

## **Guidelines for Becoming a Trauma-Informed Congregation**

### **Common Traits**

- ✚ Recognize prevalence and scope of trauma in the world today
- ✚ Recognize co-occurring affects of trauma & symptoms
- ✚ Assess traumatic histories & ongoing symptoms within the congregation
- ✚ Create opportunities for effective support and assistance with symptoms
- ✚ Recognize culture & practices that can be experienced as retraumatizing
- ✚ Attend to healthy cultural development for all members and visitors
- ✚ Practice collaborative caregiving & invite neighboring supporters
- ✚ Address training needs of staff to improve knowledge & sensitivity
- ✚ Practice factual language, and avoid surmising, guessing, and negligence
- ✚ Maintain transparent systems, open to outside parties
- ✚ Maintain open communication practices, allowing information to flow easily through the system



## **Practices**

### **Group and self-regulation**

Create reliable community rhythms for calming, breathing deeply and steadying one another through song, prayer, times of silence, and play in worship, small groups, and fellowship.

### **Create reliably, caring relationships**

- Actively build and sustain
  - Trustworthy, hospitable, joyful, loving relationships
  - Policies that adhere to safety for all members and visitors
  - Opportunities to share freely what happened (including space to choose not to share)
  - Value of physical, emotional, and spiritual developmental stages
- Avoid power and controlling dynamics

### **Communication**

- Communicate history of crises and healing of the congregation
  - Consider developing a “history” brochure or website page that not only lists facility and leadership changes, but also includes how the congregation practiced healing and growth amid challenging events and tragedies
- Communicate what happened when crises occur
- Communicate effective resourcing within and around the congregation, including pastoral liaisons, lay peer counseling, qualified community mental health professionals, and qualified community social agencies.

## **Compassionate curiosity within safe boundaries**

- Create opportunities through small groups, worship, preaching, education, and fellowship events for truth-telling, while strictly avoiding gossip, backbiting, and slander.
- Hold allegations of abuse as valuable.
- Keep the congregation informed of opportunities within the congregation and the community for qualified spiritual direction, counseling, and therapy.
- Be interested to bear witness honestly to adverse experiences from the past that may be influencing present fears and defenses.
- View forms of “acting out” as new opportunities for building trust and safe relationships.

## **Purpose**

- Show up ready to participate in making meaning together of shared life events through worship, education and fellowship.
- Create congregational activities that meet physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, and encourage growth at all ages.
- Share enthusiasm to renew members’ understandings of what is truly life-giving to persons involved in the body of the congregation.
- Direct members toward interventions and healing practices created by persons who have experienced healing and have wrestled with challenging questions that arise amid crises

## **Ongoing Group and Self-Care**

- Allow one another to be held accountable with dignity
- Identify leadership or congregational limitations
- Maintain current and effective referral practices for when addressing needs go beyond personal abilities or responsibilities in order to continue encouraging safety
- Practice healthy work and life rhythms, including regular exercise, sleep, eating, leisure, and time with family and friends.