

Expanding the Mental Health Initiative with New Manager Position, Additional Programs and Resources February 2017

One way that the National Benevolent Association lives out its mission is by connecting collaborative communities of Disciples working together on particular health and social service justice issues. One of those areas has been mental health, identified in General Assembly Resolution 1523, which calls the church to become a “welcome and support to people with mental health illness and disorders.” In partnership with Disciples Home Missions, NBA is expanding its mental health and wellness efforts beyond the initial Affinity Group model into a fuller **Mental Health Initiative (MHI)**.

Launched in May 2016, the Mental Health and Congregational Care Affinity Group was the first part of an overall strategy developed by the Research and Design Team, who met throughout 2015 and continues to serve as an Advisory Team for the MHI. The group has had four main vision areas centered on mental health maintenance and recovery:

1. *Counter stigma* of mental health challenges to help cultivate a welcoming, educated, inclusive church;
2. *Provide resources and educational support* for Disciples congregations, clergy, seminarians, and community members;
3. *Collaborate and connect* with existing ministries, organizations, and initiatives;
4. *Encourage the sustainability* of mental health ministries in congregations, regions, and the general church.

As the team has identified emerging needs and expanding partnerships through this work to-date, they will now be living into the fuller strategy of the Mental Health Initiative by focusing on the following in 2017:

- **Mental Health Affinity Group**
 - The existing affinity group continues to center its work through sub-groups exploring three mental health topic areas: justice issues; clergy wellness; and liturgical and theological resources for worship. If you or someone you know would like to get involved, please fill out the interest form at www.nbaca.org/mental-health, and we will be in touch with you soon.
- **Resource Page and Educational Support**
 - The Mental Health webinar series continues, with presentations focusing on justice and mental health; creating safe boundaries related to severe mental health issues; and suicide prevention. Find our webinars, stories, and other resources at www.nbaca.org/mental-health.
 - The MHI will offer training, support, and networking to mental health practitioners serving in Disciples-related health and social service ministries, addressing needs specific to those ministry areas, self-care, strategies for ministries in transition, and more.
- **Clergy and Chaplain Care Programming**
 - The MHI will support multi-region Clergy Care Programming, which may include specific trainings, webinars, peer groups, blogs and other resources specifically related to clergy mental health and self-care.

- An expanding part of this initiative will be to begin working collaboratively to create points of connection and care with Disciples chaplains serving in a variety of institutions.
- **Regional Mental Health Pilot Program**
 - We are excited to announce a new Regional Mental Health and Congregational Care initiative with the Christian Church in Georgia. The vision of this regional work is to cultivate welcome and counter stigma; provide education, resources, and services; encourage clergy care and support; and work toward sustainability.
- **Collaborative Partnerships and Programs**
 - The MHI will also explore collaborative opportunities with NBA and congregations, regions, other general ministries, Disciples-related health and social service ministries, Disciple-related universities and seminaries, and ecumenical partners, to fulfill NBA's mission.

NBA Hires New Mental Health Initiative Manager



To oversee the breadth and depth of this work, the NBA has hired **Angela Whitenhill** as the Mental Health Initiative Manager. Whitenhill moves into this full-time role from her part-time, contract position as the Convener of the Mental Health Affinity Group.

Angela is an innovative children and family therapist, a licensed clinical social worker, and a licensed minister with extensive experience in the mental health field and higher education. She previously served as chaplain and therapist at Tennyson Center for Children and as a psychotherapist at the Denver Family Institute, and is currently an adjunct faculty member at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work.

With degrees from University of Denver and Union Theological Seminary, Angela is a clergy activist and faith community justice educator, known for organizing in such a way that pays close attention to the nuanced intersections of social identity, religious belief, and mental health. Active in her congregation, Covenant Christian Church Disciples of Christ, Angela co-leads a community bible study at a local bar and is currently helping her pastor coordinate an interdenominational, anti-racist, and pro-reconciliation Lenten program in the city of Cary, NC. Read Angela's full bio at: www.nbaca.org/staff/angela-whitenhill.

In September 2016, Whitenhill was present with Disciples clergy and activists in Charlotte, NC, accompanying them during civic engagement, through protests, clergy training, and intentional community conversations following the fatal shooting of Keith Lamont Scott by police officer Brentley Vinson.

“Angela arrived when exhaustion, anxiety, perplexity, and conflict over competing values and goals was beginning to break out,” said Rev. John Richardson, former Regional Minister, Christian Church in North Carolina. “Her clear and simple message was: This is normal, but you’ve got to take care of yourselves. She modeled, in part, how to do that as she helped them process what had been happening. She was a Godsend to our clergy.”

Whitenhill has also been instrumental in the launch of the Regional Mental Health and Congregational Care initiative with the Christian Church in Georgia.

“By hiring Angela full-time, the NBA is making a bold commitment to answer God’s call to the church to respond to mental health. She has gifts and passion that have reignited our entire region,” said Rev. Denise Bell, Regional Minister, Christian Church in Georgia. “The new mental health initiative provides an opportunity to check our theology—one of soul care, inclusivity, and understanding. Angela’s gifts in particular have already modeled what it means to survey the land, discern what the needs are, and how the church can respond to those needs. We are thankful to the NBA for responding to the space that God has opened up for this partnership between NBA and the Christian Church in Georgia.”

About the National Benevolent Association

The National Benevolent Association (NBA) serves as the health and social service general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The NBA partners with local congregations, regional and general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers. The NBA initiates, incubates, and connects partner ministries and organizations that provide direct care to those in need. For more information, visit nbacares.org.

About Connect Ministries and the Mental Health Initiative

In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the ministries of health and social services have been core to our Disciples identity and faith. The National Benevolent Association (NBA) and Disciples Home Missions (DHM) collaborate to support a network of Disciples-related care providers and collaborative communities of Disciples working together on particular issues, such as mental health. Learn more at nbacares.org/connect and nbacares.org/mental-health.