



MIND, BODY, SPIRIT

Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness



UCC Wellness Ministries Newsletter

April 2024, Volume 9, Issue 4

REFLECTION



Do you have a hymn that reminds you of your call to Wellness Ministries? When overly challenged, do the words and melody pop into your head unbidden and remind you why you do what you do?

I had that experience this morning when the hymn of St. Teresa of Avila's prayer came to mind unbidden. The lyrics reminded me:

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.

Each of our unique wellness ministries responds to God's call to share what we have received and, with God's grace, collectively make a difference in this world. Thanks be to God.

TIMELY HEALTH TIP



Plastic pollution is creating pervasive harm to our bodies and the ecosystem we depend on. The resolution [Free from Plastic Pollution](#) was passed at Synod last July. Beyond what you can role model, there are [Five Actions a congregation may take](#): 1. Begin with a Bible study of suggested scriptures. 2. Host a community screening of [The Story of Plastic](#) or host an adult education session that includes [The Story of Plastic](#). 3. Form a book group and read a book or articles that are suggested. 4. Join or lead an advocacy campaign such as suggested. 5. Aim to become a [Zero-Waste Church](#), a ministry of the Church of the Nativity, Raleigh, NC. There are additional ideas in the resolution and from organizations like the Sierra Club and [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#). Some apps can help you reduce plastic use. This is a timely health tip since plastic particles are entering our soil, food, and bodies.

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS



Addressing Period Poverty.

1. UCC congregations have a history of assembling school kits and cleanup buckets for [Church World Service \(CWS\)](#). Now, there is an opportunity to provide Period Packs (Menstrual Hygiene Kits). Church World Service (CWS) became aware that cost made purchasing menstrual care products difficult. No student should stay home from school because they can't afford approximately [\\$13.25](#) per month for necessary menstrual hygiene supplies. [Church World Services developed resources](#) to educate congregations about the need for Period Packs and the directions on assembling them. CWS then offers them for distribution nationally and abroad.
 2. Locally, you can work to reduce the cost of these necessary supplies. Does your state tax the products needed for personal hygiene? Collaborate with local legislators to remove the tax from women-specific products.
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PROGRAM IDEAS SHARED BY READERS

Discussion with Wellness Ministries Toolkit Users: What they're doing about LONELINESS

On February 22nd, registered users of the Wellness Ministries Toolkit gathered via Zoom to share ideas. A common concern was how to address the epidemic of loneliness further. The February 2024 edition of this newsletter provided a range of resources. This conversation provided a further exchange of ideas.

Recommendations included: Increase attendance by using the terminology of “a chance to come together.” There is a stigma related to the term loneliness.

- Become a gathering space for community events. Provide a periodic open house for the community to come and sit, have coffee, chat, and play games in small groups if desired.
- Investigate becoming a UCC W.I.S.E congregation (welcoming, inclusive, supportive, engaged).
- Organise affinity groups where people come together over shared interests such as crafting, knitting, bowling, gardening, walking groups, etc.
- Have children in the faith formation program make cards monthly for the older generation.
- Encourage congregants to show up and help when there is a community concern. Also, attend community activities and celebrations. This connects faces from within the church with those in the community seeking to gather with and get to know their neighbors.

For a complete list of the suggestions, e-mail wellnessministries@ucc.org or uccwellnessministrieschair@gmail.com

Past issues are archived on the UCC.org website, including February 2024, which provides resources to help address loneliness in people of all ages.

UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM



Highlights of our March meeting

Are you interested in the new resources being developed? Would you like to connect with a network of supportive colleagues? Read on:

Your leadership team's March meeting addressed the progress of new initiatives.

- The new video explaining why we help develop Wellness Ministries within congregations is almost ready for posting on the UCC.org and UCC YouTube sites. A second one is in development. These are designed to spread the word about answering God's directive to care for one another.
 - The meeting of the registered users of the UCC Wellness Ministries Toolkit provided a forum for receiving several requests for resources, which the Task Groups will address.
 - Five volunteers are working on a *Wellness Ministries Pocket Handbook for Visitation*. If you have ideas, don't hesitate to get in touch with us.
 - We are increasing our connections within UCC conferences so more leaders learn the benefits of Wellness Ministries to congregations and the communities they serve. Can you help us connect with your Conference? We can help develop a network of others providing similar ministries.
 - Have an idea? Please send us an e-mail at WellnessMinistries@UCC.org or UCCWellnessMinistriesChair@gmail.com
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LINKS TO NATIONAL HEALTH-RELATED TOPICS

This is information from reputable sources that you can use for programs, worship bulletin inserts, bulletin board displays, and newsletter articles.



Earth Month: April is Earth Month, and for congregations, it is a time to discern further how to answer our calling as Christians: the caretaking of God's creation. Everyone's health is dependent upon our actions. [Planning for Earth Month: Resources for Congregations](#) offers suggested activities:



1. An art contest for children and youth!
2. Join the [UCC Earth Day Summit](#) featuring Bill McKibben on Sat. April 20th at 1 pm ET. A panel will discuss plastic pollution and environmental justice. [Register to watch live or later]
3. Celebrate Earth Sunday Sunday, April 21st. The UCC and [Creation Justice Ministries](#) created a resource entitled [Plastic Jesus: Real Faith in a Synthetic World](#).
4. BYOM (Bring your own mug)- Green your coffee hour and move away from disposable cups.

5. Use Earth Month to initiate a creation justice ethic. Develop into a [Creation Justice Church](#) in Five Steps.



Sexual Assault Awareness Month: [Sexual Violence](#) is a significant problem in the U.S. that can profoundly impact lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being. [The Clothesline Project](#) was a significant part of an advocate action that several churches and organizations collaborated on successfully in one community. It is explained in Section 3 of the [UCC Wellness Ministries Toolkit](#). If you aren't already a registered user of the Toolkit, please do so to benefit from the whole resource. Your contact information enables us to contact you with updates to the Toolkit.

The [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#) provides a variety of resources for survivors, friends and family, advocates, and educators, as well as a 24-hour hotline (1-800-656-4673) and an [online chat service in English and Spanish](#).



April 28th: [Break the Silence Sunday Day](#) – It is estimated that the annual number of domestic violence incidents in the U.S. affects more than 10 million adults. Some individuals turn to the church for safety, financial assistance, and spiritual care. Other victims are invisible because they have been threatened and are at risk if they speak out. Learn the [Importance of Breaking the Silence Against Domestic Violence](#) and assisting the victim through the consequences. [Worship Resources](#) are available.



May is [Mental Health Month](#). Our [United Church of Christ Mental Health Network](#) works to reduce stigma and promote the inclusion of people with mental health challenges and neurodiversity and their families in the life, leadership, and work of congregations/synagogues/organizations. For May 19th or any Sunday that fits your church's

calendar, plan a Mental Health Sunday service using the [Mental Health and Wellness Worship Resources for All](#). They also provide resources for programs throughout the year.

Mental Health can be improved by connecting with others. Loneliness and social isolation can do more harm to our health than we realize. They can increase the risk of heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline (worsening memory loss). [The Power of Connection: How It Can Improve our Health](#) is a valuable resource when discussing how a congregation may support mental health.



Any Month, But Especially Now



[Make Every Day a Take Back Day](#) – Take Back Day has helped Americans easily rid their homes of unwanted or expired medications. These medications can be a gateway to addiction and have helped fuel the opioid epidemic. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that the majority of people who use a prescription medication for a nonmedical purpose obtain that medication from the medicine cabinet of a family member or friend. Protect those you love by encouraging **Every Day to be a Take Back Day**. Medications can be dropped anonymously into year-round disposal boxes in a pharmacy, hospital, or local police department. Find safe locations using this tool to [locate a site near you](#).

RESOURCE LITERATURE

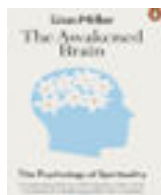
- [Becoming An Immigrant Welcoming Congregation: The Journey is Made by Walking](#). We live in a world of people seeking safety and wellness. Throughout the history of our denomination, the Spirit has moved us to journey with them. We have a distinctive ability and calling to reach out and love our neighbor, all of our neighbors. This resource guides the myriad ways churches can welcome people with dignity.



- [My Heart Sings A Sad Song](#), written and illustrated by Gary Alan Shockley, a chaplain, certified grief counselor, and spiritual director, gently offers children information and

wisdom about the range of emotions when a loved one dies and the time that grief may last. A young rabbit expresses sadness, loneliness, frustration, disbelief, and a longing for joy again. The book includes eight recommendations for helping a child grieve the death of a loved one and blank pages for them to draw or write about their feelings and memories.

- *Sacred Self-Care – Daily Practices for Nurturing Our Whole Selves* by Chanequa Walker-Barnes, PhD provides 7 weeks of daily meditation. The author explains that practices that nourish and enrich our spiritual and physical selves, or self-care in the most profound sense, actually strengthen our capacity to serve God, practices that can help us all. This would be an enriching book group experience.



- *The Awakened Brain – The Psychology of Spirituality* by Linda Miller demonstrates spirituality's positive, measurable effects on people caught up in mental and emotional crises. Clinical and epidemiological data back her findings. [View the interview How Does Spirituality Protect Our Mental Health?](#) Defines spiritual health and how it is different from religion. Shares how spiritual health improves all our modes of health.

WELLNESS MINISTRIES RELATED CONFERENCES



- April 11th 3:30 – 4:30 ET – UCC Livestream *Nurture the Soul: Building Congregational Community Safety*. Learn more about how congregations can build an ecology of community safety rooted in care, investing in each other, believing in each other, and trusting each other and the rhythms and cycles around/within us. [Register here.](#)
- April 15 – 17 2024 [Westberg Virtual Symposium](#) at the Caring for the Human Spirit Conference.
- April 16, 2024, is the Deadline to register for the Online Spring 2024 Health Minister Certificate Course, which is based at Wesley Theological Seminary. E-mail Tom Pruski with any questions.
- April 20th 1:00 – 3:00 pm ET: Creation Justice 2024 UCC Annual Earth Summit – *Energy from Heaven or Energy from Hell?* [Register here](#)

- At your convenience: [Abuse Prevention online videos from UCC Insurance Board](#) - Abuse Prevention: Creating a Safe Environment - Building a Culture of Protection in Your Ministry - Abuse Prevention: Current Research, Trends, and Best Practices

KEEP CONNECTED:

We are a community of mutually supportive leaders of all Wellness Ministries.

Check out these links:

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/UCCFCN/posts/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/6951713/>



Debbie Ringen faithfully posts information on our Facebook and LinkedIn pages that benefits our ministries. Tell her what you would like to share by e-mailing wellnessministries@ucc.org



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