

2018 Annual Report for the Southwest Conference Widening the Welcome Team Ministry
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The Widening the Welcome Team Ministry is responsible for encouraging Southwest Conference churches to participate in the UCC A2A and W.I.S.E. programs. “A2A” stands for “Accessible to All”. A2A refers to congregations that have completed the Accessible to All process to make a commitment to be physically and attitudinally welcoming of people with disabilities. The A2A process defined by the A2A resource “Any Body, Everybody, Christ’s Body” is completed by completing the check list in the back of the A2A resource and sending this checklist to UCC Disabilities Ministries. The first step to becoming A2A is completing a **Church Accessibility Audit**. the last step is to complete the **A2A Checklist** both available on line. uccdm.org

The Widening the Welcome Team Ministry has conducted four workshops to study the A2A to prepare our members to conduct a Church Accessibility Audit in their local congregations. The Widening the Welcome Team Ministry has been a resource for four congregations. We are aware of one congregation that has convened a task force to explore requirements for joining the A2A program. The Desert Palm Tempe UCC conducted a thorough Church Accessibility Audit.

The 2015 General Synod adopted the resolution: Developing Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged Congregations (W.I.S.E). for Mental Health. See uccdm.org for a copy of the resolution. Research shows that one in four Americans experience some form of mental illness in a given year. Many people living with mental illness are shunned, feared and discriminated against. As a result, many people with these illnesses don’t seek treatment and they don’t share their stories with others. Consequently, they are not included in the network of care our congregations normally extend to a member who is ill.

After conducting five workshops to educate us about the W.I.S.E. program we co-hosted with the Desert Palm Tempe UCC a conference call with Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund, who coordinates the UCC’s national accessibility ministries. Taken from the Desert Palm BREEZE electronic newsletter, Sarah’s memoir, *Blessed Are the Crazy*, illuminates the need for the church to talk more openly about mental health and mental illness. In addition to reading Sarah’s book, our members and friends interested in our Widening the Welcome ministry will be forming a committee to help Desert Palm become a “WISE” (welcoming, inclusive, supportive and engaging) congregation, which involves becoming more open and informed regarding mental health issues and resources.” We appreciated the opportunity to conduct a workshop at the 2018 Southwest Conference Annual Meeting. People directly involved in A2A and W.I.S.E. projects with their congregations made the presentations.