

SECTION A

AGENDA AND MEETING INFORMATION

- 1 PROPOSED AGENDA
- 2 OPENING WORSHIP
- 3 CLOSING WORSHIP
- 4 DIRECTORY OF OFFICERS, STAFF, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
- 5 TABLE OF CONTENTS
- 6 CHURCH HISTORY
- 7 MODERATORS OF THE NORTHWEST OHIO ASSOCIATION
- 8 RULES AND OPERATING PROCEDURES
- 9 HOW TO REPORT ON AN ANNUAL MEETING
- 10 WISE MOTION MATERIALS

62nd Annual Meeting

April 26, 2024

Proposed Agenda

Northwest Ohio Association

Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ

Peace Community United Church of Christ, Waldo, Ohio

THEME: *"Into the Deep"*

Luke 5:4-6

- 8:00 am Registration & Breakfast
- 9:00 am Call to Order – Declaration of Quorum (Sanctuary)
Welcome
Opening Worship with Holy Communion - Rev. Daniel L. Busch, Association Minister
Rev. Joel Fetter, Pastor Peace Community Church
(Special offering will be for New Church Start in Celina, Ohio) Adoption of Agenda
Approval of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes
Introductions
Special Guests
Greetings from Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins, Conference Minister
New to the Association & Members in Discernment
Nominations and Election
Recognitions – Anniversaries, OCWM Awards
- 10:15 am Keynote Address and Dialogue, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, UCC General Minister and President
- 11:30 am Video Greetings from Back Bay Mission
Lunch
- 12:15 pm Video Greetings from Ms. Jill Frey, Executive Director of Outdoor Ministries
Proposal, Discussion, and Vote: NWOA becoming part of WISE (Welcoming Inclusive Supportive Engaged) Network

Financial Reports – 2025 Final Budget & 2026 Preliminary Budget Receiving of Reports – Teams, Committees, and Association Minister Video Presentations
- 2:45 pm Closing Celebration, Announcements, Amenities, Leadership Installation
Adjournment

“Into the Deep” – A Service Reflecting Luke 5:1-11
Opening Worship – April 26, 2025
Sacrament of Holy Communion

GATHERING MUSIC

***CELEBRATING BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST** *(responsively)*

*Jesus says, “Put out **INTO THE DEEP** water and let down your nets for a catch.”*

“Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing.”

Our ministries and missions have often seemed too demanding, and we are tired.

We labor and expend our energy and are sometimes disappointed.

We have lost track of Christ’s missions and ministries that we are called to do.

Families have become strangers; neighbors are aliens; faith seems too demanding.

*Jesus calls His disciples to risk being transformed by a new way, **INTO THE DEEP**, a place of change, hope, and abundance.*

When we focus on Jesus and hear Jesus calling us INTO THE DEEP where “we have never done it that way before,” unlimited possibilities become realities of amazing grace filled with the Holy Spirit of re-formation and reformation.

*“When they let down their nets” and when we reach **INTO THE DEEP**, blessings overflow never thought possible before.*

Jesus said, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people...When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.”

***UNISON PRAYER**

(BWUCC, p. 553)

Still-speaking God, You have called us to be servants as Your beloved family. We reach INTO THE DEEP and receive Your abundant love, forgiveness, and transformation to bring peace, justice, and hope into Your world. “O Christ, our only Savior, so dwell within us that we may go forth with the light of hope in our eyes and the fire of inspiration on our lips, Your word on our tongues, and Your love in our hearts.” Amen.

MUSIC PRESENTATION

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION** *(unison)*

(from BWUCC, p. 531)

Almighty God, too often we forget Your promise. We live in ways that bring glory only to ourselves. We bask in the false assumption that we are in control of our lives. Sometimes we want to tamper with the lives of those around us for our own ends. Help us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to serve You more faithfully each day. Amen.

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Loving God, You call us INTO THE DEEP where we find blessings in abundance. Thank You for the gifts of Christ and generosity of love for one another. Bless us in our ministries and missions to proclaim the Good News of faith, hope, and love in Jesus’ name. Amen.

***HYMN**

“Take My Life and Let It Be”

#466

***COMMISSION AND BEDICTION**

MUSIC OF PRAISE

CLOSING WORSHIP -- Installation of NWOA Officers and Teams

INSTALLATION OF NWOA OFFICERS AND TEAMS

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Jesus Christ, the head of the church in heaven and on earth.

To God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Affirmation of ministry is the act whereby the United Church of Christ recognizes the diverse gifts of its members and celebrates the particular ministry of each person in the life of the church or in various settings in the life of the world. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them.

There are different ways of serving, but the same God is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to each of us for our particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts. It is one body, even though it is made up of different parts.

If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness. All of us are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

PRESENTATION

These persons have been called by God, nominated and elected by Northwest Ohio Association, to serve among us. They have accepted their call and are before us in witness to their willingness to serve.

COVENANT

Sisters and brothers in Christ, it is an honor to be entrusted with responsibility for particular service in the ministries of the Church of Jesus Christ through Northwest Ohio Association, whether gathered or scattered.

Having prayerfully considered the duties and responsibilities of your ministry, are you prepared to serve with the help of God in Christ's name and for the glory of God?

Response: I am.

Do you promise to exercise your ministry diligently and faithfully, showing forth the love of Christ?

Response: I do, relying on God's grace.

Members of this "community of communities" of faith, you have heard the promise of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have answered God's call to service. Let us affirm our intention to live in covenant with them. Will those who are able rise and witness to the commitment we now make?

We gather in celebration of the joy that is ours to be partners with you in the service of Jesus Christ. We promise to love you, honor your leadership, and assist you that together we may be a faithful church of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Eternal God, You have called these persons to serve You in Northwest Ohio Association and in the world, which You have entrusted to our care and keeping. Send Your Holy Spirit on them that they may serve among us with honor and faithfulness. Help them to be diligent in their duties that Your Church may prosper in the mission You place before it. May their example prove worthy for all of us to follow, as we are united in Christ's ministry, to the glory of Your name. AMEN.

DECLARATION

In the name of Jesus Christ, and on behalf of the people of Northwest Ohio Association of the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ, I rejoice to announce: You are installed in your respective positions.

Thanks be to God. To God be the glory. Amen.

DIRECTORY OF OFFICERS AND STAFF

OFFICERS

Ms. Peggy George Moderator
Pastor Jay Scott Vice Moderator
Rev. Darla Metz Secretary
Mrs. Dian Ewald Treasurer
Mr. Doug Ricci Past Moderator

STAFF

Rev. Daniel L. Busch..... Association Minister
Mrs. Kim Nye.....Office Manager/Placement Coordinator
Mrs. Deb LongBookkeeper

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Ms. Peggy George – MODERATOR

I have been a member of Bloomville UCC since 1976, serving several years as President of the Consistory. I remain a member even though Bloomville is not my current home. I currently reside in St. Marys, Ohio. I'm not new to the NWOA, having served as Sandusky Valley representative, past Vice-Moderator, and member of the HR Committee. I have taken Old Testament and New Testament classes in the Lay School.

Due to the retirement of Rev. Jim Brehler in April 2024, I assumed the role of Moderator for the remainder of Jim's term for 2024. I conducted my first annual meeting on April 27, 2024, at St. Stephen United Church of Christ in Sandusky, Ohio. I led in-person meetings at the NWOA office in Tiffin on May 18 and September 21. The rest of the year Zoom meetings were held on November 9, January 25 and March 15. We are preparing for the 62nd Annual Meeting to be held at Peace Community UCC in Waldo.

It has been a pleasure to serve as Moderator, and I look forward to continuing my service on the Association Cabinet.

Pastor Jay Scott - VICE MODERATOR

Pastor Jay Scott is the licensed pastor at Emanuel UCC at Upper Sandusky, (aka "The Mud Church!") where he has served since August 2014. His upbringing is in the United Methodist Church, and he pastored a Methodist church prior to Emanuel. Jay has a professional background in broadcasting, marketing/public relations, and American Red Cross management and disaster relief. Jay is also a farmer, and lives on the family farm with his wife, Kathy, who is secretary at two Lutheran churches. They have two daughters, and four granddaughters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION A - ORANGE PAGES

Basic Meeting Information

SECTION B - BLUE PAGES

Officer and Staff Reports

SECTION C - PINK PAGES

Financial Reports

OCWM in NWOA

SECTION D – IVORY PAGES

No Ordinations in 2025

SECTION E – GOLDENROD PAGES

NWOA Organizational Chart

NWOA Role and Mission

NWOA Vision

Team Reports

SECTION F – VIOLET PAGES

Directory

SECTION G- WHITE PAGES

Heartland Conference

Outdoor Ministries

Disaster Ministries

SECTION H– GREEN PAGES

Recognized Mission Partners

SECTION I – YELLOW PAGES

Nominations

BRIEF HISTORY

Peace Community UCC, Marion, Ohio

Peace Community United Church of Christ

Peace Community UCC just celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2024. There is a little debate about when the golden anniversary was, but the theme was “Open the Doors in ‘74”, but officially it could have been 1975. Our roots go much deeper, however. This congregation is a result of St. Joseph’s and St. John’s Reformed Churches merging and both dates back to the 1850’s. St. Joe’s was the city church and St. John’s was the country church. The site of Peace Community is roughly halfway between both of those predecessor bodies. You will notice that in the tower out front there are two bells. They are from the respective churches and at one time were connected so that both would ring together to call the faithful to worship.

The name “Peace” describes this congregation perfectly. People are willing to compromise, gather to complete a project with a spirit of cooperation, and are particularly supportive of pastoral leadership and staff. There is a spirit of calm that can be felt as people enter this place.

For those of you who know Rev. Frank Isaacs, you understand he loves music. This church is known as “the singing church.” As their minister, he made sure the congregation could sing in four-part harmony and with gusto. We also have a Senior Choir and, in the past, a bell choir and a dulcimer group. We were blessed to have Joyce Cumston play the organ for years even before it was Peace Community. Currently, Eileen Chappell is our organist.

This congregation loves youth. If the young people need money for a trip or event, it is there immediately. We have adults that partner with our Confirmation students and the two explore faith together. Over the years, there have been several paid staff members that have been a Christian Education/Youth Director.

This body of Christ is engaged in mission and outreach outside of our four walls. Groups, including our youth, have gone on trips including to Back Bay Mission in Mississippi, New York City, Washington DC, and Virginia. In 1999, Peace Community UCC provided the funds and the volunteers to build a Habitat for Humanity house in Marion. We have assembled disaster relief kits for the Heartland Conference, had a special relationship with a small local nursing home, and helped to serve free community meals at a site in downtown Marion. In recent years, we have also been intentional about engaging in outreach by connecting with residents. We send out a quarterly community newsletter, host events here at the church and off-site (for example, local pool), and have recently called a person as our Outreach director who will keep us laser focused on this task. There have been people throughout the years that have left the congregation with legacy funds. They include the Macks, Beckels, Edith Loyer, and Joyce Rider. The dividends from these financial gifts have been invaluable for programming and is now allowing us to do some strategic planning and upgrades to our physical facility for mission in the 21st century. We are hopeful to open a preschool in 2025-26. Two significant gifts were given by Rev. Frank Isaacs for mission trips and special educational opportunities.

We are grateful to be hosting the 62nd Northwest Ohio Annual Association Meeting. It is an honor to provide this space to express our gratefulness to the Wider Church for their partnership with us. May your experience the spirit of Peace as you participate in this gathering.

MODERATORS OF THE NORTHWEST OHIO ASSOCIATION

On Sunday, October 25, 1963 ministers and delegates representing congregations seeking membership in the Northwest Ohio Association met at Trinity United Church of Christ, Tiffin, and gave birth to this covenant fellowship. First United Church of Christ, Lima was the site of the First Annual Meeting, May 6 and 7, 1964. Since then the following persons, clergy and laity, have been elected to assume the duties of moderator:

1963-64	* Rev. Paul Rohrbaugh, St. John's UCC, Genoa, MB
1964-65	* Rev. Paul Rohrbaugh, St. John's UCC, Genoa, MB
1965-66	* Mr. Charles McKenny, Pilgrim Church of the UCC, Toledo, MB
1966-67	* Rev. Robert Boardman, First Congregational UCC, Sandusky, F
1967-68	* Mr. Oscar J. Weiker, Trinity UCC, Upper Sandusky, H
1968-69	* Rev. Richard P. Vitz, First UCC, Lima, ME
1969-70	Mr. R. Clark Hunter, Ripley Congregational UCC, Greenwich, F
1970-71	Rev. Larry K. May, St. Paul's UCC, Bellevue, F
1971-72	* Mr. Randall Buchman, The St. John UCC, Defiance, D
1972-73	* Rev. William Tuck, Trinity UCC, Tiffin, H
1973-74	Mr. Jay Elshoff, First UCC, New Knoxville, ME
1974-75	* Rev. Robert Haskins, Mayflower UCC, Mansfield, TH
1975-76	Rev. Anne Kear, Trinity UCC, Upper Sandusky, H
1976-77	* Rev. Reuben Bebler, St. John's UCC, Holgate, D
1977-78	* Mr. Philip Maurer, St. Paul's UCC, St. Marys, ME
1978-79	Rev. Robert Snyder, Park Congregational UCC, Toledo, MB
1979-80	* Mrs. Jean Winegardner, West Elm UCC, Lima, ME
1980-81	* Rev. Robert Peebles, First UCC, Shelby, TH
1981-82	* Mr. John Schaeffer, St. John's UCC, Milan, F
1982-83	* Rev. John Miller, First UCC, Galion, TH
1983-84	* Mr. William C. Bradish, Pilgrim Church of the UCC, Toledo, MB
1984-85	* Rev. Harold W. Thiedt, St. Paul UCC, Wapakoneta, ME
1985-86	Mrs. Elnor Telljohann, Faith Community UCC, Toledo, MB
1986-87	Rev. Barbara Laucks, Emanuel UCC, Upper Sandusky, H
1987-88	* Mr. David Deever, St. John's UCC, Kenton, H
1988-89	Rev. Alfred W. Schroeder, The St. John UCC, Defiance, D
1989-90	Mr. James L. Henry, St. John's UCC, Mansfield, TH
1990-91	Rev. Patricia H. Lawrence, Republic UCC, Republic, H
1991-92	* Mr. William O. Fahrenbruck, Trinity UCC, Tiffin, H
1992-93	* Rev. Gary R. Hodges, St. John's UCC, Archbold, D
1993-94	* Ms. Coral Schmidt, Salem UCC, Toledo, MB
1994-95	Rev. Frank Isaacs, St. Paul's UCC, Bellevue, F
1995-96	Mr. Garland John Gates, First UCC, Shelby, TH
1996-97	* Rev. Howard H. Hershberger, UCC, Spencerville, ME
1997-98	* Ms. Judy Shumaker, Calvin UCC, Toledo, MB
1998-99	Rev. Barry Bordenkircher, Community UCC, Fort Seneca, H
1999-2000	* Mr. Ted Lovejoy, St. John's UCC, Archbold, D
2000-01	Rev. Sam Buehrer, First UCC, Galion, TH
2001-02	* Mrs. Donna L. Overholt, Trinity UCC, Tiffin, H
2002-03	Rev. Rob Patton, St. Stephen's UCC, Sandusky, F
2003-05	Mr. Dale Schmidt, St. Paul's UCC, St. Marys, Auglaize Valley Region
2005-07	* Rev. Dr. William Chidester, Sylvania UCC, Sylvania, Lakeshore Region
2007-09	Mrs. Mary Powell, St. John's UCC, Tiffin, Sandusky Valley Region
2009-11	Rev. David Plant, The St. John UCC, Defiance, Auglaize Valley Region
2011-13	Mrs. Susan Bishop, Zion (Fireside) UCC, Bellevue, Lakeshore Region
2013-15	Rev. Robin LaBolt – Sycamore UCC, Sycamore, Sandusky Valley Region
2015-17	Rev. David Voll – St. Paul UCC, Oak Harbor, Lakeshore Region
2017-19	Mrs. Betty Rettig – St. John's UCC, Holgate, Auglaize Valley Region
2019-21	Pastor Tom Kagy – Bloomville UCC, Bloomville, Sandusky Valley Region
2021-23	Mr. Doug Ricci – St. Paul UCC, Oak Harbor, Lakeshore Region
2023-24	Rev. James Brehler – St. John UCC, Defiance, Auglaize Valley Region
2024-25	Ms. Peggy George – Bloomville UCC, Bloomville, Sandusky Valley Region

Key - The initials designate the Program Districts: MB - Maumee Bay; D - Defiance; H - Heidelberg; ME - Miami Erie; F - Firelands; TH - Tempel Hills * Deceased

RULES AND OPERATING PROCEDURES

Sixty-second Annual Meeting of the Northwest Ohio Association

The rules and operating procedures for this Annual Meeting are intended to increase the meeting's effectiveness and simplicity, and to decrease confusion and uncertainty.

The meeting itself is the total responsibility of all the delegates. Delegates (and visitors with voice) should speak only on the subject at hand, remaining aware that there are others who may wish to speak and limiting the number of times he/she speaks and the length of each speech.

The Annual Meeting Planners and the Association Cabinet suggest the following operating procedures:

1. All proceedings, unless otherwise provided for, are governed by Roberts Rules of Order, as Amended.
2. Every member in good standing of a United Church of Christ has the privilege of the floor, but only official delegates and those granted voice and vote by this Association may make motions or vote. During debate the Moderator shall attempt to alternate between "pro" and "con" speakers.
3. Every motion, except a very simple one, must be submitted in writing to the secretary for in-person attendees or through the chat feature of Zoom for those virtual attendees, at the time it is made.
4. Speakers addressing the meeting shall be limited to three minutes on a first speech and two minutes if they wish to speak a second time to the same matter of business.
5. The bar of the house shall be defined as the pews in the main sanctuary of the church for in-person attendees and the Zoom Meeting Room for virtual attendees. Only official delegates within the bar of the house shall be eligible to vote.

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

NORTHWEST OHIO ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

Copies of the Northwest Ohio Association Constitution and Bylaws are available by request at the Association office

HOW TO REPORT ON AN ANNUAL MEETING

Delegates to the 62nd Annual Meeting of the Northwest Ohio Association are representatives of a local church. Delegates are often requested to make a verbal report to the official board or during a Sunday morning worship service. Other delegates are asked to make a written report for their parish newsletter. Regardless - the question remains - how can I make a responsible and effective report? The following guidelines are prepared to help you make your report back home.

1. Basic Resources and Tools for Reporting
 - A. The Program Book - The agenda is a good summary of the meeting. Make notes in your book throughout the meeting.
 - B. Your Personality - When you write or tell the story, be personal - blend the factual report with feelings and humor.
2. Your Report - Telling the Story
 - A. Outline the story you wish to tell. It might fall into several categories:
 - a) Factual Report of:
 - *The Theme – “Into the Deep”
 - * Reports of officers, staff and teams/committees
 - * Key actions taken
 - * Speakers
 - * Elections
 - * Association Mission Spending Plan (Budget)
 - b) Your Impressions and Feelings about:
 - * Overall impressions of meeting
 - * Inspiration
 - * Challenge
 - * Disappointment
 - * Thrills
 - c) Application of the Meeting to Your Church:
 - * Anyone from your church on the program or elected
 - * Actions that touch your church
 - * Budget implications for your church
 - * New ideas or programs to share
 - d) Invitation and Challenge:
 - * For others to review the program book
 - * For others to be a delegate next year
 - * For others to become involved.
 - B. Write your story out. Be brief - you can tell a lot in five minutes. Have fun!



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



1. 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.

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

- 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.
- 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.
- Link with other faith communities and faith organizations like the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network, doing mental health ministry.
- Connect with community partners, including other local churches, NAMI, local mental health clinics, and other non-profit organizations.
- Call attention to current local, state, or national legislation regarding mental health and access to mental health services by offering education and advocacy opportunities.
- 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.
- Sign up for the UCC Mental Health Weekly blogs at www.mhn-ucc.org and join the UCC Mental Health Network Facebook page.
- Consider making a financial donation to the work of the UCC Mental Health Network.