

Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ
WISE Covenant

Proclamation

We, the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ, proclaim a divinely inspired vision of being and becoming a collection of “Diverse Minds, Covenant Hearts, Made One in the Body of Christ.”

- “Diverse Minds” implies respecting neurodiversity as well as differences in traditions and perspectives. We believe that every person is fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and created good (Ps 139, Gen. 1:26). Certainly this includes persons living with mental health challenges.
- “Covenant Hearts” suggests committing to the pursuit of connections on a spiritual level with all people. Central to this is Christ’s command to love all of our neighbors (Mark 12:30-31) including neighbors with mental health challenges.
- “Made One in the Body of Christ” infers that our collective spiritual health is dependent upon nurturing relationships of belonging at the intersection of faith and mental health. We recognize that when any part of the body of Christ is diminished or excluded, the body as a whole is incomplete and fails to live up to its calling. As one member of the body suffers, all suffer with them; when one member is healthy, all members flourish with them (1 Corinthians 12:26).

This vision motivates us to become a **Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE)** Conference with respect to people with mental health challenges and those who care for them by organizing an ISC WISE team which will seek to shape the life of our Conference through the following living Covenant:

Covenant

To **Welcome** people with mental health challenges and those who love them:

- We commit to examine our Conference facilities, organizational structures, and programs to ensure we provide a safe environment for those with mental health challenges and their communities of support.
- Further, we pledge to assist our congregations to grow in practices of hospitality within their ministries, including recognizing patterns that promote stigma and the silencing of people with mental health challenges.

To **Include** people with mental health challenges in the life, work, and leadership of the conference:

- We commit to invite and encourage all people to participate in the work of the Conference in professional and/or volunteer capacities for which they have talents to share regardless of any mental health challenges.
- Further, we pledge to encourage our congregations to promote language that is inclusive of all people within the settings of worship, education, service, and fellowship.

To ***Support*** lay members and clergy who have mental health challenges and those who love them:

- We commit to provide resources and spiritual support for people within our ministries who are living with mental health challenges.
- Further, we pledge to share resources for worship, for ministries, and for healthy boundary-setting with our congregations to help them to become communities of support for those affected by mental health challenges and the families of those needing such care.

To ***Engage*** with other organizations that work at the intersections of mental health and faith/spirituality/religions:

- We commit to seek opportunities to partner with other organizations, both religious and secular, who are providing care for persons with mental health challenges, including our covenantal partners the UCC Mental Health Network, the UCC Disabilities Ministries, and the UCC Council for Health and Human Services Ministries.
- Further, we pledge to promote suitable programs and ministries of organizations such as Hoyleton Youth and Family Services, Pathways to Promise, and Mental Health First Aid among the congregations within our Conference.

Following the movement of the Holy Spirit as it leads us to the fullness of life, we commit to creating spaces within the many expressions of this one Body of Christ where people living with mental health challenges

- can feel that they belong,
- can be seen as people first,
- can sense the holy worth of their lives,
- can receive the love of God that is extended to all without partiality, and
- can have their voices affirmed as they offer their sacred gifts.

We the people of the Illinois South Conference affirm this covenant and will regularly renew our commitment to become more WISE with all of God's people.

- submitted by the 2022 ISC WISE Exploratory Team