

WISE Covenant of the First Congregational Church of Berkeley (First Church Berkeley, United Church of Christ) [Pending Congregational Vote on February 3, 2019]

Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12: 30, 31.

Affirming our faith in a God who welcomes, loves, and is embodied among all persons, and affirming our tradition as a welcoming congregation, we, the people of First Congregational Church of Berkeley, California (First Church Berkeley, United Church of Christ), celebrate the gifts, stories, insights, and experiences of all of God's people, including those living with mental health challenges. Mental health challenges include, but are not limited to, anxiety disorders, major depression, dysthymia, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance abuse and addiction, trauma, dementia, and grief. We know these problems can profoundly disturb our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. We care about the whole person: body, heart, mind, and soul, and claim the deep and constant movement of God's Holy Spirit seeking to bring us to the fullness of life. All are beloved by God, and when one has a mental health challenge, one has a right to be known in one's fullness.

Sometimes individuals with mental health challenges suffer deeply, feel cut off from God, and do not feel included in or supported by community. It is our calling to communicate to all individuals that God loves all of us equally, even when people do not feel the love of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In fact, it is then that we are called to show God's love in specific ways. At the same time, those among us with mental health challenges have gifts to offer our faith community, and the community is called to receive them.

In light of these recognitions, we publicly declare First Congregational Church of Berkeley, California, to be a *Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) Congregation for Mental Health.*

We pledge to *Welcome* people with mental health challenges and those who love them:

- We actively welcome those with mental health challenges into our faith community and provide a safe environment in which people can worship, contribute, and share their journeys.
- In an effort to reduce social stigma, we examine and confront our own attitudes and preconceived notions about mental health challenges and mental health.
- We educate ourselves and offer educational opportunities to help our whole congregation understand issues surrounding mental health challenges and the implication of this covenant.

We pledge to *Include* people with mental health challenges in the life, work, and leadership of the congregation:

- We commit to recruiting, nominating, and supporting persons with mental health challenges to serve on teams and in leadership positions within the congregation.
- When calling clergy and other staff, we are open to hiring persons with mental health challenges.

We pledge to *Support* people in our congregation who have mental health challenges and those who love them:

- We reach out to those suffering from brain disorders/mental illnesses, addictions, and trauma in the same way we reach out to those living with any physical illnesses.
- We companion and offer compassion for individuals, families, and strangers in our midst living with mental health challenges.

We pledge to *Engage* with other organizations that work at the intersection of mental health and faith/spirituality/religion:

- We welcome and encourage outside groups who deal with mental health challenges, brain disorders/mental illness, addictions, and trauma to use our church facilities.
- We find opportunities to be in shared mission, ministry, and advocacy with others, including the UCC Mental Health Network and the UCC Disabilities Ministry, and other community organizations.

This vote affirms that we join in the communal process of ever becoming more welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged with all of God's people.

Date: February 3, 2019