

WELLNESS MINISTRIES - Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT NEWSLETTER

January, Volume 11, Issue 1

Spiritual, Mental, and Physical Wellness are Justice Issues

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REFLECTION – Entering the year 2026

Turning the calendar to a new set of 365 days often prompts some people to make New Year's Resolutions. These are typically statements about what they believe needs to be changed or added to their routines to become a "better" person. This practice highlights what the individual perceives as their negative traits, character flaws, or shortcomings. Focusing on personal negatives often proves ineffective for starting a new year.

Instead, choose to welcome 2026 by recognizing the positive thoughts and actions you've been guided to take over the past 365 days. Then, discern where your thoughts, energy, and skills may be useful in this new year. Be kind to yourself as you balance acts of self-care with acts of loving thy neighbor.

Let us pray that, with God's guidance, 2026 becomes a year of blessings!

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS – Winter Illness Guide

Colds, flu, and other respiratory illnesses become more common during the winter when we tend to spend more time indoors and attend gatherings that bring people of all ages into close contact, allowing viruses to pass more easily from one person to another.

Being proactive is the best way to reduce your risk of illness.

- Ask a health professional who knows your medical history for their recommendations regarding vaccinations.
- Stay hydrated so the dry winter air doesn't weaken your immune system.
- Wash your hands before and after you eat, after using the bathroom, after coughing or sneezing into your hand, or after touching something that others commonly touch. Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds, which is about the time it takes to hum the "Happy Birthday" song twice. Scrub your palms, backs of hands, between your fingers, and under your nails to remove germs and prevent illness effectively. Air dry your hands or use a clean towel.

If you are coughing and sneezing, how will you know if you have a cold or something more serious? Do you need antibiotics? Are you contagious?

A [Winter Illness Guide](#), provided by Johns Hopkins doctors, provides valuable information on how to identify what you might have and how to respond to symptoms, including when to call or see a health care provider. The illnesses explained are:

- Common cold, most often caused by the rhinovirus
- Seasonal influenza (flu) virus
- Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)
- Covid-19 virus
- Acute bronchitis
- Chronic bronchitis
- Pneumonia
- Whooping cough – caused by a bacterium called *Bordetella pertussis*

LINKS TO NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS – Plan Ahead for February

- **American Heart Month** - Heart disease is a leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women, but much can be done to protect and strengthen heart health. The [American Heart Association](#) offers free downloadable infographics that explain how to care for the heart.

National “Wear Red” Day for Women’s Heart Health occurs on the first Friday in February each year, which is February 6 in 2026. It is an initiative to raise awareness of the importance of heart health, specifically for women. Free infographics about women’s health and heart disease are available for download and printing on the [National Institutes of Health](#) website.

The [Centers for Disease Control](#) also has free-to-download Toolkits in English and Spanish on blood pressure control, healthy eating communications, heart valve disease, and heart disease communications.

- **Low Vision Awareness Month** - Many vision difficulties happen slowly over time and do not cause vision changes until damage has occurred. Low Vision Awareness Month emphasizes routine eye exams and provides resources for those with vision loss. [The National Eye Institute](#) of the National Institutes of Health provides free downloadable and printable fact sheets, handouts, videos, and webinars.

Through the Library of Congress, each state has access to braille and talking books and magazines for the blind and print disabled. An application process is required, and materials are sent for free via the USPS. To find and connect with the library serving your area, call 888-657-7323 or click on this link to the [National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Library of Congress](#) to find the way to connect with services in your state.

Pairing sighted members of the congregation with sight-disabled people to help them order and keep track of talking books is a great faith community service opportunity.

- **National Children’s Dental Health Month** - Each February, the American Dental Association (ADA) sponsors National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. Developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps children to get a good start on a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

The [American Dental Association \(ADA\)](#) provides free downloadable flyers, activity sheets, posters, and a “Brushing Calendar” in both Spanish and English. Search for “free toothbrushes” online, contact community outreach groups or school programs, or check with your dentist for free toothbrushes, toothpaste, and floss, or plan a community donation drive.

ITEM OF INTEREST ON THE UCC CALENDAR - January

- Jan. 6th – Epiphany - A church festival celebrating the visit of the Magi to Jesus (Matt. 2)
- Jan. 18th through 24th – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.
- Jan. 19th - Martin Luther King Jr. Day – Honors the life and work of an influential pastor. Recognize community events and encourage participation so that we all may be one.
- Jan. 25th – Health and Human Services Sunday – Helpful materials are developed by the [Council for Health and Human Services Ministries \(CHHSM\)](#).

UPDATE FROM THE UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM – Reflecting with gratitude on the range of ministries provided in 2025.

During our December meeting, the Leadership Team reviewed the resources developed and the support offered to individuals and churches in 2025. We appreciate the many people who contributed their expertise and time to the benefit of untold others within and beyond our denomination.

1. Celebrated ten years of writing and publishing our *Mind, Body, Spirit Newsletter – Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness*.
2. Updated and expanded *2025 Wellness Ministries Toolkit* that is now available on a flash drive from [UCC Resources](#).
3. Created the *Wellness Ministries Handbook for Visitation with Children and Youth* to improve the inclusion of visitation for children and youth. It is available from [UCC Resources](#).
4. Provided two sessions of the 6-week train-the-trainer series, *Orientation of Wellness Ministries Volunteers*.
5. Expanded interactions through our Facebook page, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
6. Reflected on the data received from the supplemental survey, added to the UCC Research and Data annual survey of UCC churches. This provides insights for resource planning.
7. In April, coordinated with the U.C.C. Office in D.C. to host two Zoom educational sessions on how to set up a meeting and to explain to our legislators the importance of the Medicaid and SNAP programs for the well-being of people of all ages. The efforts were titled Medicaid and SNAP Advocacy Week. CHHSM joined in the efforts and alerted its members to this opportunity. The face-to-face meetings took place all across the country the week after Easter.
8. On Sept. 24th, crafted and sent out a statement titled "*UCC Wellness Ministries Responds to the Confusion About Use of Acetaminophen & Vaccinations*" that briefly explained the long history of using vaccinations to prevent illness. It also noted that generations within congregations could testify to this experience. Science-based resources for guidance on vaccine use and Tylenol were listed with accurate links. This two-page document was sent to all conferences, our newsletter readers, known congregations with wellness ministry activities, and our additional contact lists, reaching more than 5,000 e-mail addresses.

9. The number of UCC Conferences and Associations that share information from our Wellness Ministries newsletter in their publications has increased.
10. Provided a two-hour webinar for a UCC Conference focused on implementing or expanding Visitation ministries. More Conferences have shown interest.
11. Responded to more than 200 direct inquiries about Wellness Ministries, and when requested, followed up with face-to-face or Zoom discussions.
12. Developed a collaboration with UCC Economic Justice.

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](#)
- 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.*