

Mind, Body, Spirit:
Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

UCC Wellness Ministries Newsletter

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REFLECTION: STARLIGHT AND WISDOM

Epiphany, also called Theophany and Three Kings Day, marks the 12th day of Christmas and the day the Magi, or the three kings, visited the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. The ancient Magi were wise astronomers who paid close attention to the stars and planets above, reading their signs. When a bright star appeared in the eastern sky, they followed this divine light to Bethlehem. Donna Schaper has written a small book, *On Tiptoes In Expectation: Prayers for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*. Her prayers shine light on familiar scripture passages and offer opportunity to experience the presence of God in our everyday lives.

A wintry January day can be an invitation to curl up with a hot drink and a good book. Books offer a window to worlds we have not yet visited. Reading has positive mental and physical benefits. The act of reading strengthens the brain, increases the ability to empathize, reduces stress, and builds vocabulary. Literary fiction that explores the inner lives of characters can heighten our ability to understand the feelings and beliefs of others. A study published in the *Journal of College Teaching and Learning* found that 30 minutes of reading lowered blood pressure, heart rate, and feelings of psychological distress just as effectively as yoga and humor. Reading with children builds their warm and happy associations with books, increasing the likelihood that they will find reading enjoyable in the future. Doctors at the Cleveland Clinic recommend that parents read with their children beginning as early as infancy and continuing through elementary school years. While reading is often solitary, book clubs allow individuals to share their perspectives, engage in meaningful discussions, and learn from others. One of the most significant benefits of a book club is that it encourages reading. Book clubs – in-person or by internet platform sessions - can foster a sense of community and belonging by bringing people together over a shared love of reading and can help individuals develop social skills, such as active listening and effective communication. What books are on your to-be-read (and re-read) list?

"A book, too, can be a star, a living fire to lighten the darkness, leading out into the expanding universe." – Madeleine L'Engle

TIMELY HEALTH TOPIC



Making New Year's Resolutions is a tradition that may – or may not result in positive outcomes. Good intentions early in January often come undone by February. Usual items on the list often include: Exercise regularly; Eat Right; Protect yourself from COVID-19, the Flu, and RS; Get enough sleep; and Stick to your plan. These [5 Tips for a Healthier 2024](#) offer good suggestions. Part of a good plan is to write out your goals and action plan, create incentives, and tell someone who can help you stay on track and celebrate your accomplishments.

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS

As people spend more time indoors, it's a good time for a reminder about protection from respiratory viruses. Illnesses caused by respiratory viruses like flu, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can make anyone sick. Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against flu, COVID-19, and RSV. The effects of cancer treatments on the immune system make it harder for the body to fight infections. People with cancer or a history of cancer are more likely to become seriously ill from respiratory viruses. It is important for people who live with or take care of someone with cancer to get vaccinated to lower the risk of the person with cancer getting sick.

Stay up to date on vaccinations. Ideally, flu vaccinations are recommended to be received by the end of October, however, you can get the flu shot any time during flu season, as long as vaccines are still available and flu viruses are still circulating. Vaccine protection decreases over time. It is especially important to get your 2024–2025 COVID-19 vaccine if you are ages 65 and older, are at high risk for severe COVID-19, or have never received a COVID-19 vaccine.

People ages 65 years and older: You are up to date when you have received:

- 2 doses of any 2024–2025 COVID-19 vaccine 6 months apart.
- While it is *recommended* to get 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine doses 6 months apart, the *minimum* time is 2 months apart, which allows flexibility to get the second dose prior to typical COVID-19 surges, travel, life events, and healthcare visits

The preventive measures for COVID-19 also apply for the flu and RSV: avoiding large crowds and gatherings, wearing a mask, social distancing, frequent handwashing, and staying at home when you feel sick.

NATIONAL HEALTH AWARENESS TOPICS FOR FEBRUARY:

Observation Days:

- **[Give Kids A Smile Day \(GKAS\)](#)**: February 2. Almost one in four children under five already have cavities and 10 million children under the age of 18 receive no dental care. To find GKAS events in your state, contact your local or state dental society as well as contacting the American Dental Association through the email gkas@ada.org.
- **[National Wear Red Day](#)**: The first Friday in February is a day to raise awareness about heart disease, the No. 1 killer of women in the U.S.
- **[National Donor Day](#)**: February 14. This is a day to focus on all types of donation – organ, eye, tissue, blood, platelets and marrow – by participating in blood/marrow drives or donor registration events.
- **[Random Acts of Kindness Day](#)**: February 17. Suggestions offered for RAK's at home, school, and work settings.

Monthly Observances:

- **National Children's Dental Health Month (NCDHM)** The National Institutes of Health provides **[free publications](#)** including material on baby teeth, tooth decay, and finding low-cost dental care.
- **[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. **[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](#)**—Glaucoma is a leading cause of vision loss and blindness in the United States but half of the people with glaucoma don't know they have it. Sharing information about types of glaucoma, methods of diagnosis, and treatment and encouraging everyone at higher risk for glaucoma to get a dilated eye exam is the best way to protect their vision.
- **[Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month](#)**. Nationwide, youth ages 12 to 19 experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault. **[Youth.gov](#)** lists activities to promote awareness and engage in this work. Share information about how to access the **[National Dating Abuse Helpline](#)**.

RESOURCES FOR YOUR WELLNESS MINISTRIES

- **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 opens Jan. 2nd.](#) Registration is limited.

Questions? Contact Peggy Matteson, Chair of Wellness Ministries, National Setting, at UCCWellnessMinistries@ucc.org or UCCWellnessMinistriesChair@gmail.com.



- **RESOURCE! UCC Wellness Ministries Handbook for Visitation.** Are you visiting a person or writing a note on behalf of the church? Aren't sure what to say to this person? This handbook furnishes information to guide you in each encounter and provides scripture passages, prayers, and blessings you can easily use. This handbook is now available through the [UCC Resources](#).
- In early 2025, there are 3 opportunities for you to join UCC Wellness Ministries sub-committees to develop needed resources:
 - a webinar on ***Understanding and Responding to Loneliness***
 - resources for ***Break the Silence Sunday*** – April 27th
 - a ***Handbook for Visitation with Children, Youth and their Families***. It is anticipated that the team will finalize their work the week of Jan. 2nd and begin the publication process.

Interested? Contact Peggy Matteson, Chair of Wellness Ministries, National Setting, at UCCWellnessMinistries@ucc.org or UCCWellnessMinistriesChair@gmail.com.

- Rev. Debbie Gline Allen posted [a book review](#) on the UCC Southern New England Conference website that may be of interest. She suggests that in addition to a Christmas gift, [The Book of Belonging: Bible Stories for Kind & Contemplative Kids](#), may be a birthday or baptism gift.
- The [Nollau Leadership Institute](#) is the Council of Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) signature program with more than 250 attendees in its 20+ years. The Institute's Enrollment is now open for the 2025-2026 class. The short application can be found [here](#). A limited number of tuition scholarships are available to help offset the cost

of the program. The program consists of **two in-person retreats** at [Bellwether Farm](#), **online interactions** in between the retreats, and an additional day of programming at the **2026 Gathering**, which includes the commissioning of the class as [Diakonal Ministers](#).

UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATE

Our next Leadership Team monthly meeting is **Thursday, January 7th, 2:00 – 3:30 pm ET**. We invite you to join in conversation with colleagues from across the UCC. To learn more, contact uccwellnessministrieschair@gmail.com

KEEP CONNECTED & SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER



We are a community of mutually supportive leaders for the many aspects of Wellness Ministries. **Visit us at:**

- **Facebook** - [Wellness Ministries UCC](#)
- **Instagram** - [wellnessministries.ucc](https://www.instagram.com/wellnessministriesucc)

Share with Debbie Ringen topics you would like us to post on our social media connections by emailing wellnessministries@ucc.org. Join in the conversations.

A NOTE FROM THE CO-EDITOR, ALYSON BREISCH:

Newsletter Update: In 2019, after Peggy Matteson completed a 3-year cycle as editor of this newsletter, I served as the editor from 2019-2022. In 2023, Peggy and I began a process of serving as editor for alternating months' issues. With this issue, I am completing 5 years of participation in crafting issues of this newsletter. Beginning in February 2025, Peggy and other volunteers will continue in the editor role.

Have a question about health and wellness ministries? Do you have an innovative way you've provided wellness ministries? Let us hear from you. Contact us at wellnessministries@ucc.org

