide than others, current

statistics generally indicate Veterans share about the same risk as the general population. However, occasionally certain groups experience an unusual spike in the incidence of suicide. Such is the recent increase experienced in the U.S. Air Force which prompted its Chief of Chaplains to send a letter to all Air Force chaplains, (Active, Reserve and Air National Guard), issuing a "Call to Prayer 13-15 September 2019." In his letter dated 27 August 2019 and an accompanying attachment with "Optional Prayer Ideas and Themes" Chaplain Major General Steven A. Schaick, USAF, calls on his chaplain colleagues to "join him in a time of prayer due to a nearly fifty percent increase in the number of Total Force suicides among Airmen this year. The goal of this collective, global, focused prayer is to defeat the spiritual dimension of hopelessness in our Airmen and replace it with hopefulness." In his concluding paragraph, Chaplain Schaick goes on to write "My prayer is that every Airman knows their life is precious. That he or she is surrounded by wingmen and loved ones who authentically care for them. That every Airman knows that feeling overwhelmed and helpless are feelings that all of us experience. That every Airman commits to persevere in hope that their overcoming will encourage someone else to overcome in the future. That every Airman knows without a doubt that they matter."

Martin Luther likened suicide to being "...overcome by the powers of the devil, like a man who is murdered by a robber in the woods." Just as we safeguard our citizens' lives and well-being from an 'ordinary' robber through education, assistance, and law enforcement protection, we can do the same to protect our brothers and sisters who are in danger of attack from that robber of life and all the forces that prompt the taking of one's own life. Please take the time to review the following information and prayerfully consider how you can aid and assist those in need. This will be posted on Zion's web page (www.zionwestwoodnj.org) and Zion's Operation Barnabas Chapter Page on Facebook. The hyperlinks provided there will make it easier to locate and view the various resources listed.

LCMS chaplains are deployed on active duty throughout the world. In support of their mission, Zion's Operation Barnabas Chapter will "adopt" a chaplain or chaplains who the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces inform us are in need of assistance. We will provide prayer and encouragement, as well as care packages for the chaplain and for his distribution

to those in his care. Details will be provided once this is finalized with the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces and a chaplain is identified. For additional information, you can reach me at pastorwhs@zionwestwoodnj.org or calling the church office.

Your Servant in Christ,
Bill Schmidt, SMP
Assistant Pastor

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS FROM A VETERANS ADMINISTRATION BULLETIN ON SUICIDE

**EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN PREVENTING VETERAN SUICIDE
LEARN HOW YOU CAN HELP AT BETHEREFORVETERANS.COM.**

September is Suicide Prevention Month. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is using this national observance to encourage everyone to *Be There* for Veterans in their lives by sharing *caring messages of support*.

Suicide prevention isn't limited to clinical settings, and you don't need special training to help someone feel less alone. Here are some actions anyone can take to help prevent suicide:

- Post *#BeThere* campaign materials and graphics — available at BeThereForVeterans.com — on your social media platforms.
- Reach out to the Veterans in your life and let them know you care. Send a “thinking of you” text, invite them to catch up over coffee, or offer to cook them dinner.
- Watch the free **S.A.V.E. training video** to prepare yourself to respond with care and compassion if someone indicates they are having thoughts of suicide.
- Download **VA's Social Media Safety Toolkit** to learn how to recognize and respond to social media posts that may indicate a Veteran is experiencing emotional distress or crisis.
- Share stories of help-seeking and recovery — such as those at MakeTheConnection.net — through your networks.
- Save the Veterans Crisis Line number in your phone: **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.**

- Familiarize yourself with the warning signs of suicide risk and learn how to respond to them at VeteransCrisisLine.net.

THE PRESENCE OF THE FOLLOWING SIGNS REQUIRES IMMEDIATE ATTENTION:

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug misuse, carelessly handling weapons, etc.

Finally, you can help by reinforcing the message that seeking help with life’s challenges is a sign of strength and courage, not weakness. There is always hope, and support is available through both VA and community providers.

Working together, we can prevent Veteran suicide. Learn more and get involved at BeThereForVeterans.com.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

Reporters covering this issue can download VA’s [Safe Messaging Best Practices fact sheet](#) or visit ReportingOnSuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

