

WELLNESS MINISTRIES - Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT NEWSLETTER

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Spiritual, Mental, and Physical Wellness are Justice Issues

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REFLECTION – My Only Hope based on Psalm 27:4

*All I ever wanted was peace and harmony.
I would love to live serenely in God's presence.
Instead of protecting me from the tragedies of life
God gives me ways to cope with them.*

Taylor, Jim (1994) *Everyday Psalms*,
British Columbia, Canada:
Wood Lake Books

WELLNESS MINISTRIES FOCUS – Suicide Prevention

- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States. Around [one-fifth of all adolescent deaths](#) are from suicide. It is the [second leading cause of death](#) among young people 10-14 years old and [third leading cause of death](#) for those between 15-24. In 2024, suicide self-injury made up more than a third of visits to children's hospitals' emergency rooms.
- Each year in the United States, an estimated 48,000 people die by suicide and 1.5 million people of all ages attempt suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Across [all adult age categories](#), males die by suicide at a rate roughly four times higher than females.
- Suicide is a difficult topic to discuss, but it is a serious public health issue that affects all too many families. Suicide can be prevented. The risk of suicide can be minimized by knowing the risk factors and recognizing the warning signs.

Spirituality has a role in mental health support. Studies show that people in religious or spiritual groups have a lower risk of premature death or illness than those not involved. The reasons are unclear, but fellowship, goodwill, and support may promote healthy living and mental health. A congregation can reduce the stigma and provide a safe space to talk about mental illness and the risk of suicide.

Resources For Congregations – Reduce the Stigma and Start the Conversation

- The [UCC Mental Health Network](#) has a *Suicide Prevention Toolkit* and A *Congregation/Synagogue/ Organization Toolkit*.

- The American Psychiatric Association Foundation [Mental Health - A Guide for Faith Leaders Vol. Two](#) Is available as a free download.
Part 1 provides a Mental Health Overview that includes suicide.
Part 2 focuses on Faith Leader Support for People With Mental Illness and on building community capacity to support individuals with mental health needs.
It also addresses compassion fatigue, burnout, and self-care for Faith Leaders.
- National Suicide Prevention **988 Lifeline**: (<http://988lifeline.org>) provides 24/7, free, confidential support for people in distress via call, text, and chat.
The 988 Lifeline provides specialized responses and resources for ALL, including:
[Veterans](#) (connecting to the Veterans Crisis Lifeline),
[Spanish speakers](#) (with voice, text, and chat options),
[LGBTQ+ individuals](#) (connecting with a specialized counselor by texting "PRIDE" to 988 or pressing "3" when calling), and
[People who use American Sign Language](#) (using videophones to contact 988 directly).

Books

- [***Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness, Family, and Church***](#). *Blessed Are the Crazy* is more than memoir by Rev. Dr Sarah Lund. It's a resource for churches and other faith-based groups to provide healing and comfort. A small group study guide is included: "*Ten Steps for Developing a Mental Health Ministry in Your Congregation*."
- [***Blessed Youth: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness with Children and Teens***](#) In addition to stories of children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, Rev Dr. Sarah Lund includes practical resources such as prayers and a guide for having age-appropriate talks with children about warning signs and how to get help for themselves and friends.
- [***Don't Just Give Me That Old Time Religion***](#). In her important new book, available from Pilgrim Press, pastor and psychotherapist Christine Y. Wiley considers the intersection of Black women's lived spirituality and their mental wellbeing.
- [***Troubled Minds - Mental Illness and the Church's Mission***](#). Mental illness is the sort of thing we don't like to talk about. We pretend it doesn't exist, but it does. Statistics suggest that one in four people experiences some form of mental illness. Their friends and family carry their own scars and anxious thoughts and see no safe place to talk about the impact of mental illness on their lives and their loved ones. Many of these people sit in churches week after week, suffering in stigmatized silence. Author Amy Simpson reminds us that people with mental illness are our neighbors and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and she shows us the path to loving them well.
- [***Wild Coin Hunting - The Recovery of Joy while Living with Depression***](#). On his journey of recovery, Rev. Robert W. Griggs invented a new hobby: Hunting "wild coins." The rules of wild coin hunting became his simple practices to recover joy. *Wild Coin Hunting* is a relatable narrative that balances humor with hard truths as Griggs dispenses with self-help tropes and focuses instead on pleasure and other recovery essentials. Available from Pilgrim Press.

Brochures

[**Care Notes**](#) from Abbey Press provide several pamphlets supportive of the needs of congregants:

- *Understanding Thoughts of Suicide and Self-Harm*
- *Suicide Prevention: Getting Help Before It Is Too Late*
- *Finding Your Will to Live – Suicide Prevention for Veterans*

- *Bearing the Special Grief of Suicide*
- *After Suicide...Living with Loss, Healing With Hope*

Consider how you can reduce the stigma of talking about suicide prevention during the week of national attention from September 6th through the 12th.

NATIONAL WELLNESS RESOURCES – We provide this information on national health-related educational activities in August so you have time to choose a topic and gather resources to share in September.

- **Sunday, Sept. 6th** – marks the start of **National Suicide Prevention Awareness Week**.
“A time to raise awareness, spread hope, and spark meaningful action around one of the most urgent mental health issues of our time.” The theme of *Suicide Prevention Awareness* could be highlighted or integrated into parts of the service. Resources specific to church programs are listed above.

[SAMHSA offers information re: Suicide and Suicidal Behavior](#) and offers free-to-download digital toolkits on Suicide Prevention and the 988 Suicide and Crisis **Lifeline**, as well as [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#), a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service in English and Spanish.

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) also offers a free-to-download Toolkit for Suicide Prevention education and information about calling 988. To find the information, type “Toolkits” in the Search bar.

They offer a variety of support groups online. The NAMI Helpline is M-F 10 am – 10 pm ET. Call 800-950-6264.

For more local support, look online to see if there is a local NAMI group near you. They will come to speak free of charge and bring a variety of handouts with them.

- **National Atrial Fibrillation Month**: Atrial Fibrillation (AFib) is rising across the U.S., increasing the risk of stroke and heart failure. The American Heart Association has a free-to-download and print *AFib Toolkit* in English and Spanish. Go to [American Heart Association](#) Type “Afib Awareness Month” into the Search bar.
You may hear the term “Watchman.” The [WATCHMAN implant](#) is a safe, minimally invasive, one-time implant for people with non-valvular atrial fibrillation (AFib) that reduces stroke risk.
- **Prostate Cancer Awareness Month**: “Is an annual global campaign to raise awareness about prostate cancer, encourage early detection, and support those affected by the disease. Prostate cancer is one of the most common cancers in men, typically beginning in the walnut-sized prostate gland. If you have 8 men in your congregation, 1 either has or has experienced prostate cancer.
The [Prostate Cancer Foundation](#) has a Patient Resource page and a free-to-download Toolkit. The [American Cancer Society](#) has fact and information pages on its website: Type “prostate cancer” in the search bar.
[My Prostate Cancer Team](#) is an online community of 6,300+ men who have or are experiencing prostate cancer. It offers support and information on a variety of topics.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR – **3 Opportunities to Connect with Colleagues on Zoom**

- August 10 - **Wellness Ministries Affinity Gathering, 6:30 – 7:30 pm ET.**
Topic - **Care of the Caregivers**. This gathering is open to all who provide programs that support spiritual, mental, and/or physical health within their church or community.
- Oct. 21,22,28 & 29 - **HEALTH MINISTRIES ASSO. 36th Annual Conference 3 - 6:30pm ET**

Theme: **Say Yes to GRACE and Be Nourished**

G – Grace R – Research A – Aging C – Communication E – Energy

HMA is a collective of health ministers, faith community nurses, clergy, chaplains, faculty, and program leaders who have developed and provide health ministries in diverse faith communities. [HMA Information and Conference Outline](#)

- November 2 - **Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table**, 5:30 – 7:00 ET

The cost of food is an issue for many in our pews as well as others beyond our doors. This webinar, [Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table](#) will introduce a seven-session curriculum for congregational discussion groups exploring the links between the way we eat and the way we live.

Skillfully weaving scripture, prayer, and stories from our local and global community, the curriculum explores four key aspects of our relationship with food:

- the health of our bodies
- the challenge of hunger
- the health of the earth that provides our food
- the ways we use food to extend hospitality and enrich relationships

Funded, in part, by a grant from the UCC Genesis Fund, *Just Eating?* takes participants on a journey from the table of the Lord to the table of the world that will challenge, encourage, and enrich all who participate.

Registration information will be in our September newsletter.

UPDATE FROM THE UCC WELLNESS MINISTRIES LEADERSHIP TEAM – What we learned from the Supplemental Survey of Wellness Ministries, 2025 UCC Statistical Profile.

Thank you to the more than 638 churches that filled out the Wellness Ministries Supplemental Survey. Your ministries fell into 8 categories:

- **Direct Care and Connection:** Home visits, hospital and care-facility visits, cards or notes, and phone outreach are the most common activities.
- **Spiritual and Emotional Support:** Ministries offer healing circles, prayer circles, meditation, bereavement support, book studies, and other spiritually focused programs.
- **Food and Basic-Needs Support:** Congregations provide meal deliveries, food pantries, community meals, grocery gift cards, food drives, clothing drives, and donations to shelters or thrift shops
- **Health Education and Self-Care:** Offer blood pressure checks, nutrition education, retreats, yoga, Tai Chi, AED and CPR classes, telehealth efforts, and other wellness activities.
- **Small-Group and Community Gathering Support:** Host small groups, provide meeting space, and support groups such as Caregiver Support, NAMI, AA, NA, Al-Anon, and Scouts.
- **Mental Health and Disability Support:** Programs include mental health services, disability awareness, access support, medical supply closets, and advocacy for care.
- **Family and Household Assistance:** Activities include parent support groups, diaper ministries, child care, foster care support, housing assistance, and emergency financial help.
- **Advocacy and Justice Work:** Advocating for universal health access, climate resiliency, immigrant support, LGBTQ+ support, Black Lives Matter, and broader community well-being.

These responses indicate that our congregations are now offering a broader range of wellness programs than those reported in the 2023 survey. The UCC Wellness Ministries Leadership Team is grateful to everyone who took the time to complete the survey. Your responses provide valuable insights to inform further resource development.

CONNECTING AND SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER - Our Circle of Colleagues Grows

- Every month, we welcome more contacts on 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 us 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.*

