

Background

In the United States approximately 45 million people experience mental illness in a given year, nearly 20 million people abuse or are addicted to alcohol and drugs, and about 15 million people live with brain disorders ranging from traumatic brain injury to strokes to various forms of cognitive processing disorders and dementia. The number of family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and others affected by those challenges is exponentially higher.

[Resource data compiled by NAMI, SAMHSA, Family Caregiver Alliance, etc.]

Our W.I.S.E. Covenant (May 19, 2019) Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged with Mental Illness, Substance Abuse, and Brain Disorders

We, the people of St. Paul's United Church of Christ of Westminster, Maryland, proudly open and affirming to all, realize that persons dealing with mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders may feel cut off from the love of God and the blessings made possible through engagement with local congregations and the universal church. Others may turn to churches that are unprepared to provide needed support.

Therefore, St. Paul's UCC, following Jesus' example and seeking in all things to welcome, include, support, and engage with marginalized people, joyously extends our congregation's compassionate welcome and love to those affected by mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders, including but not limited to: anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance abuse and addiction, cognitive processing disorders and dementia, as well as therapeutic needs related to trauma and grief.

Further, in becoming a WISE Congregation, we commit to:

- providing and promoting relevant education, activities, and resources for individuals, families, and communities relative to mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders;
- collaborating with community organizations in the interest of building and strengthening the network of available services and supports for people dealing with associated issues;
- standing with and for persons dealing with mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders to reduce and ultimately eliminate stigma;
- advocating for legislative and judicial action that works in the best interest of all persons affected by such action.

As a progressive Christian congregation that makes a difference for persons living with mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders, we specifically pledge to:

1. continue to extravagantly welcome all people, including those affected by mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders;
2. be intentional about learning and growing into what it means to be a WISE Congregation;
3. nurture and support every person's spiritual and personal journey through generous ministries including hosting and facilitating support groups and offering a variety of programs to address current and emerging needs;
4. empathize with and practice compassion towards everyone, including those in need of support;
5. offer individuals and families affected by mental illness, substance abuse, and brain disorders a sense of belonging and encourage their full participation in church life and leadership;
6. observe and honor 'Mental Health Sunday' and 'Mental Health Awareness Month' annually;
7. continue the activities of our WISE Leadership Team, which are intended to educate and support our WISE efforts through forums such as Seekers, special presentations and programs, our website and social media presence, Highlights newsletter, and during our times of corporate worship on a regular basis.

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends... And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (I Corinthians 13)