

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

**EXEMPLARS OF WELLNESS MINISTRIES ACTIVITIES**

**Spiritual Health and Wellness**

**Title:** *Teddy Bears in Church*

**Age groups served:** Children

**Reason for development and implementation:**

Children and even adults often find comfort in holding a teddy bear or other stuffed animal. However, they are not always available at the place, and time they could offer the most comfort.

**Sharing the story:** Sharing a sign of love and care

Starting the first Sunday in January, church attendees are encouraged to bring new cuddly teddy bears of all types to worship and leave them in the pews. Additional ones join the group every Sunday in January. It has been a perfect time for this project since toys are generally on sale after the holiday season. Of course, the bears must be new, or agencies will hesitate to accept them.

Each Sunday, a few more bears appear in the pews, big or small, traditional or fanciful; they are all welcome. Sometimes a cat, a lamb, a dog, or another form of stuffed animal joins the bears. During a service, they may be seen sitting on people's laps or stroked as they lean against someone in the pew. Some are passed from one to another, receiving hugs.

During the week, they stay in their pews, hearing the Minister of music practice the organ, watching the altar guild clean up the sanctuary, or receiving "friends" who come in just to sit in the sanctuary and hold a bear while meditating or praying. During this past January, two funerals were held. With the families' approval, the bears stayed in their pews and offered comfort to the grieving friends and family members of the deceased.

The project runs for four weeks. During worship on the first Sunday in February, the bears are blessed through prayer and then "sent on their way" to offer comfort to others. Each has a small card attached reading:

*Hello!*

*I have been to the XXX Church, UCC, where I have been hugged, loved and prayed with for several Sundays.*

*Now I have come to share the love I have received with you and let you know that you are prayed for and loved. May God's tender love embrace you as you hug me.*

Where do they go? To police stations, the women's shelters, the homeless shelters, the local hospital, or any place where an injured or scared child or adult might be. For example, police have them available when responding to a domestic violence call, an accident, or when they have to question a child about alleged abuse.

**Evaluation:**

- For three years, the congregation has brought new teddy bears to church and left them in the pews.
- We hear stories from those distributing them about how appreciative recipients are.
- Members of the congregation have been deeply affected by participating in this ministry. Worshiping in pews shared with stuffed animals has led to healing and wholeness within the members of the congregation.

**Next steps:**

- Continue to offer time to collect stuffed animals for this caring ministry.
- Maintain contact with current agencies that receive the stuffed teddy bears and establish new connections.

**Resources:**

- [Benefits of having stuffed animals and plush toys.](#)
- [The Positives of Plushies: Stuffed Animals Have Benefits for Children and Adults](#)