

A PROPOSED PROCESS FOR THE ILLINOIS SOUTH CONFERENCE TO BECOME A WISE CONFERENCE



RATIONALE:

For our pastors, our churches, our communities, and our Conference, the COVID 19 pandemic has reminded us that mental illness is a reality of which the Church is not yet comfortable talking about or addressing openly. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) defines mental illness as a *“condition that affects a person’s thinking, feeling, behavior or mood. The conditions of which deeply impact day-to-day living and may also affect the ability to relate to others.”*

The current data NAMI reports is that:

- **1 in 5** U.S. adults experience mental illness each year
- **1 in 20** U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year
- **1 in 6** U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year

Noting 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.

www.nami.org

We believe the Church can play a significant role in helping to reduce the stigma of mental health and connect people who are living with mental health conditions to support and resources they need.

In the United Church of Christ, the Mental Health Network is committed to working *“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.”* (This is the stated mission of the UCC Mental Health Network.)

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A WISE CONFERENCE:

WISE stands for Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged. To engage in the process of becoming a *WISE* Conference would first mean entering a period of education, discernment, and decisions about how the Illinois South Conference might live out a commitment to be welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged with persons (who are our pastors, church leaders, church members, and veterans in our member churches) with mental health conditions/brain disorders in the life and leadership of our Conference.

A Conference-wide *WISE* team consisting of five to seven members of the Illinois South Conference would be selected to help name the commitments and resourcing we could engage in and develop a *WISE* Covenant for the Conference. The *WISE* team would work together with the Mental Health Network of the United Church of Christ in this process to create a covenant and action plan. The covenant and action plan would be presented at the 2022 Annual Meeting for the delegates to adopt and vote on to officially become a *WISE* Conference.

HOW THE WISE TASK FORCE WILL BE CHOSEN:

Applications of interested persons will be sent to and reviewed by the Executive Committee of the Illinois South Conference. It is a shared belief that the *WISE* team should consist of a wide demographic of the Conference whose participants have the passion, experience, and availability to carry out the necessary steps of the process.

TIMELINE OF THE WISE PROCESS:

2021 Annual Meeting	Rollout of the idea.
November 2021	Applications for the <i>WISE</i> team are made widely available.
Mid-December 2021	The <i>WISE</i> team is selected, participants are notified and the team is officially announced.
January 2022	The <i>WISE</i> team begins a four-month intensive process of education, discernment, and planning with the help of the Mental Health Network of the United Church of Christ
Summer 2022	The proposed <i>WISE</i> Covenant and action plan are finalized.
September 2022	The proposed <i>WISE</i> Covenant and action plan are shared widely in the Conference.
2022 Annual Meeting	Delegates to the 2022 Annual Meeting vote on becoming a <i>WISE</i> Conference.
Beyond Annual Meeting	If the resolution passes at Annual Meeting for Illinois South Conference to become a <i>WISE</i> Conference, the real work begins.