

DRAFT
W.I.S.E. Covenant
Kent United Church of Christ

“Enlivened by the grace of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Kent United Church of Christ does justice, embraces faithful love, and walks humbly with our God to serve and transform lives, our community and the world.” (*Micah 6:8*)

Emerging from this congregational mission and inspired by Jesus’ acts of compassion, healing and radical love, we formed our WISE team to plan and implement opportunities for the whole congregation to engage in the WISE process. We centered this engagement on spiritual healing and wellness as a critical element of mental illness and addiction recovery. Kent UCC has had a mental health ministry since 2007, led by Mary Homer, our beloved member who is in recovery from mental illness. This ministry has included social engagement with local group home residents, financial support of local mental health partner organizations, book studies, NAMI walks, and community conversations.

Our congregation has been touched deeply by the pain of mental illness and addiction, including members currently incarcerated due to the criminalization of mental health and addiction and families who have lost loved ones because of mental illness and addiction. **We include these members in messages of God’s love and acceptance.** We have also been touched by the gifts of those in recovery, giving us the courage to proclaim we are open to collective healing, for we recognize we are all in need of it. Mental health is a part of all our lives; this is not an “us” vs. “them” reality. Further, we recognize that our role is not to “fix” the situation, but to make referrals and share resources when appropriate, and to be present with those experiencing it. We are called to proclaim that we are loved by our Almighty and All-Vulnerable God and accepted for exactly who we are, no exceptions. We do not believe that our identity is rooted in any diagnosis, addiction, or mental health challenge but rather as the beloved children of God.

Therefore, we the people of the United Church of Christ of Kent, Ohio vote to continue to be a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (W.I.S.E.) congregation for mental health and spiritual wellness.

We commit to being a church of extravagant hospitality and radical belonging, accepting each other just as we are and honoring our lived experiences.

We commit to being present by holding sacred space and accompanying one another, and our families, through experiences of the pain and despair and of mental illness, addiction, or other brain dis-ease.

We commit to being a stigma-free community. We pledge to become judgment-free and shame-free, choosing words that are life-giving and not stigmatizing labels, affirming our humanity instead of creating more boundaries between us.

We commit to educate ourselves and our wider community to better understand mental health and substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, and other brain dis-ease.

We commit to companioning our children, youth and our elderly, listening without judgment to their stories of mental dis-ease, whether personal or within their families and among their friends. Mental health is a part of our overall health at all ages and stages of life and we recognize the particular needs in certain seasons of our lives.

We commit to recruit, nominate, and support persons in mental health and addiction recovery to serve on ministry teams and in leadership positions within the congregation.

We commit to be open to calling clergy and hiring staff engaged in recovery from mental health, addiction, or brain dis-ease challenges.

We commit to maintain contact and offer our support to members who become incarcerated because of episodes of mental illness and behaviors due to addiction.

We commit to forming strategic partnerships with mental health and addiction recovery agencies and professionals, the LGBTQAI+ community, racial justice organizations and social service agencies to join with them in advocacy for justice.

We commit to invite and encourage support and recovery organizations to use our building facilities.

We commit to maintaining clear and healthy boundaries as a congregation. Our role is to proclaim that we are loved by God and accepted for exactly who we are; but it is not within our power to fix or cure, or to act as if we are something other than a faith community.