**The Essentials of Suicide Prevention for Busy Pastors**

BIO:

Dr. Karen Mason is a Professor of Counseling and Psychology and the Director of the Counseling Program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary—Hamilton where she has prepared students to be licensed mental health counselors since 2006. She is a native of Colorado (and loves to ski and hike). She learned French while growing up in France, some German while living in Austria and some Haitian Creole while living in Haiti, teaching at Hope Academy. She has also lived in Pakistan, teaching at Murree Christian School. She completed an M.A. in Old Testament at Denver Seminary and an M.A. and Ph.D. in counseling psychology at the University of Denver with a minor in industrial / organizational psychology. In addition to being a licensed professional counselor and a licensed psychologist, she has managed teams and several high impact projects. Before moving to Massachusetts, she managed the Office of Suicide Prevention at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. She has worked in the mental health field since 1990 with clients across the age-span and in a variety of settings including Lahey Behavioral Health. She is currently in private practice. Her research is focused on the clergy’s and faith community’s role in suicide prevention. She is a member of the American Counseling Association and the American Psychological Association.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The U.S. suicide rate has steadily increased since 1999, though it briefly decreased during the pandemic. About 6% to 11% of your congregation may be thinking about suicide. Given the increasing numbers of lives lost to suicide and the presence of suicide in churches, it is imperative that pastors are equipped to help prevent suicide.

In this course you will learn all relevant and basic aspects of suicide prevention. We will discuss the unique role of faith in protecting congregants from suicide. We will develop a theology of suicide and life (reasons for staying alive). You will learn how to help a suicidal congregant who reaches out to you for help. You will plan how to help loved ones and a community following a suicide death. We will also discuss how to develop a personal plan for self-care.

TEXT: Mason, K. (2023). *The Essentials of Suicide Prevention: A Blueprint for Churches*. Cascade Books.

COURSE OUTLINE WITH READINGS:

**January 9 7pm-9pm**

**Session 1 Prevention**

Read Chapters 1-4 in Mason, K. (2023). *The Essentials of Suicide Prevention: A Blueprint for Churches*. Cascade Books.

**January 16 7pm-9pm**

**Session 2 Intervention**

Read chapters 5-6 in Mason, K. (2023). *The Essentials of Suicide Prevention: A Blueprint for Churches*. Cascade Books.

**January 23 7pm-9pm**

**Session 3 Postvention**

Read chapters 7-9 in Mason, K. (2023). *The Essentials of Suicide Prevention: A Blueprint for Churches*. Cascade Books.

ASSIGNMENT:

Choose ONE of these options for your paper.

Write a double-spaced 4-page paper on the topic of your choosing.

1. Write your Theology of Suicide, which will be amply supported with scriptural references. Moral objections keep some people from suicide but do not provide theological arguments for not taking one’s life and being with the Lord now. Therefore, include a theology of life (why live?), a theology of suffering (why live in a broken world full of suffering?), and a theology of community (can anyone ever be a burden?)
2. Plan a 15-minute suicide prevention activity. The activity could be a sermon on choosing life or a youth group activity on building a Hope Kit or a suicide funeral message or a caring letters campaign to suicidal congregants or a handout for suicide survivors.
3. The Response Protocol is a procedural manual on what your church will do both in an acute suicidal crisis (for example, what to do if a suicidal congregant asks for help or if a congregant attempts suicide) AND what your church will do following a suicide. Make sure to mention what you will do for long-term care for survivors.

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National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. (2023). *Hope: A guide for faith leaders to help prevent youth suicide*. The Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma.

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**Lived experience with Suicide**

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Hsu, A.Y. (2017). *Grieving a suicide: A loved one’s search for comfort, answers & hope (2nd ed.).* Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Stone, E., & Stone, E. (2014). *Valley of the Shadow*. Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press

**Websites**

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline <https://988lifeline.org/>

Watch Kevin Hines**:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcSUs9iZv-g>

Watch Kevin Berthia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HB2_lA68YDU>

American Association of Suicidology <http://www.suicidology.org/>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention <http://www.afsp.org/>

Mennonite Media’s Fierce Goodbye website <http://store.mennomedia.org/Fierce-Goodbye-P978.aspx>

National Institute of Mental Health— [http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml)/

Suicide Prevention Resource Center <http://www.sprc.org/>

**Apps**

**See reviews at** [**https://www.apaservices.org/practice/business/technology/tech-column/mobile-apps-suicide-prevention**](https://www.apaservices.org/practice/business/technology/tech-column/mobile-apps-suicide-prevention)

Suicide Safe

Suicide Safety Plan

Virtual Hope Box