

# Trinity Church of Northborough WISE Covenant

## Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive & Engaged

### **Introduction**

We, the members of Trinity Church of Northborough, will strive to support and understand people with mental health\* challenges who often feel cut off from God and not included. We will reach out with support for each person.

### **Our Commitment**

Our covenant and our calling are to communicate to everyone that God loves everyone equally even when we do not feel God's love in our lives. People with mental health challenges have gifts to offer and share in our faith community. We want everyone to feel fully welcomed, included, supported, and engaged in the life, work, and leadership of our church.

### **Educational Endeavors**

As a WISE church we will continue educational endeavors not only for our church but also our wider community. We will achieve this through regular outreach, adaptability in our worship services in our sanctuary and Fellowship Hall, in yearly events during mental health awareness month, suicide awareness prevention month, and more.

### **Our Journey**

Our WISE journey began at Trinity Church because we have worked at being an inclusive church for all people. We became an ONA church in 2003. During our journey, we worked to help make people feel comfortable and included.

### **Empathy and Understanding**

We began this part of our journey by talking about how to help our congregation become more empathetic and understanding of all people. Especially those that experience anxiety, depression, and any/all mental health challenges. We then held discussion panels with health care professionals, watched movies, and held open discussions in services. We walked carefully through this process.

## **Embracing Our Community: A Commitment to Mental Health**

### **A Call to Love and Support**

We are blessed by the gifts, stories, and experiences of all our members and our wider communities. These unique contributions form the tapestry of who we are, and it is our duty to use these gifts to love and support one another. This includes reaching out to those with mental health challenges, in the same way we would do to those with physical illnesses.

As a community of God, we choose to be a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaged) congregation for mental health. Our commitment is to fully welcome, include, and support all individuals, regardless of their mental health status.

### **The Right to Dignity**

Everyone facing a mental health challenge should be seen as a person first. This principle is grounded in the teachings of Romans 15:7, which instructs us to "Accept each other as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory." This scripture calls us to a higher standard of acceptance and love, mirroring the unconditional acceptance we have received from Christ.

Mother Teresa, a beacon of compassion, often said, "If one should see someone on the street, critically ill and disfigured by sores, one must treat that person with the same love and care that a priest handles the tokens of Holy Communion, because the poor person is none other than Jesus in disguise."

This powerful message reminds us that true love for our fellow humans means treating every person we encounter as if they were Jesus himself. Jesus made no distinction between various members of society; he did not show any partiality and included all people in his commandment to love.

### **A Promise of Understanding and Support**

Our promise as a WISE congregation is to continue in our educational endeavors of mental health acceptance for ourselves and our community. Education is a crucial step in breaking down the barriers of stigma and misunderstanding that often surround mental health. By increasing our knowledge and awareness, we can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

We commit to working together to ensure that people receive the help and support they need in their lives. This involves not only providing direct assistance but also advocating for systemic changes that improve access to mental health care and resources. It means standing in solidarity with those who face mental health challenges and walking alongside them on their journey to wellness.

### **Building a Culture of Acceptance**

To build a culture of acceptance, we must first examine our own attitudes and beliefs about mental health. It is essential to challenge any biases or misconceptions we may hold and replace them with understanding and empathy. This requires ongoing education and self-reflection, as well as open and honest conversations about mental health within our community.

We can also create a more accepting culture by sharing stories and experiences of mental health challenges. By giving a voice to those who have lived through these struggles, we can humanize mental health issues and foster a deeper sense of connection and empathy. These stories can serve as powerful reminders that mental health challenges do not define a person and that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

### **Practical Steps for Support**

In addition to fostering a culture of acceptance, we will take practical steps to support those with mental health challenges. This can include:

- Providing resources and information about mental health services and support groups.
- Creating safe spaces where individuals can share their experiences and feelings without fear of judgment.
- Offering training for community members on how to recognize and respond to mental health crises.
- Partnering with local mental health organizations to provide additional support and resources.
- Encouraging self-care and wellness practices within our community. By taking these steps, we can ensure that individuals with mental health challenges feel supported and valued within our community.

### **Advocacy and Systemic Change**

While individual support is crucial, we will also advocate systemic changes that improve mental health care and support on a broader scale. This can involve:

- Lobbying for increased funding for mental health services and research.
- Advocating policies that reduce barriers to mental health care, such as insurance coverage and access to treatment.
- Working to eliminate stigma and discrimination related to mental health within our society.
- Supporting initiatives that promote mental health education in schools and workplaces.

### **A Vision for the Future**

Our vision for the future is a community where mental health is treated with the same importance and care as physical health. A community where every individual feels valued and supported, regardless of their mental health status. A community that embodies the true meaning of love and compassion, following the example set by Jesus Christ.

We recognize that mental health is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a compassionate, informed, and holistic approach. By committing to ongoing education and advocacy, we can work towards a community where mental health is understood, respected, and prioritized in every aspect of life.

In conclusion, we commit to being champions for mental health acceptance and support. We will educate ourselves, challenge our biases, and take practical steps to support those with mental health challenges. Together, we will build a community that truly reflects the love and compassion of Christ.

*\*Mental health includes anxiety & OCD, bipolar, depression, schizophrenia & psychotic disorders, intellectual and eating disorders, trauma & stress related disorders, PTSD, substance abuse disorders, brain injuries, neurocognitive disorders, depression, mania, personality and impulse-control disorder, neurodevelopmental disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and any other disorders.*