

W.I.S.E. Covenant
Kent United Church of Christ
1400 East Main Street
Kent, Ohio
www.kentucc.org

Entering into a WISE (**W**elcoming~**I**nclusive~**S**upportive~**E**ngaged) covenant is a *holy and sacred promise* to God, to each other, and to our community. It is grounded in the perfect love we know God holds for each of us. We are God’s beloved children, and through a WISE covenant we proclaim that we are beloved even when we are experiencing mental illness, addiction, or other brain dis-ease [Lund (2014), p. 93]. As our Sunday services regularly affirm, “We do not come as perfect people; but as people perfectly loved by God” (Senior Pastor Amy Gopp, 2021). This is the heart of the WISE covenant.

Specifically, as a member of this congregation, I commit to

- **Recognize** mental health is a part of all our lives; this is not an “us” vs. “them” reality. Further, I **recognize the role of our congregation** is not to “fix” situations but to make referrals and share resources when appropriate, and to be present with those experiencing challenges, responding with compassion. I am called to proclaim that we are loved by our Almighty and All-Vulnerable God and accepted for exactly who we are, no exceptions. I do not believe that our identity is rooted in any diagnosis, addiction, or mental health challenge but rather as the beloved children of God.
- **Extend** radical belonging to all and **accept** each other just as we are, honoring our lived experiences.
- **Hold** sacred and safe space and accompany one another and our families through experiences of the pain and despair of mental illness, addiction, and other dis-ease.
- **Create a stigma-free, judgment-free, and shame-free environment; choose** words that are life-giving and not stigmatizing labels; affirm our humanity instead of creating more boundaries between us.
- **Educate myself** and our wider community to better understand mental health and substance use disorders, neurodevelopment differences, and other brain dis-ease.
- **Companion** our children, youth, and elderly; listen without judgment to their stories of mental dis-ease, whether personal or within their families and among their friends; recognize particular needs in certain seasons of our lives.
- **Recruit, nominate, and support** persons in mental health and addiction recovery to serve on ministry teams and in leadership positions within the congregation.
- **Being** open to calling clergy and hiring staff engaged in recovery from mental health, addiction, or brain dis-ease challenges.

I also commit to the mission of our congregation to

- **Maintain** appropriate contact and **offer** support to members who become incarcerated or hospitalized because of episodes of mental illness and behaviors due to addiction.
- **Form** 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 in treatment and support.
- **Invite** and **encourage** support and recovery organizations to use our building facilities.
- **Maintain** clear and healthy boundaries for the well-being of the congregation and community.
- **Hold** ourselves true to this covenant by convening a team to review our WISE actions each January. This includes evaluating our areas of strength and identifying areas needing more resources in the coming year.
- **Proclaim** the Good News of Jesus Christ for all who are a part of our community so that everyone knows they are loved and accepted by God just as they are, and provide the hope that Christ makes all things new.

We, the congregation of Kent United Church of Christ, pledge to uphold this covenant in our personal lives as well as in the actions of our church family, and to prayerfully seek God's guidance in building a Welcoming/Inclusive/Supportive/Engaged community.