

Practical Resources for Churches: Becoming a Mental Health WISE Congregation

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Be still and know that
I am God.

Psalm 46:10



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you are not alone

you are loved

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of Christ

Disabilities
Ministries

Accessible to All
(A2A)

www.uccdm.org

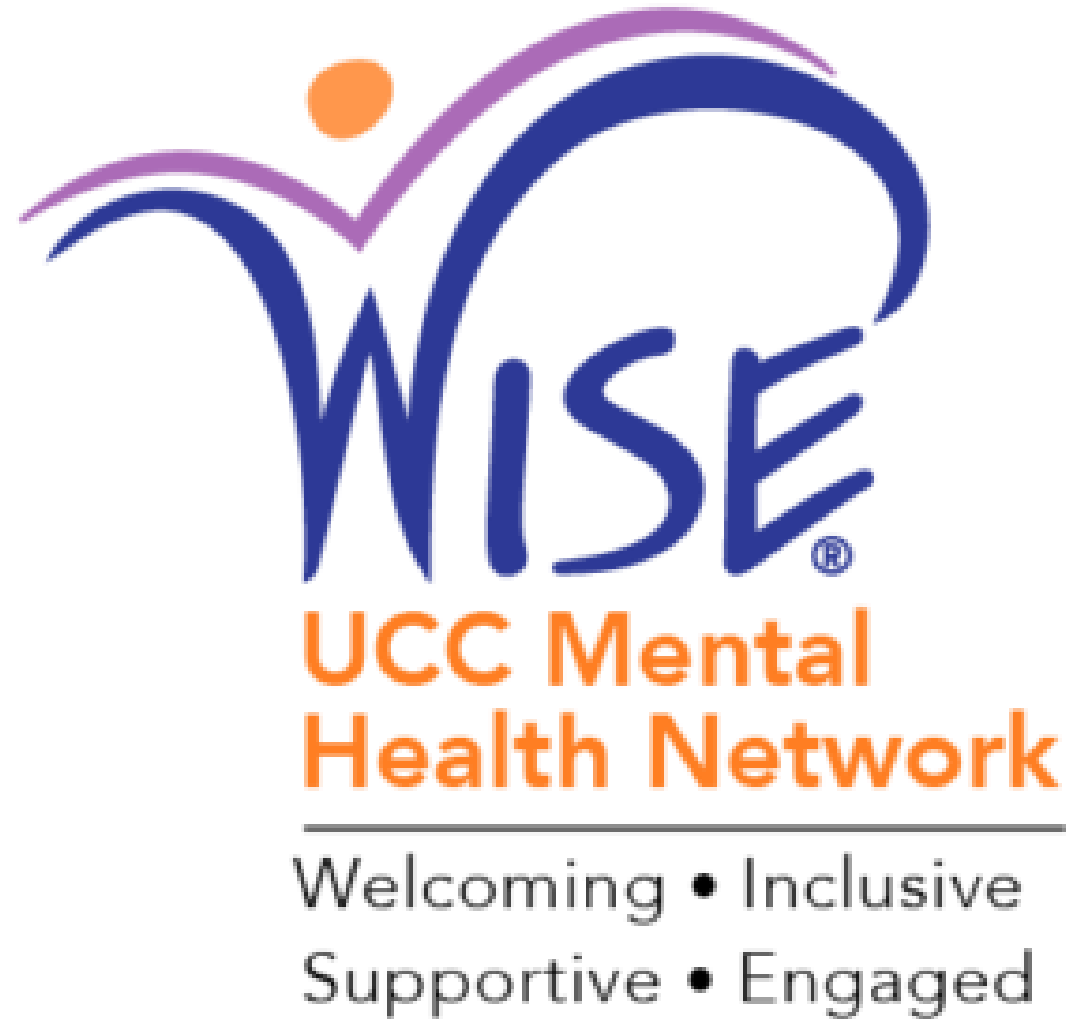


United Church of Christ

Mental Health Network

WISE (Welcoming,
Inclusive, Supportive,
and Engaged) for
Mental Health

www.mhn-ucc.org



What do we mean
by mental health?



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“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, & contribute to their community...it is a basic human right.”

World Health Organization



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What do we mean
by mental illness?



“Mental illness is a condition that affects our thinking, emotions, and behaviors. Mental illnesses can be influenced by our environments, past and trauma, and biology.”

Mental Health America



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1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness
each year

1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious
mental illness each year

National Alliance on Mental Illness



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1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year

50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people ages 10-24

National Alliance on Mental Illness



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What stories do the
numbers tell?



Tools to support mental health for faith communities



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Mental Health Network
WISE
(Welcoming, Inclusive,
Supportive and Engaged)



Welcoming

Create a welcoming environment for people with mental health challenges and their families.

Start a Mental Health Ministry Team to understand mental health challenges and address stigma around them in the larger community.



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Inclusive

Include people with mental health challenges and brain differences in the life of the congregation and ensure worship is a safe space to speak on mental health issues. Offer prayers for those living with mental health challenges, specifically praying with and for those who are willing to have their mental illnesses acknowledged in prayer. Celebrate Mental Health Sunday (designated by the UCC as the third Sunday in May every year).



Supportive

Provide support for people with mental health challenges and their families. Offer a Spiritual Support Group for Mental Health each month in which individuals living with mental health challenges, their families, and their friends can share their stories in a faith-based safe space. Provide the proverbial “casserole” to those who are experiencing mental health challenges at home or in mental health center/hospital.



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Engaged

Provide outreach and educational opportunities both within the congregation and throughout the larger community. Offer a Mental Health Ministry Forum that can offer speakers, book study, discussions, sermon reviews, or other education monthly. Connect with community partners, including other local churches, NAMI, and local mental health clinics.



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Ten Steps to Become
WISE
Welcoming
Inclusive
Supportive
Engaged
for Mental Health



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1. Consult faith leader

In many faith communities, a lay committee guides the congregation through the WISE process.

Letting your faith leader know about your interest in WISE certification, inviting them to participate, or committing to keeping them informed as you move ahead is a necessary first step.



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2. Form a WISE Team

Invite individuals and families living with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, and brain disorders—as well as people from a wide variety of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality identities to be part of your WISE team



3. Connect with the UCC Mental Health Network

Send an email to wise@mhn-ucc.org if you have questions or start the process by filling out online form. You will receive a warm welcome from MHN's WISE Team and then meet your assigned WISE Liaison, who will support you and your community throughout your WISE journey.



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4. Develop an approach that leads to a vote to become WISE

Consider the impacts of the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, immigration status, sexuality, gender identity on mental health and access to culturally appropriate health care. Discuss how the congregation may provide appropriate mental health resource information for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families



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5. Draft your WISE Covenant & share it with your WISE Liaison

You can find sample draft WISE Covenants on the website at www.mhn-ucc.org. Review your draft WISE Covenant with your WISE Liaison



Covenant Sample language:

In an effort to reduce social stigma, we pledge to examine our own attitudes and preconceived notions about mental health challenges and mental health and to confront our own ingrained stigma. We pledge to actively welcome those with mental health challenges into our faith community and provide a safe environment in which people can tell their stories and share their journeys.



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Covenant Sample language:

We pledge to include people with mental health challenges in the life, work and leadership of the congregation. We commit to recruiting, nominating and supporting persons with mental health challenges to serve on teams and in leadership positions within the congregation. When calling clergy and other staff, we pledge to be open to hiring persons with mental health challenges.



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6. Involve your leadership in engaging the WISE Covenant

Offer all the members of your congregation, including leadership, the opportunity to read, comment, and ask questions about your covenant. Listening sessions and presentations are common ways for sharing draft covenants within an organization.



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7. Adopt your WISE Covenant

Each faith community and faith tradition has its own way of adopting covenants: use the method that works for your community. For example, within the United Church of Christ and many mainline Protestant congregations, a vote of members at an annual or specially called meeting is the way to adopt a covenant. In other faith communities, a board or council may make the final decision.



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8. Certify and Celebrate being WISE

Inform your WISE Liaison that you have adopted a WISE Covenant so that the UCC MHN can celebrate! You will receive a link to a final form to fill out, where you can attach the final version of your covenant. You will be added to the list of WISE Congregations on the UCC MHN website, receive appreciation via the UCC MHN social media channels, receive your WISE certificate in the mail, and be honored at the next UCC General Synod. You can request MHN Board Member to honor you and share your WISE certification at your faith community or denomination's meeting.



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9. Publicize your WISEdom locally

Connect with local advocacy and behavioral health organizations, like NAMI, Mental Health America, hospitals, mental health systems, city government, and state's health and human services department. Offer financial support to the UCC MHN each year. The WISE certification process is free to all faith organizations, and your donations help us continue to offer WISE and mental health resources to everyone.



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10. Turn to the Future

You are now mental health justice leader in your community and a member of the WISE family. UCC MHN will check in with you at least annually to celebrate your WISE ministries. What will you do next to make your community a place of radical belonging for everyone?



Where is God showing up?



God is at the center



Breaking the silence

Ending the stigma

Telling the stories



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What is our calling
for such a time as this?
Faith communities can create
spiritual communities that
strengthen connections to God
and show love for one another.



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988

24/7 confidential crisis line



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NAMI Support Groups
(National Alliance on Mental
Illness)

www.nami.org



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Mental Health First-Aid Trainings

www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org



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Mental Health America
free online screenings

www.mhanational.org



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UCC Mental Health Network WISE

www.mhn-ucc.org



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