

# Lutheran Social Service Offers Free Services to Veterans and Their Families

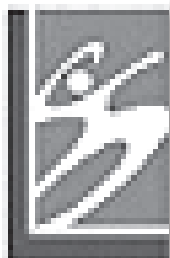
by Amy Blumenshine, *Coming Home Collaborative*

Pastoral staff and congregations involved in ministry with veterans and their families now can refer to a trusted friend – Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) – for no cost care. Veterans of any era, active duty, reserve military and their immediate families across Minnesota are eligible for a range of LSS services thanks to a partnership with the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and state funding.

The overall concept is to help military service members who have not been getting appropriate care for their problems. Case management, outreach, referral to other services and education are the goals of the program. Those functions also form the program's acronym: Minnesota Service C.O.R.E. The scope of services includes individual and family counseling, financial counseling, debt management, addiction assessments and referral, disability services and in-home counseling.

"We're dependent on other people's eyes and ears to touch others in need and let them know what we offer," said Gene Benson a senior director for LSS.

Recent clients in these programs have ranged from individuals who had difficulty navigating the Veterans Administration services to veterans who were acutely depressed and suicidal. Many military service members are making use of the financial counseling.



Of course, anyone can turn to LSS for services, but the pathway for a veteran to access the specialized free services of this program requires connecting first with their county veteran's service officer (in Hennepin County 612-348-3300) or with a representative of the Minnesota Department of Veterans' Affairs (1-888-

LinkVet is their 24-hour phone line). After a military service member is approved for assistance, an LSS case manager will contact the client and begin coordinating local resources. The case manager will work directly with clients. Alternatively, a service member or their immediate family could call the LSS intake line (612-879-5320) and ask for the C.O.R.E. program.

Many service members suffer from moral and spiritual injuries. LSS employs counselors who are also ordained ministers and can address those issues, if requested. In addition, the faith community is an appropriate place to address those wounds. A special Way of the Cross Service oriented towards the suffering and healing of veterans and their families is being planned for Good Friday evening, April 10. Contact ListenToVets@comcast.net for more information.



## Mental Health Support, continued from page 10

- A caregiver program connects a caregiver with a person who has mental illness. They both look forward to the time spent together.
- Events during May, which is Mental Health Awareness Month include Theatre-Lodge Magic and discussion, art gallery show, works by artists living with mental illness, and youth and parent discussions on depression and suicide.

We encourage all to look at this topic, because it affects us all in some way, and we want to be prepared to recognize when we can and should reach out. More people are dealing with economic stress, we have soldiers coming back that need support, and our elderly and youth have many new challenges.

For those in other parts of Minnesota: Each county is mandated to have a Local Advisory Council (LAC) for adults and children. It is designed for those who use or need mental health services in the county, to have a voice in how it works, and to advise the commissioners and state advisory which brings recommendations to the governor on this topic. It would be valuable for faith communities and the LAC to have someone representing the faith communities on both the adult and children's groups. Last October, leaders came to a conference designed to strengthen these advisory councils. Many asked how they could get their churches more interested in these concerns.

We are happy to share what we have learned to assist any churches in building or strengthening their mission to all those who are experiencing illnesses of the brain. If you would like more information, contact Jan Buntz at 612-926-9646.