

## Southwest Conference Lay Ministry Report

History was made on Sunday March 15, 2020 as many of our congregations made the decision to cease operations in the hope that we would be able to be together for in-person worship within a matter of weeks. Unfortunately, that was not the case as Our Still Speaking God was calling us to “Be the Church” in a new and different light. In the early stages of the pandemic, I faced one of the biggest hurdles of my ministry thus far as I was charged with the task of moving from having the opportunity to gather with you and your congregation in person to share my story while introducing you and your congregation to the process of becoming a Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaging Congregation for Mental Health.

I feel honored and privileged to share that three of our congregations so far have voted and been recognized as WISE Congregations for Mental Health by the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network.

- Desert Palm United Church of Christ in Tempe, AZ adopted their WISE Covenant on Sunday January 26, 2020.
- The Church of the Palms in Sun City, AZ adopted their WISE Covenant in January 2021.

In May 2021, First Congregational Church in Albuquerque, NM will hold a congregational meeting to adopt their covenant as a WISE Congregation for Mental Health. I ask that you hold First Congregational Albuquerque in your prayers as they prepare to vote on the adoption of their WISE covenant.

On Monday January 18, 2021, I received the news that the Rev. Robert Koth lost his battle with COVID. A virtual Celebration of Life for Robert was held at First Church UCC Phoenix on Saturday February 27, 2021. When I spoke at his virtual celebration of life, “One thought crossed my mind as I was not only saying goodbye to a friend but was also saying goodbye to a mentor. I first got to know Robert through his work with the Southwest Conference as the coordinator of the Widening the Welcome Ministry Team.

Robert planted and watered many seeds in my life, and I feel fortunate and blessed that I knew him as both a friend and mentor. I will continue his legacy through my continued work as the conference Lay Minister for Disability Education, Advocacy, and Awareness.

On Sunday February 28, 2021, a new chapter of Robert’s legacy began as First Church UCC Phoenix, voted to accept and adopt its covenant as a WISE Congregation for Mental Health.

As your congregation begins to have conversations about when it is safe for you to return to worship in-person and return to a sense of familiarity post COVID, consider how you and your congregation can be WISE for those folks who might not be ready to return to worship in-person? How is God calling you to “Be a WISE congregation” in a post COVID world?

I look forward to gathering with when you and your congregation feel that it is safe to return to and resume in-person gatherings in the life and ministry of your church.

If your congregation is interested in receiving more information about how to begin the journey to become a WISE Congregation for Mental Health Feel free to send me an email at [swclayminister@gmail.com](mailto:swclayminister@gmail.com)

Your Partner in Ministry  
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