

**U.C.C. WELLNESS MINISTRIES TOOLKIT**  
**Section 3**

**EXEMPLARS OF WELLNESS MINISTRIES ACTIVITIES**

**Mental Health and Wellness**

**Title:** *Observing Our 1<sup>st</sup> Mental Health Sunday*

**Age groups served:** Youth and Adults

**Reason for development and implementation:**

Many of us remember that in the past, the word cancer was not used when prayers were asked for someone who was sick. In many situations, that has changed. The prayer request often mentions the type of cancer and even the treatment plan. For example, “Prayers for Susan as she starts chemotherapy.” Even though mental illness is one of the most common health conditions in the United States, we do not speak of it as openly as we talk about cancer and other illnesses.

[According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#), one in five Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year. It is difficult when a person or a loved one is experiencing a mental illness to feel comfortable asking for prayers when the condition appears to be unmentionable. The silence must be broken, and the stigma in talking about mental illness addressed. Caring congregations can provide welcoming spaces to share stories and receive support.

Wellness Ministries activities can encourage mental health and provide support when a mental illness is identified. Many mental illnesses can be successfully treated. Although there is no single cause of mental illness, several factors may increase a person’s risk or impede recovery. Visiting and inclusion in church activities can reduce feelings of loneliness, isolation due to illness, or negativity.

Mental Health Sunday is designated on the UCC calendar as the third Sunday in May. However, it can also be the focus on any Sunday that suits the particular church’s calendar. [A Mental Health Worship Resource Guide](#) developed by the UCC Mental Health Network provides suggested aspects of the service.

**Sharing the Story:** Creating understanding about mental illness

Aware that many individuals sitting in the pews each Sunday were either dealing with mental illness or concerned about a loved one’s diagnosis, it was decided to start a dialogue within the congregation by designating a Mental Health Sunday. The worship service was informative, and the design followed the suggestions from the Mental Health Worship Resource Guide.

Sunday Worship Guides were distributed as usual to attendees as they entered the sanctuary. Each copy had a small dot placed on the lower back corner of the worship guide by a member of the Wellness Team. The dot was one of five colors. The sermon focused on increasing understanding that mental health challenges are real and numerous. The statistic that one in five individuals experience mental illness was shared. To help visualize that ratio, all those with the red dot were asked to stand. Very slowly, most individuals with red dots rose to their feet. It was explained that those standing were not ill. They were graciously providing a visual explanation of the frequency of mental illness. With this shared awareness, we hoped to increase the open discussion of mental illness and the acceptance of people with mental illness.

The closing prayer asked for guidance on how to support each person's desire for mental health and care for those who are ill and their loved ones.

During Coffee Hour, which immediately followed the service, a variety of information was displayed on a bulletin board and made available on the tables with the food and beverages. Materials included: tips on caring for mental health, general information on mental illness and the most common types, how to support someone experiencing a mental illness, and contact information of community resources.

### **Evaluation:**

- The feedback during Coffee Hour conversations was positive.
- The pastor made clear that the Worship Guides had been randomly distributed. However, the stigma attached to mental illness became apparent when some individuals with a red dot hesitated to rise when asked.

### **Next steps:**

- Focus on providing information and activities that reduce the stigma and normalize the ability to discuss mental health and mental illness.
- Continue to include mental illness in prayers for health.
- Continue to have an annual Mental Health Sunday

### **Resources:**

- The [UCC Mental Health Network](#) has many helpful resources.
- The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) provides resources supporting mental health and explaining mental illness. In addition, the [NAMI FaithNet](#) educates faith communities about mental illness, and the role spirituality may play in recovery.
- The [American Psychological Asso.](#) has information available. Use "faith" to search the site.