



Northwest Ohio Association
United Church of Christ

Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) Resolution

In the United Church of Christ, we affirm that no matter who you are and no matter where you are or have been on life's journey, you are welcome. This affirmation is rooted in love when Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

The Northwest Ohio Association (NWOA) has chosen to live out this commandment by becoming a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supporting, and Engaged (WISE) association. We will establish covenantal relationships with God and individual churches within the Northwest Ohio Association, as well as with each other and ourselves.

Therefore, the NWOA agrees to live out this call of accepting all of God's beloved children by entering into a WISE covenant:

WHEREAS, the NWOA resolves to be Welcoming to people with mental health challenges to reduce the stigma that has made them feel unwelcome in the past.

WHEREAS, the NWOA resolves to be Inclusive to people with mental health challenges to ensure they fit into all association events and activities.

WHEREAS, the NWOA resolves to be Supportive of people with mental health challenges to recognize that everyone needs help at some time in their life.

WHEREAS, the NWOA resolves to be Engaged with people who have mental health challenges to learn more from them and how they can be active participants in the beloved community.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NWOA will become a WISE Association in all activities from April 26, 2025 forward.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NWOA will offer resources and support to congregations who choose to become WISE churches.

References:

[UCC WISE resolution](#)

[UCC Mental Health Network WISE website](#)

[Heartland Conference WISE Covenant](#)

[Heartland Conference Mental Health and Accessibility](#)

[Network 10 Steps for WISE Certification Updated July 2021](#)

Becoming WISE
Welcoming Inclusive Supportive Engaged

- The United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries (UCCDM) envisions a world in which all people are included in the fullness of life because they are created in the image of God.
- The mission of UCCDM is to support all settings of the United Church of Christ (UCC) including but not limited to: Local Congregations, Associations, Conferences, camps, Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGs), and national settings as they seek to recognize and provide access to people with disabilities in all aspects of the church's life and ministry.

WISE~~~What it is and isn't

- It IS a process to encourage congregations (and associations and conferences) to become more welcoming and supportive of those living with mental health challenges and their families.
- It IS NOT a way to "fix situations" or take the role of therapist!
- It IS learning to be present with those experiencing mental health challenges and to respond with compassion.
- It IS providing safe space for spiritual support.

What Does It Mean?

- The warm, welcoming invitation to all!
- True hospitality – think about barriers ahead of time!
- Examine from all perspectives.
- Removing barriers for all!
- The ministry opportunities for all!

How? Examine Everything...

- By: Sight Sound Touch Taste Smell Space!
 - How about: Movement and Space
 - Size of furniture Arms on some chairs
 - Table Level Chair level Soap level Sink level
 - No Steps
 - Directions/signs visible everywhere
 - Because everyone should be able to serve in worship, discipleship, fellowship, and stewardship!

But More than Anything ...

- Attitude.
- Greetings, welcome, invitation, and inclusion.
- The opportunity to DO ministry as well as receive it.

--copied from Heartland Conference Website

WISE NETWORK *Who We Are*

What is our Mission?

The United Church of Christ Mental Health Network proclaims and celebrates the basic sacred right each individual has to their own mental health. Therefore, our mission is to reduce stigma, and promote the inclusion of people and families with self-reported emotional/neurodiverse symptoms, experiences, and diagnoses, in the life and leadership of congregations, synagogues, and organizations.

We recognize the despair prevalent in today's world and respond in joyful embrace of the individual's divinity and dignity. Our programs normalize the conversation around mental health, and seek to prevent isolation and suicide by centering on education, belonging, and safety.

What is our Vision?

We envision a future in which:

- People with self-reported emotional and neurodiverse symptoms, experiences, and diagnoses, along with their families/caretakers feel welcomed, included, supported, and engaged in the life, leadership, and justice/advocacy work of their congregations/synagogues/organizations.
- UCC congregations have eliminated stigma, and their members offer true compassion and support, creating a just world for all people.
- All settings of the UCC are collaborating with other faith-based and community organizations to widen their welcome to all people.
- Our UCC communities nationwide acknowledge the unique aspect of the divine that exists in those living a different mental health experience than our own, and in gratitude enter into a loving communion with all.

What are our Values?

- Jesus has shown us the way to embrace those who are marginalized by society and advocate with and for them.
- Every person has value and worth and deserves love, dignity and respect.
- All people, regardless of mental health or disability status, have something to contribute to the life, leadership and work of their congregations/synagogues/organizations.
- Community matters. A sense of belonging is important to us all, whether we face mental health challenges ourselves or not.
- True compassion in ministry and relationships is based on equality.

What is our History?

- In 1992 the Mental Health Network (formerly the Mental Illness Network) began with a grant from the American Missionary Association of the United Church of Christ. We began as a response to the need for families and others to communicate among themselves about their experiences as families, and in congregations/synagogues/organizations. We are, therefore, a network and not a committee.
- Who are we striving to include?
- We are your sibling, the person across the street, the person next to you in the pew.
- In a given year, one in every four people (26.2%, according to the National Institute on Mental Health) is dealing with a mental illness, also known as a brain disorder.
- Here's what Rosalynn Carter says:
"People with mental problems are our neighbors. They are members of our congregations, members of our families; they are everywhere in this country. If we ignore their cries for help, we will be continuing to participate in the anguish from which those cries for help come. A problem of this magnitude will not go away. Because it will not go away, and because of our spiritual commitments, we are compelled to take action."
- What is your congregation, synagogue, organization doing to widen the welcome and support those with mental health related challenges in your midst? What are you doing as an individual? How is your congregation/organization/synagogue supporting those with mental health challenges or stressors related to neurodiversity?

--copied from Heartland Conference Website

Next Steps

Living Into Your WISE Covenant/Commitment

Faith communities can practice being a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged Congregation for Mental Health in the following ways:

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

- Welcome people by name.
- Create “Mental Health Ministry” badges, visually indicating that mental health is important in our congregation
- Launch a Sunday Companionship Team.
- Start a Mental Health Ministry Team to understand mental health challenges and address stigma around them in the larger community.

2. Inclusion: 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:

- Actively include people with mental health challenges in the work of the Mental Health Ministry.
- Use inclusive language from the pulpit about mental health conditions such as major depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, PTSD, eating disorders, and substance use disorders.
- 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 United Church of Christ as the third Sunday in May every year).
- Find or develop a curriculum and/or adult forums that ensure the needs of adults and children with mental health challenges are included in all areas of church life.
- Provide education and activities that welcome any marginalized group, including immigrants, communities of color, members of the LGBTQIAA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and allies) community, to share and be honored for their experiences and stories regarding access to mental health resources and living with mental health challenges.



Living Into Your WISE Covenant/Commitment



3.Support: 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.
- Develop a community mental health resource list that can be shared and used by church staff and volunteers.
- Offer rides to church or to local support groups.
- Provide the proverbial “casserole” to those who are experiencing mental health challenges at home or in mental health center/hospital.
- Consider practical support such as respite care for caregivers, temporary housing, and offering opportunities for meaningful work for individuals living with a mental health challenge.

4.Engagement: Provide outreach and educational opportunities both within the congregation and throughout the larger community:

- a. Offer a Mental Health Ministry Forum that can offer speakers, a book study, discussions, sermon reviews, or other education each month or every other month.
- b. Provide mental health promotion and support training to the congregation and larger community. For example, offer a free or low-cost Mental Health First Aid certification training at your faith community.
- c. Link with other faith communities and faith organizations like the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network, doing mental health ministry.
- d. Connect with community partners, including other local churches, NAMI, local mental health clinics, and other non-profit organizations.
- e. Call attention to current local, state, or national legislation regarding mental health and access to mental health services by offering education and advocacy opportunities.
- f. Allow outside groups that deal with mental health concerns to use your facility without cost. For example, allow your local NAMI chapter to host a weekly NAMI support group in your faith community.
- g. Sign up for the UCC Mental Health Weekly blogs at www.mhn-ucc.org and join the UCC Mental Health Network Facebook page.
- h. Consider making a financial donation to the work of the UCC Mental Health Network.