

INDIANA-KENTUCKY CONFERENCE W. I. S. E. COVENANT

COVENENTING TOGETHER AS A WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE, AND ENGAGED CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

We, the people of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference United Church of Christ, affirm Christ's commandment "to love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) in becoming a Conference endorsing a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (W.I.S.E.) Covenant for mental health. As a covenant community we acknowledge the need to live out this covenant across all expressions of the Conference from the local church, associations, Committees on Ministry, Board of Directors, chaplains and non-parish ministries, CHHSM agencies, and the Conference as a whole. We believe that in doing so we participate in the Kin-dom of God and help build a just and compassionate world for all people, including those with mental health challenges and other forms of neurodiversity and their communities of support.

Such a covenant calls upon the various expressions of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference to live out the mental health core values framework of Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged. We covenant to live these core values in the following manner:

CONFERENCE SETTING

WELCOMING: We will provide an institutional framework and culture that embraces persons experiencing mental health challenges as a natural part of the human experience. We see this being made visible by the full inclusion of all God's children in our mission and ministry and staffing capacity as a Conference.

INCLUSIVE: We will work to ensure that there is an intentionality around inclusion, education, advocacy regarding mental health challenges so that all persons may be included in any area of ministry within the Conference. We will seek to ensure that our liturgies, prayers, communication and literature, reflects language that includes all people.

SUPPORTIVE: We will work with our associations, congregations, and local ministries to extend resources and spiritual support that can equip these settings to meaningfully address stigma around mental health challenges and respond to the needs of all persons in their communities affected by mental health challenges. We will aim to provide opportunities for authorized ministers to find support for their own mental wellness.

ENGAGED: The Conference Staff and the Board of Directors shall find opportunities to be in shared mission, ministry, fellowship and advocacy with other covenanted partners, including the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network, the United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries, and the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries. We commit to establishing and supporting a team that will tend to the ongoing ministry of this WISE covenant.

ASSOCIATION SETTING

WELCOMING: We commit to all association meetings, shared ministries, and gatherings being considered safe spaces for those with mental health challenges and their communities of support. We welcome all persons as people of sacred worth to contribute to the collective work that we share.

INCLUSIVE: In working to ensure all are welcome, we will work towards including, nominating, and supporting persons with mental health challenges to serve on teams and leadership positions within the associations.

SUPPORTIVE: We commit to working together in sharing local resources to help those affected by mental health challenges within our local churches and communities. We will cultivate opportunities for clergy and lay continuing education that provides a focus on mental health challenges, including the offering of Mental Health First Aid classes.

ENGAGED: We will work together as associations to foster on going partnerships with local mental health community resources, agencies, and other local faith communities. Combined with these local resources, we will further widen our resources to the conference and national opportunities for connection in the areas of mental health and neurodiversity. We will also encourage our Committee on Ministries to tie its covenant work with the resources of the conference and national UCC around mental health challenges regarding its authorized ministers and members in discernment.

LOCAL MINISTRY SETTING

WELCOMING: With 1 in 4 people experiencing some form of mental health and brain disorder challenges, there continues to be stigma, discrimination, and the pain of silence, therefore our local congregations and wider ministry settings will seek to create safe boundaries and a radical welcome to everyone.

INCLUSIVE: We will seek to ensure that our language and actions in the church, local ministries, and worship experiences are inclusive of all people and through the awareness of intersectionality (the interconnectional nature of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability), affirming of all the neurodiversity among us.

SUPPORTIVE: We promise the continuing support to all facing mental health challenges and their communities of support through spiritual support and connection to local and regional mental health resources.

ENGAGED: We shall find opportunities to be in shared mission, ministry, fellowship and advocacy with others, including other local faith communities, the Indiana Kentucky Conference, our associations, the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network, the United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries, and the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries.

Proposed by the IKC W.I.S.E. Team November 2019