

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT
Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

U.C.C. WELLNESS MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER
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REFLECTION

Does your Advent season focus on attending various gatherings, making dozens of cookies, decorating every corner of the church and home, and shopping for multiple gifts? Take a moment to consider what you expect of yourself and others. What do others expect of you? How necessary are these expectations? How can you make adjustments while paying attention to self-care? How can you effectively journey through Advent primarily focused on the reason for the season?

Dear God, please guide me through this Advent season in a way that considers my self-care and encourages others to do the same. May we slow down and journey meaningfully as we honor the gift of Jesus. Amen.

A TIMELY HEALTH TIP

When the season doesn't feel calm or bright.

Did the "most wonderful time of the year" turn into the most stressful time of the year?
[Tips for Managing Your Mental Health During the Holidays](#)

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS

What is Stigma? Why is it a Wellness Ministries concern?

Stigma is a degrading attitude in society that discredits individuals or groups based on attributes such as illness, deformity, color, nationality, and religion. The coping behavior of affected individuals results in internalized stigma. When a discredited person internalizes stigma, it becomes equally destructive regardless of whether actual discrimination occurs.

Stigma destroys a person's dignity, marginalizes affected individuals, violates fundamental human rights, significantly reduces the chances of a stigmatized person achieving their full potential, and severely hinders the pursuit of happiness and contentment.

When stigma is linked to a medical condition or disability, it hinders individuals from seeking evaluation and treatment, disclosing their diagnosis to those most likely to provide support, and adhering to treatment guidelines.

Stigma has become a significant reason why the HIV epidemic continues, causing millions of people worldwide, including in the U.S., to get infected and die from HIV every year. [What can you do?](#) You can perform small actions that will make a big difference. [A Stigma Language Guide helps reduce stigma as you educate others.](#)

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WELLNESS MINISTRIES

- **Dec. 1st [Beginning of Advent- 2024 Advent Resources](#)** – Theme – **A Righteous Branch-** active agents of the realization of the “*kingdom*” of God in our time. Resources to worship, reflect, and embody hope for adults and children during Advent.
- **Dec. 2nd [An Ecumenical Gathering for Prayer and Action for World AIDS 2024-](#) A Nurture Your Soul Special Offering** (Register here) 3:30-4:30 PM ET - An Ecumenical Prayer Vigil and Call-to-Action featuring prayers, reflection, and song. Hear the experiences of pastors and lay leaders living with HIV/AIDS as they invite us to end religious stigma and call for equal access to health care.
- **[Orientation of Wellness Ministries Volunteers](#)** – A 6-session train-the-trainer program for those who wish to develop or further develop Wellness Ministries within their congregation. Tuesdays, January 21 & 28, Feb. 4, 11, 18, & 25 from 4:00- 5:30 PM ET. All reading materials will be supplied free of charge. Registration will open on Jan. 2nd through a direct link in the January newsletter. Questions? Contact Peggy Matteson, Chair of Wellness Ministries, National Setting, at UCCWellnessMinistries@ucc.org or UCCWellnessMinistriesChair@gmail.com
- **[Allied Against Hate: A Toolkit for Faith Communities](#)** – Building Relationships Across Faiths, Preventing Incidents of Hate, Discrimination, and Bias, Responding to Acts of Hate, Discrimination, and Bias.
- **[UCC Contemplatives in Action](#)** - The goal of this website, created with the support of Local Church Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ), is to help resource “Conferences, Associations, local churches, clergy, lay leaders, General Synod, and seminaries in practicing and teaching a foundational life of spiritual practices, as modeled in the life of Jesus” (in the words of the Resolution).

UPDATES FROM THE UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM

- **Rev. Roberto Ochoa**, Minister for Ethnic Inclusion & Congregational Support for Rural and Small Churches, met with us during our November meeting and shared how we might better meet the needs of the churches he serves. Our conversations will continue.
- In early 2025, there are 3 opportunities for you to join our sub-committees to develop needed resources:

- a *Handbook for Visitation with Children, Youth, and their Families*
- a webinar on *Understanding and Responding to Loneliness*
- resources for *Break the Silence Sunday* – April 27th

For more information e-mail UCCWellnessMinistries@ucc.org or UCCWellnessMinistriesChair@gmail.com

LINKS TO NATIONAL HEALTH-RELATED TOPICS

December

- **Dec. 10th** [Human Rights Day](#) - Human Rights Day focuses on how human rights are a pathway to solutions, playing a critical role as a preventative, protective and transformative force for good.
- **Dec. 21st** [Winter Solstice Liturgy Longest Night](#), [Blue Christmas](#) services – These services provide space for those who don't feel so "merry and bright" this time of year, acknowledging the stress, mental strain, and grief sometimes felt during the holiday season.
- [National Impaired Driving Month](#) – Information related to distracted driving, drowsy driving, drunk driving, drug-impaired driving, and speeding.
- [Safe Toys and Gifts Month Guidelines](#) – How to determine appropriateness and safety.
- Dec. 31st [Watch Night services](#)— Watch Night, or "Freedom's Eve," marks the day African Americans across the country watched and waited for the news of freedom, the day the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. Today, Watch Night is an annual New Year's Eve tradition that includes the memory of slavery and freedom, reflections on faith, and a celebration of community and strength.

January

- [Birth Defects Prevention Month](#) – 10.4% of births in the U.S. are preterm, before 37 weeks with significant disparities among racial and ethnic groups.
[There are ways to support pregnant women to reduce the risk](#)
- [Blood Donor Month](#)— In only 45-60 minutes, an individual can donate one unit of blood, which can be separated into four components and could help save multiple lives. Invite a blood donor team to your church to hold a blood drive.
- [Glaucoma Awareness Month](#) – Information about types of glaucoma, methods of diagnosis, and treatment.
- [Current Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month](#) – Shares how to identify a victim and the most helpful response. Be aware some may be sitting silently in your worship service.

WELLNESS MINISTRIES RELATED INFORMATION

Resources available from Pilgrim Press

- [A Path for Love](#) Christmas Card
- [The Mess in the Messiah](#) – 2024 Advent Devotional. Downloadable PDF (\$3.00) and free Advent calendar PDF. Also provides guidance for lighting an Advent Wreath in your home.
- [Christmas on the Screen - Reviewing the Evolution of American Spirituality](#)
- [The Unicorn at the Manger- Animal Stories of the Holy Night](#)
- Meet Winky, [The Christmas Cat](#)

Non-profit Security Grant Information

- [Learn About the Non-profit Security Grant Program \(NSGP\)](#) funding for community organizations, including places of worship, and where to obtain more information.
- [Non-profit Security Grant Program \(NSGP\) Application Process](#)

STAY CONNECTED AS WE SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER

- **Facebook** - [Wellness Ministries UCC](#)
- **Instagram** - [wellness.ministries.ucc](#)

We are a community of mutually supportive leaders of all Wellness Ministries. Debbie Ringen has been working to update our social media connections. Please tell her what you would like to share by e-mailing wellnessministries@ucc.org.