

COMMITTEE 6

DEVELOPING WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE AND ENGAGED CONGREGATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

WHEREAS, most people believe that mental illnesses are rare and “happen to someone else,” when in fact, mental illnesses are common and widespread with an estimated 61.5 million Americans (1 in 4) experiencing some form of mental illness in a given year;

WHEREAS, there continues to be strong stigma and discrimination in society against people with these brain disorders in housing, employment, social relationships, (including how they are treated in our churches);

WHEREAS, many uninformed people believe people with mental illnesses are likely to be violent, while in reality, people with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators;

WHEREAS, the public mental health system, which previously served as a safety net for people with the most severe mental illnesses, has suffered from dramatic funding cuts in the last decade, and our prisons and county jails now house more people with mental illnesses than psychiatric hospitals do;

WHEREAS, faith and spirituality can be an important component of recovery from mental illnesses and addictions;

WHEREAS, a mental illness or brain disorder in the family affects not only the ill family member, it profoundly affects other family members and loved ones and the entire family structure;

WHEREAS, people having a diagnosable brain disorder and/or substance abuse disorder are potentially at a higher risk for suicide;

WHEREAS, the church is called to be a community that breaks through fear and isolation to offer love, hope, care and healing;

WHEREAS, Jesus showed us the way to reach out to those who are ill or marginalized to offer companionship, compassion and support;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourages United Church of Christ congregations to adopt covenants to be WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Engaged) Congregations for Mental Health.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourages congregations to work to eradicate stigma around mental illnesses/brain disorders, and to offer support to persons with and those impacted by mental health challenges, including their family members, loved ones and others concerned.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod encourages advocacy by all settings of the church for broader and more just access to quality mental health services including private and public insurance coverage. This advocacy includes services for all persons with mental illness who are falling through the fraying safety net, especially persons in jails/prisons, and persons who are homeless.

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries and other entities of the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.