



IKC convenes WISE conference team

Word to the *WISE*, IKC has launched a new initiative focused on enhancing mental health inclusion in our congregations.

Sobering statistics indicate 1 in 5 adults living in the region have a serious mental illness or other mental health condition impacting their daily lives. Due to long-standing and ever-present social stigma, many individuals with mental illness do not seek needed treatment or community supports for their mental health needs. Too often, this stigma extends into the church, one place where every child of God should be supported and nurtured in their spiritual, mental, emotional and physical needs.

Responding to this need, IKC convened a team of clergy, members in discernment, and laity in September to prayerfully explore ways to widen the welcome for our congregants experiencing mental health conditions. To develop strategies to support enhanced mental health inclusion, the team will be relying on the WISE framework created by the UCC's Mental Health Network.

As the introduction to the Mental Health Network's WISE toolkit states, "The objective of WISE is to encourage our congregations to become more welcoming of those living with mental health challenges, to expand our inclusion of those who are living with mental health challenges, to be supportive of all who are affected by mental health conditions, and to engage in ways to live our commitment to be WISE about mental health." IKC hopes to its WISE effort will foster conversation on mental health at both the conference and local church levels.

The WISE team plans to carry out its work along two interconnected paths. First, the WISE team is developing an educational program to foster local church conversations on congregational capacity to support its members with mental health conditions. To that end, a contingent of the WISE team will be attending the Mental Health Network's two-day educational conference, held November 1st and 2nd in Phoenix, Arizona.

Second, the WISE team is drafting a covenant to designate IKC a WISE Conference, thereby establishing mental health inclusion as a conference-level priority and devoting meaningful resources to supporting WISE in interested local churches. The WISE team intends to offer the draft IKC WISE Conference covenant for consideration at 2020 Annual Gathering in New Albany.

Be on the lookout for more information and updates as the WISE team continues its work to support congregations in becoming more Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged with individuals experiencing mental health conditions.