

WELLNESS MINISTRIES
Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT NEWSLETTER

November 2025, Volume 10, Issue 11

SPIRITUAL, MENTAL, AND PHYSICAL WELLNESS IS A JUSTICE ISSUE

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REFLECTION - Weary? Rest and then rejuvenate by working collaboratively.

Jesus role-modeled taking time for rest and time away for contemplation and regeneration.

If we wear ourselves out mentally, physically, and spiritually, our ministries will suffer.

We are called to take measures to sustain ourselves with and for others.

We have to make time to rest, we don't do this work alone...

*The relationships that strengthen us start with our congregations
and move out to communities most impacted by hatred and harm.*

Rev. Ali Lopez-Valcarcel,
Rev. Randy Mayer, & Rev. Noel Anderson
Nurture the Soul

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS - Continuing to Advance Church Vitality With Wellness Ministries

The [Manual on Local Church](#) (June 2025) in Section 3 - Marks of Faithful and Vital Local Churches in the United Church of Christ, states that:

*Local churches experiencing vitality may or may not be growing numerically,
but they do demonstrate spiritual growth,
healthy community, institutional well-being, and
faith-inspired engagement to the wider community and world.*

United Church of Christ ©
2025 Faith Education, Innovation,
and Education. Pg. 17.

Over the past 30 years, thousands of UCC congregations have developed Wellness Ministries programs. The programs are created in response to the unique challenges of people inside and outside the church walls. The providers of this circle of care come from both within and outside the church walls to share their time and talents.

Section 3 of the new [Manual on Local Church](#), Categories 6 and 7, provides twelve directives applicable to our ministries, some of which many congregations are already addressing. Which ones might you and your Wellness Ministries Team be prayerfully drawn to explore next during these times?

6. Caring for the Wider Community

- Providing hope and healing for one another and to a hurting world.
- Responding to the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of individuals and the community.
- Nurturing care and compassion for God's creation and those impacted by environmental harms.
- Practicing humility and respect with all people and groups who have been harmed by the church or who are un/underrepresented in the church.
- Seeking to understand the lived experiences of the wider community, particularly those whose experiences differ from those in the Local Church in identity, ability, age, gender, race, and/or religion.
- Partnering with wider community groups by collaborating and being responsive to their directly expressed needs.

7. Working Together for Justice and Mercy

- Practicing the extravagant hospitality of Jesus in worship and community.
- Drawing on the liberating activity of God throughout Scripture to confront injustice and oppression locally and globally.
- Understanding community history and cultural context in order to be present to the needs of the community.
- Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence, in order to better care for and be cared for by one another, always honoring the humanity of those with whom we partner.
- Dismantling physical and cultural barriers that hinder accessibility or inhibit connection or relationship with the Local Church and community.
- Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit biases in the life of the church, including within the Local Church. [Implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness.]

TIMELY RESOURCES - *Love your neighbor as yourself.* Mark 12:31a NET

*Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples -
if you have love for one another. John 13:35 NET*

Our families, congregants, and neighbors are all facing new challenges to their health and well-being. No individual, group, or organization can do everything that needs to be done, but together we can make a difference. Building bridges of relationship and connectedness requires patiently developing mutual trust between community leaders and church groups, so that they can now learn from the community what is needed and how best to accomplish it. Below are several excellent resources individuals, groups, and communities might want to explore.

As individuals:

- *Start with Hello (and other simple ways to live as neighbors)*, written by Shannon Martin, “highlights the importance of loving your neighbor and treating people with dignity and respect, while also providing practical tools to help you in understanding those you perceive to be different from you (Faith Brooks).

In groups:

- *the ministry of ordinary places - Waking up to God's Goodness Around You*, written by Shannon Martin, "reminds us of the simple, yet beautiful call to love our neighbor and what that could really look like today (Katie Davis Majors). She also "reminds us to pay attention, look outside of ourselves, to lay aside our preconceived judgements, and stay put, bearing with each other, carrying each other's burdens, and finding Jesus at the center of it all" (LaTasha Morrison).

In community:

- *The Abundant Community - Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, written by John McKnight and Peter Block, "reminds us that our greatest strength as people comes from the gifts of caring, aware communities and neighborhoods" (Frances Strickland). They "challenge us as individuals to understand the power of the individual and the potential of our work together" (Robert J. O'Neill, Jr). "Read this book with your mind, heart, and spirit" (Puanani Burgess).
- [The Community Tool Box](#), is a free resource from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, provides practical, step-by-step guidance in community-building skills, and links to related Toolkits, which offer short outlines for key tasks. The Tool Box provides:
 1. An overview,
 2. Community assessment,
 3. Communication to promote interest and participation,
 4. Developing a strategic plan and organizational structure,
 5. Leadership and management,
 6. Analyzing community problems and designing and adapting community interventions,
 7. Implementing promising community interventions,
 8. **Cultural competence and spirituality in community building with a link to Toolkit 9 - Enhancing cultural competence.**,
 9. Organizing for effective advocacy,
 10. Evaluating community programs and initiatives,
 11. Maintaining quality and rewarding accomplishments,
 12. Generating, managing, and sustaining financial resources, and
 13. Social marketing and sustainability of the initiative.

WELLNESS MINISTRIES RESOURCES FOR YOU & THOSE YOU SERVE - Links & Published Materials

- *Always with You - Spiritual Comfort for Those Living in the World of Dementia*. Available from [The Pilgrim Press](#). Donna Marie Vuilleumier offers guidance that extends beyond the individual caregiver to promote and prepare support from the congregation of a person living with dementia. It is a vital resource for meeting people exactly where they are on the dementia journey.
- The [Black Church Food Security Network \(BCFSN\)](#) is the fruit of Maxine's Garden at Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in Baltimore, MD. After years of witnessing the benefits of incorporating a vegetable garden into the church's ministry and growing frustrated with food access and charity models of food distribution, Rev. Heber Brown, III began dreaming of what could happen if more Black churches started growing food on their land and collaborated with other congregations and farmers to create local Black-owned food systems.

Today, the BCFSN covers much of the country, with member congregations located as far west as Omaha, Nebraska, along the East Coast, and throughout the southeastern United States. Using an asset-based community development approach, the BCFSN shares with churches how to create

gardens on their land, host small farmers' markets, and purchase wholesale from Black farmers, all while utilizing their existing assets and member skills.

- [*God Is*](#) - Through simple couplets, *God Is* offers wellness with a profound theology of joy, wonder, and assurance for children of all ages—including those of us who are learning anew, in adulthood, how to have faith like a child. Available from [The Pilgrim Press](#).
- [*How are you holding up?*](#) Whether lay or authorized minister, our work has a peculiar way of teaching us to hide our struggles behind our calling. We become experts at pastoral presence while our own souls grow weary. So what do you do? Realistic suggestions are shared.
- [*Responding to Life's Challenges that are Out of Your Control*](#) - A Care Note written by Diane Pharo, SCN, offers ways to sustain our inner being with sections titled, "Living life with resilience," "Cultivating a hopeful attitude," "Living gracefully," "Exploring creativity," "Practicing gratitude," "Mindful breathing," and "Staying close."
- [*Who Is Our Neighbor?*](#) Written by Rev. Erica Poellot describes the decades of outreach to their neighbors by Judson Memorial Church in New York City.

[LINKS TO NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS - For December](#)

- **Monday, Dec 1st** - [World AIDS Day 2025](#) supports a day of solidarity for people around the world affected by HIV. The theme of the [UN World AIDS Day for 2025](#) is *Overcoming disruption, transforming the AIDS response*. It will highlight the impact that the funding cuts from international donors have had on the response to AIDS, as well as showcase the resilience of countries and communities stepping up to protect the gains made and drive the HIV response forward. Ministry resources are available on [UCC resources for World AIDS Day](#).
- **Dec. 1st - 7th** [National Hand Washing Awareness Week](#) - Hand washing is a simple, effective way for children and adults to prevent infections and illness. Studies show that people who wash their hands have 24% fewer sick days due to respiratory illnesses and 51% fewer sick days caused by stomach bugs. Free to download/print posters, coloring books, charts, and bookmarks in multiple languages, plus a toolkit for schools, are available from [Henry the Hand Foundation](#). Information and activities are designed for all ages, from daycare to adults.
- **National Safe Toys and Gifts Month** - Be aware that the toys suit the child's age, individual skills, and abilities, especially for infants and children under age three. [Choosing Safe Toys](#) provides general guidelines when shopping for or accepting toys, stuffed animals, crayons, and paints. Specific guidance when [Choosing Safe Toys for Babies](#), when [Choosing Safe Toys for Toddlers and Preschoolers](#), and when [Choosing Safe Toys for School-age Kids](#). There is also a list of [Safety Tips for Teens](#) that explains what additional equipment is needed to use gifts such as sleds, ice hockey or lacrosse sticks, skateboards, and other activities. Information may be downloaded for free and is available in both English and Spanish. Additional [Kids Health Information](#) is available for parents, kids, teens, and educators.

This information covers the range of ages we serve within our churches. Regularly checking items brought into our nursery and classrooms could be a joint effort between Faith Formation and Wellness Ministries. Youth leaders may also find the information related to teens useful.

ITEM OF INTEREST ON THE UCC CALENDAR - In November

- Monday, Nov. 3rd, 3:30 - 4:30 ET [The Future of Faith: The Sacrament of Interfaith Friendship](#) - In this divisive moment, we are called to both go forth and build meaningful connections across lines of difference and to tend to our spirits and communities. As we connect with others beyond our church walls, Wellness Ministries make a difference in our neighbors' lives.
- Sunday, Nov. 23rd [United Black Christians \(UBC\), UCC](#) - Celebrates the lay and clergy members who faithfully serve in over 278 predominantly African American congregations of the UCC, as well as those African American members in congregations that are not predominantly African American. The mission of the United Black Christians of the United Church of Christ is to promote the cause of Jesus Christ and to serve as a prophetic voice for all African American members within the United Church of Christ. With Christ as our guide, we are called to strengthen and uplift the entire church through advocacy, ecumenical and global partnerships, empowerment, and training of laity, including youth and young adults, for contemporary ministry.

UPDATE FROM THE UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM - Appreciation and Requests

- Thank you for all the positive responses we received about how helpful you found the document addressing the confusion around the use of acetaminophen and vaccinations.
- We have also received requests for additional resources, as we aim to provide both expected and unexpected support to our congregants and their neighbors. Some of these resources are included in this month's newsletter. We will continue to seek out more.
- Someone unfamiliar with the concept of wellness might ask why these topics are coming up. What do they have to do with wellness? Gently remind them that Wellness Ministries focuses on: - Spiritual care for those seeking health and healing. - Education that promotes health and aims to reduce or prevent disease. - Advocating for individuals or groups seeking proper care. Collaborating with community organizations for the well-being of all God's children.
- Please keep those thoughts and suggestions coming to wellnessministries@ucc.org. We aim to support your ministry.

CONNECTING AND SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER- Our Circle of Colleagues Grows

Ministry is often lonely work. You have a network of colleagues who will support you and your ministry. Connect with us on:

- Facebook - [Wellness Ministries UCC](#)
- Instagram - [wellness.ministries.ucc](https://www.instagram.com/wellnessministriesucc)
- Linked-In - [Wellness Ministries UCC](#)

Please send information to post or questions to Debbie Ringen, MS, FCN, wellnessministries@ucc.org

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation.

UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.