

Covina Community Church: WISE COVENANT

Covina Community Church, a United Church of Christ, is committed to assuring all people that they are worthy of God's love and capable of being loved by a community. We have grown into a diverse community composed of people from across creation's many spectrums. We are blessed by the stories, experiences, and gifts of each person. We are also shaped by the hurts, challenges, hopes, and longings of everyone who finds our Church family to be a safe sanctuary. While much of our diversity is visible, openly articulated, and freely expressed, there are other diversities that impact people's identity that must be respected, affirmed, and supported. This includes those living with mental health challenges such as, but not limited to, mental illnesses, brain disorders, addictions, abuse (spiritual, sexual, emotional, physical, etc.), and trauma.

We know these challenges can profoundly shape our feelings, thoughts, and behavior and seriously impact our families and relationships. We are aware that there are many voices of judgment in the world, and many have dared to speak for God, leaving people feeling unwelcomed by the Church and unloved by their Creator.

As a community that believes God is most fully expressed in love and that God's love is for all people, we are committed to supporting those facing mental health challenges, as well as the family members and friends affected by such challenges. We are committed to confronting stigmas in society and within the Church universal. We are committed to empowering self-expression, in all its complexity, without judgment or condemnation.

In response to these commitments, we covenant to be a W.I.S.E. (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaging) congregation for those who face mental health challenges, and to live out this covenant in the following ways:

We will *welcome* everyone:

- We will educate ourselves on the needs and issues surrounding mental health challenges so that we can offer a sincere and authentic welcome to all. We will be aware of triggering language and behaviors that might discredit our words of welcome or God's unconditional love.
- We will continually welcome those with mental health challenges into our faith community and provide a safe environment in which people can tell their stories and share their journeys.
- We will welcome those who have experienced spiritual abuse in other communities. We will commit to loving them without expectations, assuring them that God's love is unconditional and that their personal boundaries will be respected.

We will *include* everyone:

- We commit to recruiting, nominating and supporting persons with mental health challenges to serve in leadership positions within the congregation. We further commit to providing the ongoing support required for them to succeed.
- When calling clergy and other staff, we will be open to hiring persons with mental health challenges.
- We will welcome people as they are, with all the intersecting traits that make them unique, understanding that various aspects of our own identities can also be a challenging balance.

We will *support* everyone:

- We will reach out to those living with mental health challenges, and the family members and friends affected by such challenges, in the same way we reach out to those living with other physical illnesses.

- We will offer companionship and compassion for individuals living with mental health challenges, and the family members and friends affected by such challenges, and assure them they do not face these challenges alone.
- We will continue to be supportive when symptoms of mental health challenges make communication and relationships more complicated.
- We will listen to and partner with those who have specific needs and boundaries in order to foster feelings of safety and respect for all persons.
- We will establish, maintain, and reinforce healthy boundaries for all who participate in our Church community.

We will *engage* the world:

- We will partner with outside groups and agencies who deal with mental health challenges, inviting them to use our facilities, participate in our programming, facilitate our growth and mental health competency, and advocate for those within our congregation and wider society.
- We will be an active voice in mental health networks and serve as a link between secular, private, government supported, and religious partners, including the UCC Mental Health Network.
- We will equip and accompany those who have faced or are currently facing mental health challenges as they find their own voice and venues for self-expression. We will then journey with them as they share their truths.

This covenant affirms that we will continue to grow as a welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged community, seeking ways to express this commitment in the structural, liturgical, and relational expressions of our Church.