

Caring Communities Program

United Methodist General Board of Church and Society

Caring Communities are United Methodist congregations that covenant to enable an understanding of mental illness and to foster ministry to and with persons with mental illness and their families. They have undertaken an education program within the congregation on the topic of mental illness; their Church Councils have voted to approve a covenant statement for the church to be identified as a Caring Community which welcomes persons with mental illness and their families; and they engage in ongoing welcome, support and advocacy.

How to Become a United Methodist Caring Community

Education

- Study the United Methodist Social Principles and Resolutions on mental illness; discuss them in ongoing study classes
- Form one or more special classes to study serious mental illness and ways congregations can be supportive
- Sponsor education programs of outside organizations such as the Family to Family program of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Schedule special events with speakers
- Visit an existing treatment facility hospital, halfway house, or group home
- Educate about what services and supports exist in the community
- Hear from consumers
- Show videos on mental illness
- Include information on the nature of mental illness in sermons where appropriate
- Educate and train the faith community about the mental illness community and their accompanying problems; promote the building of relationships between the two communities. Doing this can include the use of training workshops and the sharing of life stories by the mental illness community.
- Tie the congregation's education program to Mental Health Month in May and to Mental Illness Awareness Week in October
- Educate yourself on what severe mental illness is and ISN'T
- Ask for a speaker from the speaker's bureau of mental illness organizations to talk with your church and community organizations.
- Learn about how those with mental illness can improve and recover.
- Pray for knowledge and insight about mental illness and those who suffer from it.

Covenant

- Ask your governing body – your Church Council -- what your congregation is doing to make all persons with disabilities, including persons with mental illness, feel welcome and a part of congregational life.
- Gain support for a mental illness ministry from your congregation's clergy and members of the Church Council. Establish a Church Council task force to train and educate the congregation about mental illness and the development of a mental illness ministry.
- Request a Church Council vote to self-identify the congregation as a Caring Community
- Request that Church Council adopt a statement endorsing a program of education regarding serious mental illness and welcoming persons with serious mental illness and their families in the life of the congregation.
- Review the covenants passed by other Caring Communities.
- Pray that the covenant will be a three way covenant between the congregation, persons with mental illness and their families, and God.

Welcome

- Post specific words of welcome where visible from outside the church building
- Seek specific newspaper publicity regarding church's welcome and steps it has taken to be welcoming
- Train ushers and greeters to include specific means of being welcoming and supportive.
- Show a video such as "Creating Caring Congregations" as a model for how churches can be welcoming.
- Where appropriate, plan worship services to be reminders of the welcome.
- Pray that all persons will be genuinely welcoming.

Support

- Invite groups such as AA or NAMI to meet in the church.
- Invite support groups such as local Mental Health America (formerly NMHA) chapters, or chapters of DBSA (Depression Bipolar Support Alliance) to meet in your church. The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health has local chapters.
- Offer help to a family that is living with mental illness.
- Provide emotional support, understanding, and company when needed.

- Do more than be friendly. BE a FRIEND to those who have no friends, for severe mental illness tends to isolate people. Include them in your outings, invite them to a ballgame, out to eat after church, or accompany them to church activities.
- Volunteer your help in programs serving persons who are mentally ill
- Pray for persons who are mentally ill, for those who work to help them-both their families and professionals -- and for a better understanding in your church of the concerns of people with mental illness

Advocacy

- Be a STIGMA BUSTER. Object in writing and by telephone when media and gatherings stigmatize mental illness.
- Join an advocacy group to better support the needs of mentally ill persons even if you don't have an ill family member. Be alert to pending legislation regarding the disabled and mentally ill.
- Support funding for research into severe mental illness. Research money should not be siphoned off from other serious diseases but mental illness needs to begin getting its fair share of attention from government agencies and the private citizen
- Contact the Governor and Your State Representatives to let them know you care about services for persons who are mentally ill.
- Pray that the hearts of those who do not support mental illness programs will be softened and changed.

Be Recognized as a United Methodist Caring Community!

When your Church Council has adopted a covenant statement and you have taken steps in each of these five areas, contact the Program Director for Alcohol, Other Addictions and Healthcare to be recognized by the General Board of Church and Society as a Caring Community!

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