

THE UCC MENTAL ILLNESS NETWORK AND THE UCC DISABILITIES MINISTRIES  
NATIONAL CONFERENCE

*Widening the Welcome: Inclusion for All*

July 22, 2010

Dear UCC Colleagues:

In this age of short emails and even shorter texting, this is a long email. However, here are the sections so you can skim, if needed.

1. Invitation
2. My experiences
3. Reasons for attending
4. Speakers and program
5. Keeping costs down and finding funding
6. Pass the word around
7. Questions



1. **Invitation.** I strongly encourage you to attend the national gathering, “Widening the Welcome: Inclusion for All.” It is hosted by our UCC Mental Illness Network and Disabilities Ministries, Sept. 23-25, 2010, in St. Louis. (With an extra day optional to envision General Synod.) I am extending this personal invitation to you at this time so you can plan your fall schedule and/or personally extend this invitation to others in your congregation.
2. **My Experiences.** My experiences have led to my volunteer work in the area of mental illness/brain disorders and disabilities for accessibility. While I was on the national UCC staff, I did have a stroke. I have written about my brain injury and now, 17 years later, there are no apparent disabilities. However, I know the difference. After serving on the national staff of the UCC, 1979-1999, and being as chaplain at The Children’s Hospital, Denver, I have become the chair of our church’s Mental Health Ministry, a member of the Inclusion Team that led to our church’s vote for the A2A (Accessible to All) Covenant, a cofounder of the Interfaith Network on Mental Illness, and the present chair of the UCC Mental Illness Network. I am the father of an adult son who lives with a dual diagnosis, bipolar disorder and substance abuse, and my only brother who struggled with

major depression died by suicide. My passion for this ministry is grounded in those experiences and has led to my high commitment to this Sept. Conference. I hope you share that commitment and will join me and others in this important event.

3. **Reasons for Attending.** There are at least these 5 reasons why I think you might want to come to the Conference.
  - 1) You want to learn about what congregations are actually doing and implementing around A2A (Accessible to All) and Mental Health Ministry. Not just theory.
  - 2) You want to know about the connection/interface between spirituality and mental illness/brain disorders and disabilities.
  - 3) You want to be in a strong, small core group in which to share your own experiences/inquiries and hear from others. You will receive support yourself.
  - 4) You want to have some strategic steps to take in your life and in your local church around these issues and to have someone(s) with whom you might be held accountable.
  - 5) You want to be inspired and nurtured in your own ministries/life.
  
4. **Speakers and Program.** The Keynote Speakers are national leaders in their fields. Dr./Sister Nancy Kehoe works in a program affiliated with Harvard Medical School and her book is top in the field. It is *Wrestling with our Inner Angels: Faith, Mental Illness, and the Journey to Wholeness.* Dr. Debbie Creamer is a leading spokesperson on theology and disabilities. Her book is, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities.* Each of them will be present for the whole conference and will be offering workshops among the 7 offered for three times. Other workshops will be on subjects such as:
  - congregations developing Mental Health Ministry
  - helping Vets returning home
  - spiritual support groups
  - how congregations implement accessibility including and beyond the ramp
  - substance abuse
  - programs developed for families by the National Alliance on Mental Illness
  - learning from persons who are living with mental illnesses/ brain disorders and disabilities

The program will provide worship, devotions, small group sharing, and hospitality time. Those who would like to stay for extra time on Sunday will attend local UCC churches, envision ways to bring the issues that will be addressed at the Conference to General Synod, and look ahead of the work of UCC Mental Illness Network and Disabilities Ministries.

5. **Keeping Costs Down and Finding Funding.** When you go to [www.wideningthewelcome.com](http://www.wideningthewelcome.com), you will see all the leaders and all the details for registration. The registration fee has been reduced as low as possible. The hotel has a reduced rate until August 21. Room rate is the same for 1, 2, 3, or 4 people. To save money you may call the number listed on the hotel information page and request a roommate.

I encourage you to find funds in your congregation to support your attendance or that of someone in your congregation. We are focusing on providing ideas, resources, and support for mental health and accessibility in your congregation.

If you also would have your congregation support the Conference itself financially, we would welcome that. We would list your congregation in the Conference Program. Just let me know.

6. **Pass the Word Around.** Please get the information about the Conference to anyone who might be interested. Perhaps you could also send this email along to your colleagues. It is not possible for me to send this personal email to every UCC congregation. We are doing the best we can to let people know about the Conference as well as to encourage persons to register. I would appreciate it if you, too, would get the word around.
  
7. **Questions.** If you have any comments, questions, suggestions or for information, please email me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation,

(The Rev.) Alan Johnson  
Chair of the UCC Mental Illness Network  
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