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 and symptoms
- Assess traumatic histories and ongoing symptoms within the congregation
- Create opportunities for effective support and assistance with symptoms
- Recognize culture and practices that can be experienced as retraumatizing
- Attend to healthy cultural development for all members and visitors
- Practice collaborative caregiving and invite neighboring supporters
- Address training needs of staff to improve knowledge and 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 dynamics and controlling dynamics.

**Communication**
- Communicate history of crises and healing in 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 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.