WELLNESS MINISTRIES - Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT NEWSLETTER

April, Volume 12, Issue 4

Spiritual, Mental, and Physical Wellness are Justice Issues

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REFLECTION – What Does God Ask?

God does not ask your ability or your inability.
God asks only your availability.

Mary Kay Ash

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS – *Break the Silence Sunday* – April 26th

Epstein Files, #metoo, Cesar Chavez, Bill Cosby … it's all over the news. Stories of sexual violence and assault. Conservatively, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 10 men in the United States will be victims during their lifetime. And yet, the church is often deafeningly silent, or when it does speak, it perpetuates the victim-blaming and shaming of the society around us.

Begun by the Rev. Moira Finley in 2016, and building on more than a decade of advocacy on behalf of survivors, Break The Silence Sunday (BTSS) is an effort to change that, to open up a conversation within the church about rape and sexual assault.

In 2019, the General Synod in Milwaukee overwhelmingly approved a resolution to make BTSS an official date on the UCC calendar, the fourth Sunday of April, inviting churches to participate in worship and study. Within the context of our faith communities, we hope to:

- acknowledge the reality of rape and sexual violence in our world;
- support survivors by creating a place where they can tell their stories, feel loved and supported, and find encouragement on their healing journeys,
- commit ourselves to the work of changing the world, creating a future where rape is a memory.
- More information can be found on our website **breakthesilencesunday.org,** or by emailing **breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com.** All emails are held in confidence and sacred trust. If you need urgent help, please reach out to the Rape Abuse Incest National Network (RAINN) at 800-656-4673.

Thank you, Rev. Moira Finley, for sharing this life-saving information.

AN IDEA SHARED BY WELLNESS MINISTRY COLLEAGUES - *Blessed Minds Discussion* offered by the St Louis Association.

In 1997, at the 21st UCC General Synod, the delegates adopted the resolution "Reclaiming the Church's Ministry of Health and Healing," which established what is now known as Wellness Ministries. This resolution called on local churches, Associations, and Conferences to "address health and human services confronting members and their communities." Rev. Melinda Love, Rev. Kevin Cameron, and their colleagues have organized a way to break the silence about neurodiversity through a group of congregational leaders.

The St. Louis Association Ministerium is a circle of relationship-covenant connections with local UCC clergy, and "includes all ministers – active, licensed, interim, retired, MIDS, and the rest!" Attendees have been encouraged to read: *Blessed Minds – Breaking the Silence About Neurodiversity*, by Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, before their next meeting. This book can help churches embrace the gifts of neurodiversity and become a welcoming place for all. On Friday, April 24th, at 11 am, the group will meet at the St. Louis County Library. The discussion will be led by the author, Rev. Dr. Lund.

You can share this knowledge through many congregations by reaching out to your Association's leadership with an offer to organize a similar program. Church leaders will appreciate learning how to better welcome neurodivergent individuals and their families. You probably don't have access to Rev. Lund, but a speaker from your local NAMI chapter or another mental health organization might join your meeting and answer questions. Thank you, Rev. Melinda Love and Rev. Kevin Cameron, for sharing this idea with us.

Do you have an idea to share? E-mail **UCC Wellness Ministries Chair**

TIMELY RESOURCES – That Support Your Ministry

- ***2025 Wellness Ministries Toolkit*** – Flash drive: A downloadable, print-friendly version of this comprehensive 220-page book features clear, easy-to-understand content. When you're looking for more detailed insights or specific tools for your Wellness Ministries programs, click on the embedded hyperlinks. Learn from other health ministers how to start or expand your programs in your Wellness Ministries, or find inspiration in the examples they share.
- ***Always with You - Spiritual Comfort for Those Living in the World of Dementia,*** written by Donna Marie Vuilleumier and available from Pilgrim Press, offers insights and practical tips for compassionately supporting the spiritual well-being of those living with dementia and for accompanying a person through their advancing illness.
- ***Blessed Minds: Breaking the Silence About Neurodiversity,*** written by Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, is available from Chalice Press. A study guide is also available. Is your church truly welcoming to all of God's children? Many churches are unintentionally exclusive toward people whose brains work differently. This book helps churches embrace the gifts of neurodiversity and become a place of belonging for all.
- ***Looking Up While Lying Down: Thoughts, Poems, and Prayers for Those in the Hospital (revised)*** written by John E. Biegert, who knows from personal experience that confinements in the hospital can be lonely, depressing, anxiety-producing, and painful, wrote this booklet filled with prayers,

thoughts, scripture passages, and poems communicates compassion. Available at Pilgrim Press at a lower cost than a nice card.

- ***Rest in the Storm - Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers (20th Anniversary Updated Version).*** Kirk Byron Jones discusses beliefs and strategies to help caregivers care for themselves. His prayer is that, regardless of your specific caregiving role, you will develop a firm conviction, which can be expressed in the following credo: *I am no less precious to God than the work I do or the people I serve.*
- ***The Gift to Listen - The Courage to Hear.*** Carl Jackson shares three factors that make it hard to effectively listen. Initially, we develop listening skills by observing the behaviors demonstrated to us. If our surroundings prioritize talking rather than listening, we are likely to follow suit. Next, based on our experiences, we often think others won't listen, which makes us focus on being heard instead of listening ourselves. Lastly, our emotional and spiritual well-being influences how effectively we listen.

LINKS TO NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS – May

During May, the four health education topics of highest interest to our congregants may be: arthritis, vision, mental health, and stroke awareness. Each of these topics is relevant to many within our congregations and those we seek to serve in our communities. Seek speakers for programs and raise awareness of health initiatives in your community.

- **Arthritis Awareness Month** brings extra attention to this painful and debilitating condition that affects nearly 60 million men and women, and over 100,000 children in the U.S. There are over 100 types of arthritis and related conditions that damage the joints and often other organs. The **Arthritis Foundation** provides information with free downloadable fact sheets, webinars, a telephone connection for questions, a podcast, virtual support groups, and a wide variety of resources.
- **Mental Health Awareness Month** strives "to increase awareness about the vital role mental health plays in our overall health and well-being, and to provide resources and information to support individuals and communities who may need mental health support".

  - **Mental Health Network - UCC** provides links to websites for mental health under the Resources tab, along with resources that can help your congregation become a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged for Mental Health) Congregation. They also prepare materials that may be used on **Mental Health Sunday,** which is usually recognized in the UCC on the 3rd Sunday of May, or whenever during the year you want to start or continue providing education and support to your members regarding mental health challenges.

    Debbie Ringen, a member of the Wellness Ministries Leadership Team, is also active in the Mental Health Network, UCC. You may contact her by sending an e-mail through **WellnessMinistries@UCC.org**

  - **National Alliance on Mental Illness** has local chapters across the country that provide speakers and support groups. They may be invited to speak with youth groups, adult groups,

and even as a presenter on UCC Mental Health Sunday. The national office and local chapters provide free information and downloadable infographics.

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA) – Provides free downloadable infographics under the "Mental Health" tab.

- **Healthy Vision Month** focuses on promoting eye health and encouraging individuals to make healthy lifestyle choices that protect their vision." **National Eye Institute - National Institute of Health** offers free downloadable infographics on general health and vision care available in multiple languages.

  Currently, NIH is sponsoring an **Eye on the Future Teen Video Contest** that encourages U.S. high school students, either individually or in groups of three, from all backgrounds, to explore science and create a video in one of three categories: Science in Your World, Science in Action, or Science in Your Future. The contest rules and the process for selecting winners are described. Winners will receive a cash prize. The deadline for submissions is April 19th at 11:59pm ET, or once the first 300 submissions have been received.

ITEMS OF INTEREST ON THE UCC CALENDAR – April

- **April is Earth Month -** It can be a great time to further discern how to best answer our first calling as Christians: the caretaking of God's creation. **Four Things your Church Can do to Celebrate the Earth.**
- **April 5th – Easter Sunday** – A day of rejoicing, ***Hallelujah*!**
- **April 13th – International Holocaust Remembrance Day –** Go to **www.ucc.org** and search Holocaust Remembrance Day. Several pages of resources lift up in prayer an Earth and human community that contribute to the healing touch we all need, and as a way to never forget.
- **April 19th – Creation Justice Sunday** – Celebrated on the Sunday closest to Earth Day. Creation Justice Ministries has developed resources for 2026. The theme is **Canopy of Creation.** Across the United States, tree canopy maps trace the same fault lines as historic redlining, revealing how access to shade, clean air, and climate resilience has been shaped by systemic injustice. *The Canopy of Creation* invites the church to look up, tell the truth about tree apartheid, and rediscover trees as gifts, witnesses, and instruments of healing. Multiple resources are shared for a full worship service or as parts of a service
- **April 22nd – Earth Day -** **Environmental Justice Ministries** provides additional information. Throughout the year, our children and grandchildren rely on us to be good ancestors.
- **April 24th - Armenian Martyrs' Day** (Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day) is observed annually on April 24, marking the 1915 start of the genocide and honoring the 1.5 million victims of Ottoman-era massacres. Within the UCC, we have Armenian descendants and Armenian churches. On April 24, family and friends who were killed are recognized in services held worldwide, including in the U.S.
- **April 26th – Break the Silence Sunday** - Information can be found on the website **breakthesilencesunday.org** or by emailing **breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com.** All emails are held

in confidence and sacred trust. Encourage those who need urgent help to please reach out to the Rape Abuse Incest National Network (RAINN) at 800-656-4673

UPDATE FROM THE UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM – A Gathering of Colleagues

The evening of Thursday, March 12th The Leadership Team hosted a mid-Lenten Zoom gathering of colleagues in Wellness Ministries. The conversation was relaxed and welcoming as we shared stories and learned from one another. If you weren't able to attend this gathering but are interested in attending the next one e-mail: **WellnessMinistries@UCC.org** or **UCC Wellness Ministries Chair.** We look forward to hearing from you.

CONNECTING AND SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER - Our Circle of Colleagues Grows

Every month, we have more contacts coming to our social media sites. Ministry is often lonely work. Know that you have a network of colleagues who will support you and your ministry. Connect with them through:

- **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.