



Checklist for Faith Communities

Becoming a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) Congregation for Mental Health

Where is your faith community in the process of becoming a welcoming, inclusive, supportive and engaged (WISE) congregation on mental health? This checklist is designed to be a mirror showing you where your congregation is today and a window to see where you might go in the future.

To become a WISE congregation is not a statement of status. Rather it is a statement of purpose and process. It will never be complete. As it unfolds, it becomes a richer, deeper and wider ministry.

We know that brain disorders can profoundly disturb our feelings, thoughts, and behavior. We recognize that brain disorders/mental illnesses are illnesses like any other, and we strive to communicate that all people are beloved by God and have a right to be seen as people first. Our vision is that all those touched or affected by mental illnesses/brain disorders will be fully welcomed, included, supported and engaged in the life, work and leadership of congregations.

Using the checklist

Using this checklist is a way to see what you have done and what you may yet do in light of your congregation's commitment to mental health ministry. This checklist is dedicated to fostering healing in and recovery from mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma.

Welcoming

How can you make the environment in your congregation feel more welcoming to people with mental illnesses and their families?

Steps you can take:

___ Ask your congregants to watch their language with respect to people with mental illnesses and avoid stigmatizing labels. Do not refer to people as "crazy," "psycho," "loony" or "mental."

___ Start a Mental Health Ministry Team. If you are interested in starting a mental health ministry at your church but are not sure how to go about it, download a flyer, "10 Steps for Developing a Mental Health Ministry in Your Congregation" from the Interfaith Network on Mental Illness website (www.inmi.us). Look on the "Resources for Faith Leaders" page.

___ Educate your congregation about various facets of brain disorders/mental illnesses. Sponsor a Mental Health First Aid class (www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org) at your church. You'll also find a variety of resources for educating your congregation on the Mental Health Ministries Web site (www.mentalhealthministries.org), the Pathways to Promise website (www.pathways2promise.org) and on the INMI site (www.inmi.us).

___ Educate your clergy, lay leaders, and teachers about the challenges of brain disorders/mental illnesses and offer support if necessary so that all

may be included in the life, work, and leadership of the church. ("10 Things Faith Community Leaders Can Do to Make The World a Better Place for People with Mental Illnesses" is a one-page summary published by INMI. See the "Resources for Faith Leaders" page www.inmi.us).

Inclusive

Steps you can take:

___ Include "persons with brain disorders/mental illnesses and their family members" in prayers of the people during worship.

___ Find or help develop curriculum and/or adult forums that ensure the needs of adults and children with mental health challenges are included in the lessons and/or presentations.

___ Have an annual Mental Health Sunday. See the Resource Guide for Mental Health Sunday created by the UCC Mental Health Network for litanies, sermons and sermon starters, prayers, bulletin inserts and other resources you can use as is or adapt to your needs. (mhn-ucc.blogspot.com). Ask people in your congregation who have mental illnesses if they would help you plan the service and take an active part in it.

Supportive

Steps you can take:

___ Reach out to those suffering from brain disorders/mental illnesses in the same way you would reach out to those living with other physical illnesses. Ask your members to provide companionship and compassion for people on the road toward recovery. Offer a ride to church or to a local support group. Listen without judgment. Offer to bring a casserole when someone returns home after a hospitalization.

___ Offer an active spiritual support group. "Starting a Spiritual Support Group for Mental Health and Wellness in Your Faith Community" is a booklet on the INMI "Resources" page (www.inmi.us). You'll also find sample guidelines for a support group you can adopt or adapt.

___ Offer practical support such as meals, temporary housing, meaningful work, and respite care for those in need of these services.

Engaged

Steps you can take:

___ Allow outside groups who deal with mental health challenges, addictions, and trauma to use your facilities at no cost.

___ When your church has an active mental health ministry, register in INMI's Online Directory for Organizations Working at the Intersection of Faith/Spirituality and Mental Health at www.inmi.us. The directory aims to make it easier for faith communities and organizations to find each other, collaborate, and share best practices.

___ Join/actively support programs such as the Interfaith Network on Mental Illness (INMI), the Caring Clergy Project (CCP), NAMI FaithNet, Pathways to Promise, and Mental Health Ministries.

___ Work with the larger community of faith both within the structure of your faith tradition and other ecumenical and interfaith organizations to educate all members of the faith communities about the importance of love and compassion for all those affected by mental illnesses/brain disorders.

Using the checklist as a guide, work with your congregation's leaders and governing body to adopt a covenant to become a WISE Congregation for Mental Health.

This checklist was created by members of the UCC Mental Health Network and the Interfaith Network on Mental Illness.