

A W.I.S.E. (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive & Engaged) Congregation Covenant for Mental Health

The Congregational Church of Mansfield, United Church of Christ, has a storied history of reaching for grace and inclusion no matter the cost to our people. Whether it was standing up for the abolitionist movement, converting our church facilities into a temporary hospital during the Spanish Flu from 1918-1920, or engaging in the challenging dialogue during the adoption of ONA, we have consistently reached out to the hurting and the stigmatized to bring them into the embrace of our community.

We know we are graced by the gifts, stories, and experiences of all our members, as we are met with lived mental health experiences such as, but not limited to, neurological experiences, mental illnesses, addictions, trauma, and physical health. It is with this spirit that we covenant to become Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged in the mental health of all people and to be leaders in our community for mental health justice and advocacy.

We know these lived experiences can profoundly impact our feelings, thoughts, and behavior. We care about the whole person: body, heart, mind, and soul. We affirm the deep and constant movement of God's Holy Spirit, seeking to bring us to the fullness of life.

We believe that all people are beloved by God. We are founded on our commitment to Matthew 22:36-38, where Jesus said the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself." He made no distinction between various members of society; he did not show any partiality. He included all people in this commandment.

Sometimes, lived mental health experiences can make one feel cut off from God and not feel included. It is our calling to communicate to all persons that God loves equally, even when we do not feel the love of the Holy Spirit in our lives. All people have gifts to be offered in our faith community. We want everyone to feel fully **Welcomed, Included, Supported, and Engaged** (W.I.S.E.) in the life of our church community.

We, the Congregational Church of Mansfield, vote to continue and expand to be a **Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged** (W.I.S.E.) congregation for mental health. As a congregation, we are creating an atmosphere of openness and acceptance. Our experience together makes members, friends, and visitors more likely to feel safe and free from judgment. This acceptance and sense of safety can help create a place of confidentiality and belonging, where truly everyone, no matter where they are on life's journey, is welcome. (See Safe Church Policy for full terms.)

Call to action:

We pledge to create and maintain a welcoming environment for our community and families experiencing diagnoses and realities: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, by:

- Educating ourselves and offering educational opportunities to help our whole congregation understand the issues surrounding health challenges, such as neurological experiences, physical and mental diagnoses, addictions, trauma, and the implications of this covenant.
- Making an effort to reduce social stigma and pledging to examine our own attitudes and preconceived notions about mental health and to confront our own ingrained stigma.
- Actively welcoming all into our faith community and maintaining a safe environment in which people can tell their stories and share their journeys.
- Commit to self-care and self-love, knowing that we are loved and valued beyond comprehension.

We pledge to include people with mental health diagnoses and realities into the life of our church community by:

- Committing to welcoming, nominating, and supporting all available persons to serve on teams and in leadership positions within the congregation.
- Committing to reaching out to one another during times of health experiences by offering support and compassion.
- Committing to reaching out to the community to minister and advocate for mental health reform.
- Committing to utilizing the sacred role of the natural world by intentionally weaving mental health wellness into hikes, retreats, and meditation so that we maintain a connection to our literal roots.
- Committing to a yearly meeting to assess the current state of our WISE ministry. Each year, we will seek a renewed vision and a nimble adjustment to our changing needs. We will follow up with communication to the national UCC Mental Health Board to report our ongoing commitment and status.

We pledge to engage with other organizations that work at the intersection of health and faith/spirituality/religion:

This vote will confirm our commitment to be **Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged** with all of God's people.

- By welcoming and encouraging outside groups who work within the field of mental health treatment, such as, but not limited to, neurological experiences, mental diagnoses, addictions, trauma, and physical health, to use our church facilities.
- Engaging with other organizations to find opportunities to be in shared mission, ministry, and advocacy together. This includes working with our church's W.I.S.E. team, the UCC Mental Health Network, and the UCC Disabilities Ministry.