

U.C.C. WELLNESS MINISTRIES TOOLKIT
Section 3

EXEMPLARS OF WELLNESS MINISTRIES ACTIVITIES

Spiritual Health and Wellness

Title: *Providing a Service of Hope and Healing*

Age groups served: All

Reason for development and implementation:

Several congregants expressed the desire for periodic healing services. Further discussion led them to describe a service not of bodily healing but a gentle service of spiritual healing through song, meditation, and prayer. The [Book of Worship of United Church of Christ](#) contains several good outlines of worship services that address healing. These services, as written, did not quite match the request of the congregants, so the Wellness Minister and Pastor investigated other options. Each searched their resources and talked with colleagues for ideas.

The potential attendees shared that they sought a time of worship apart from the Sunday morning worship service. They desired a service focused on enhancing their relationships with God's sustaining presence in their challenging lives. With their assistance, a *Healing Vespers* service was developed. The first one was scheduled for 4:00 pm on the third Sunday of the following month, so there would be adequate time to get it on the church calendar and announce it to the congregation and community. To increase a sense of intimacy, the service was scheduled to be held in a room for about 30 rather than the larger sanctuary. Soft lighting and candles helped to convey that this was a quiet time and place.

It was decided that no offering would be taken. This service was a gift of God provided to all who entered the room by the people of God.

Sharing the story: Finding a peaceful center

We had no idea how many would attend this new service. Our thoughts ranged on the continuum from "No one will come." and "What if we won't have enough seats?" Yet we knew that whoever was in this space, worship leader or worshipper, would be blessed by God's presence and that was sufficient.

The church organist provided the music on the piano. Several members of the choir provided solos. Two lay leaders each provided readings. The Wellness Minister and Pastor shared the responsibilities of delivering the welcome, prayers, meditation, communion, closing prayer, and benediction. By wearing street clothes and involving many of the laity in the service a strong sense of mutual support and care was provided.

The desired atmosphere was explained to attendees at the top of the worship bulletin: *We welcome all of you here this afternoon and pray that this may be a time of reflection, healing, and blessing. Our intent is to provide some space for God's comforting love to work within us and bless each of us with its power for healing. You are most welcome here!*"

Taize chants and hymns from the New Century Hymnal provided much of the group singing. Chants such as "O, Lord Hear My Prayer" build a sense of community while raising a mutual prayer.

In the worship bulletin, all were invited to remain seated during the postlude and use the time for personal reflection. This provided an unhurried ending to the service of which attendees took advantage. As they gradually gathered in the hall outside the room, most seemed to wish to sustain their sense of fellowship, and spontaneous plans were made to go out for ice cream.

Based on the response to the Healing Vespers, it was decided to continue to offer these monthly services.

Evaluation:

- There was no difficulty in obtaining lay leaders to set up the room or participate in providing the service. They appreciated the solace provided by the calming, late afternoon candlelight service and were glad they could facilitate the Vespers.
- Congregants brought neighbors and friends to this service, people they hadn't invited to the Sunday morning worship services.
- Occasionally the Healing Vespers was an interfaith joint service with a neighboring conservative Jewish congregation. After several years of shared activities and pulpit exchanges, thoughts evolved to have a joint healing service. A strong sense of the oneness of our humanity was felt as we prayed side by side for personal and community health and healing.

Next steps:

- Continue to offer based on the availability of leaders and the congregation's interest.
- Explore developing ecumenical healing services.

Resources:

- [Reclaiming the Ministry of Healing](#) is a sermon by Rev. Dr. Arlene K. Nehring, Eden United Church of Christ.
- [Introduction to Healing Services and Prayers](#) explains the difference between services for healing and services for curing.
- [Planning a Healing Service: Worship and Ritual Guidelines](#) offers some questions to consider as you plan your service(s).
- [Taize chant - Oh Lord Hear My Prayer](#)