

If you are experiencing difficulty with anxiety or stress and do not know where to turn, remember that you are not alone. You may contact the Parish Nurse for support. Call Karen Watson at 519-578-0660. After the voice mail answers, press 2.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

1 Peter 5: 6-7



Healthy Reflections – Body, Mind and Spirit

February 2016

Heart to Heart:

Can we choose - to Stress or not to Stress?

February is our month to focus on

Heart Health ... we can tell right away by all the plump, red hearts showing up on store windows and shelves.... RIGHT?



Of the many risk factors for heart disease and stroke, the effects of ongoing stress are right up there. We all have a certain amount of stress in our lives – in fact, having some stress is stimulating and motivating, helping us to accomplish the things that need doing.

The Canadian Mental Health Association states that 25% of Canadians report a high degree of life stress (2013). So what level of stress is okay? When will stress start to affect our physical, mental and spiritual health? The answer is probably

different for everyone; however having a “**tool box**” of positive coping skills will make the biggest difference for most of us.



A few essentials for your tool box:

- Be aware of the things that stress you (stressors)... this is often very individual
- Recognize the symptoms of stress – be aware of how **you feel** when stress is too high
- Healthy Life Choices make a BIG difference – proper nutrition, physical activity, consciously creating a balance of work, play and recreation

- Pay attention to getting enough rest and sleep
- Be mindful of negative coping strategies – for example, overindulgence in alcohol, smoking, eating too much or too little, holding all your emotions inside, using drugs in order to relax, withdrawing from others
- Develop a strong social network that is life-giving

In the busy-ness of life we often need to be intentional about taking the time for activities which relax. Do you regularly include some quiet time in your day? Some time to reflect, to read scripture or inspirational writings – perhaps you like to



write in a journal, practice meditation and prayer? Some other activities you might like to try are yoga, slow stretching, Tai Chi, deep breathing, music that soothes you, walking or getting out in nature, singing, taking a hot bath..... The key is to identify what works best for you and then to **set the time aside regularly.**

Last evening I decided to look at the Pastors in Exile (PiE) website; Chris Brnjas’s presence with us this past Sunday had intrigued me, so I took the time to have a look at their blog.

<http://pastorsinexile.org/>

Chris’s partner in ministry is Jessica Reesor Rempel – Jessica has decided to give up stress for Lent. That is interesting, isn’t it? In her blog Jessica talks about things like acknowledging and expressing feelings and not letting stressful thoughts take over. She admits that giving up stress may not be completely possible; however choosing the ways we will manage stress is doable.

Following are a couple of quotes from Jessica’s blog (with permission)

“Feelings exist for a reason and there is no way through them but to feel them and express them. In that sense I can’t choose not to feel stressed. So during lent, when I start to feel stress creeping in, I will acknowledge it, maybe write about it in my journal or call my mom to talk about it, but then I will try to move on.”

“For me choosing not to let stressful thoughts circle and circle in my head feels like an important practice to come back to at this time of year as I am opening up space to examine my life and God’s place in it. As I set down some of the burden of stress, I trust that God holds that burden. I am not in this alone.”



Jessica is modeling some positive approaches to managing stress, such as healthy emotional expression and spiritual practices. We can all make these small changes. The earlier in life that such habits and practices are developed, the more they simply become part of the way we “do life.” They become coping strategies that help to prevent stress from having negative health outcomes.

Remember that it is also okay to seek help if situations have become overwhelming or if you are feeling that life is out of control. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness!

Sometimes simply talking through things with a trusted friend will be enough. Professional counselling or more formal support groups are also very appropriate, and, at times, necessary.