

UCC Disabilities Ministries and UCC Mental Health Network

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Growth Brings Change to UCC Disabilities and Mental Health Ministries

Our ministry of inclusion and accessibility is growing! The success of our four **"Widening the Welcome: Inclusion for All"** Conferences has helped us reach out to more people and their families with disabilities and mental health challenges than ever before. We have been actively making an impact at interfaith and ecumenical conferences as varied as the White House Conference on Mental Health, to the World Council of Churches in South Korea. Work at the congregational level is growing as churches address architectural changes and create committees to provide mental health and disability ministry for their congregations and/or communities. People with developmental and cognitive disabilities are seeking increased acceptance and inclusion, too.

Each area of disability and mental health ministry is seeking more of our attention than our current structure can deliver. Therefore, the UCC Disabilities Ministries Board has voted that effective January 1, 2014, the Mental Health Network will be its own entity rather than a sub-committee of UCC Disabilities Ministries.

Rev. Lynda Bigler, Chair of the Disabilities Ministries Board and Rev. Alan Johnson, Chair of the Mental Health Network are excited about the opportunity to expand their ministries. Becoming separate Boards will enable each group to more intensely focus on its particular ministry and will allow for a wider array of projects being undertaken and completed without working together on everything. *"By modifying our structure we hope to reach more people at all levels of the church,"* said Rev. Bigler. *"We can focus our energies on even more ways to encourage local churches to become A2A, Accessible to All,"* she says. Rev. Johnson adds, *"The new structure will also allow us to work more closely with individual congregations in addressing and meeting their needs regarding mental health. The boards will join in partnership as we both envision more Widening the Welcome Conferences in the future."* Both Revs. Bigler and Johnson emphasize that "inclusion and accessibility for all" remains the core mission of both the UCC Disability Ministries and the UCC Mental Health Network.