

# 10 Steps to Becoming a WISE Congregation for Mental Health

1. Consult with your pastor.
2. Form a WISE Team.
3. Connect with the UCC Mental Health Network and examine available resources.
4. Develop an approach that leads to the congregation's vote to become a WISE Congregation for Mental Health.
5. Draft your WISE covenant.
6. Involve your church's leadership in engaging in the WISE covenant.
7. Vote.
8. Certify and celebrate being WISE.
9. Publicize.
10. Turn to the future.



Welcoming • Inclusive  
Supportive • Engaged



United Church of Christ  
**MENTAL HEALTH  
NETWORK**



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**MENTAL HEALTH  
NETWORK**

**Mental Health Network  
seeking welcome,  
inclusion, support,  
and engagement of  
all persons in every  
congregation**

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Find us on the web at  
**mhn-ucc.org**



# Who We Are

The UCC MHN is in ecclesiastical covenant with the UCC Collegium and **we are a non-profit, 501c3 organization**. We began in 1993 and have recently become strong mental health advocates since the adoption of the WISE Resolution at General Synod, 2015. While **the MHN has been busy creating new resources and growing our educational and support opportunities**, we are currently most excited by our WISE program which is supported through a UCC Genesis Grant.

Given that there are already mental health challenges in our congregations, the **UCC Mental Health Network has developed a process by which your congregation can become WISE about mental health**. It includes increasing awareness and education for congregations as well as support for and engagement with the challenges of living with mental illness.

**Our newest programs are the WISE Conferences on Mental Health**. We are beginning to offer these conferences around the country. It is our hope that these conferences will enable more congregations to become WISE.

## Our Mission:

The United Church of Christ Mental Health Network works to reduce stigma and promote the inclusion of people with mental illnesses/brain disorders and their families in the life, leadership and work of congregations.

## Our Vision:

We envision a future in which:

- People with mental illnesses feel welcomed, supported, valued and included seamlessly in the life, leadership and work of their congregations.
- UCC congregations have eliminated stigma, and their members offer true compassion and support for people with mental illnesses and their families.

## 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.

## Mental Illness: What is it?

**Mental illnesses are medical conditions that impact an individual's ability to think clearly, experience emotions, regulate mood, or maintain healthy relationships.**

"Even though mental disorders are widespread in the population, the main burden of illness is concentrated in a much smaller proportion – about 6 percent, or 1 in 17 – who suffer from a serious mental illness."\* **No population is exempt;** people across all ages, economic and educational levels, ethnicities and religions are affected.

Some commonly held beliefs are that mental illnesses are a result of personal weakness, lack of faith, or poor upbringing. These misperceptions detract from the fact that **mental illnesses are brain disorders and require medical treatment**.

In addition to medical treatment, different types of psychotherapy, peer support groups, and other community services provide useful tools for maintaining balance. This is where congregations can be vital on the path toward wellness and recovery. **As a faith community you are in a unique position to offer kinship, prayers, support, welcome and inclusion to those who often find themselves on the periphery of society.**

\*The World Health Organization. 2004.

## We know that up to 25% (1 out of 4) people in our congregations are affected by mental health challenges.

These include people who are grieving the death of their loved one, people who have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness, and those who are affected by the experience of their family member. People in our churches can have serious brain disorders which include major depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, eating disorders, PTSD, anxiety, and others.

