



Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas

Winter 2023

Welcome to the Newsletter for The Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas

Who are we?

The Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas formed as a group of mental health and wellness supporters in interfaith communities who have come together to enhance mental health and wellness in our North Texas neighborhoods.

What is our Mission?

The Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas is a collaboration between faith communities and partner organizations to improve sustainable mental health and wellness for all North Texas neighbors.

What is our Vision?

The Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas envisions all persons in North Texas flourishing with sustainable mental health and wellness through the commitment of faith communities to engage all persons with dignity and respect.

If you are interested in learning more about the MWIANT, click [here](#).

If your faith community would like to be a part of MWIANT, please click [here](#) and share your information. We welcome you!

What is MWIANT?

Welcome to our network of support!

The Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas originated in the summer of 2019 when Dr. Ed Nace and Bud Browne of First United Methodist Church of Dallas along with Pamela Mickens of St. Luke Community United Methodist Church conceived of the idea of North Texas interfaith organizations collaborating to navigate our community's mental health crisis. Their idea was to support the mental health and wellness work being done within their faith communities and together, identify opportunities to develop and produce sustainable solutions to the current issues in our neighborhoods. They wanted to be intentional to not duplicate work being done by others, but to strengthen and support access to mental health services and wellness programs.

In the fall of 2019, they conducted a survey of the mental health and wellness activities in seven churches and found each organization had programs inside their churches and in their neighborhoods. Each church said they would like to be a part of a collective group to collaborate on solutions. The response demonstrated that we need each other to reach those in need and improve access to care in four functional areas:

Since early 2020, the MWIANT formulated a program plan that addresses these four functional areas and they began to work together on initial projects:

- Education & Knowledge Building
- Solutions & Projects
- Advocacy & Access
- Community Collaboration

Today, the Alliance locally produces the Pathways to Hope Conference through NAMI Interfaith of North Texas, which bridges spirituality and mental health, host a quarterly Faith Leaders Consultation Roundtable to assist faith leaders with complex needs, share community resources and events, and are working towards building a support network for faith communities to feel empowered to meet the mental health needs of those within their faith community or neighborhood.

We would love to have you join MWIANT and help us help others!

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Ways to participate in the Alliance...



We are growing our volunteer base to staff our projects and operations! We accept volunteers from all faith communities and from the community at large. We are seeking volunteers to help with the following:

- Steering Committee
- Communications Team
- Education Planning Team
- Consultation Roundtable for Faith Leaders

If you have a heart for mental wellness and would like to contribute to our efforts to help our North Texas neighbors flourish, click to sign up!

We will be glad to have you!



The Alliance is accepting donations to help fund our corporate set up costs, project costs and operating expenses. You can make a donation commitment online by the visiting the MWIANT [website donation page](#). You may also contact Bud Browne at budbrowne47@gmail.com.



The Alliance is developing specific committees to produce the Pathways to Hope Conference and MWIANT's Faith Leaders Consultation Roundtable. We are looking for community members with resources and networks to join this effort to build programming to support our faith communities and our collaboration with government, schools, community centers, health systems, mental health organizations, businesses and other community groups. If you are interested, please fill out the volunteer form [here](#) and indicate how you would like to serve.



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BLUE CHRISTMAS

A Worship Experience for those
experiencing grief during Christmas

Blue Christmas/Longest Night Worship With Those Who Mourn

For many people, the approaching Christmas holiday does not bring with it the joy and happiness that is advertised on television or in greeting cards. They may be facing a holiday after the death of a loved one or after a divorce. Perhaps they have been unable to have a child, or have suffered through an emotional or physical trauma, such as cancer. Or perhaps they feel pressured and overwhelmed by holiday preparations. For those who associate Christmas with carols and ornaments and cozy family gatherings, it can seem strange to focus on such darkness. But according to Ben Stewart, who teaches worship at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, this darkness has always been part of the story. "So there's this sense at Christmas that God's own self identifies with that sort of aloneness, and comes to be with people."

In recent years, many faith communities have attempted to meet the needs of people who feel burdened or who are grieving by adding Blue Christmas services, sometimes called the Longest Night Services or Services of Hope and Healing, to their worship offerings. These services have a more quiet, somber feel than a traditional Christmas worship service. Scripture, music and meditations or sermons focus on the comfort God offers during dark times. The format of Blue Christmas services vary church to church. But the common theme is dropping the usual merry and bright, and recognizing the hard stuff. People offer prayers and light candles, and open up to the sadness they're carrying. About loss, relationships, addiction. Stewart says that in the calendar of 2,000 years ago, Dec.

25 was the solstice — the actual Longest Night. Stewart says these are environmental realities — it's cold and dark. And theological realities — how to acknowledge the darkness and the fragile light. The Longest Night service is a place where many have an opportunity to grieve, but also to experience hope.

Services include an emphasis on candles, with people in the congregation invited to come forward and light a candle in memory of someone or to mark an event in their lives. Some will say words out loud, others in silent prayer. Candles are also sometimes lit as prayers or Scripture readings are recited.

Is this holiday season one in which you are struggling with this year? Find community and hope by attending a Blue Christmas or Longest Night Service near you. Several are listed here:



Blue Service offered at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas on December 17, 2023 from 4-5 p.m. in the McIver Chapel.

Longest Night Service offered at First United Methodist Church in Dallas on December 21, 2023 from 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Service of the Longest Night offered at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas on December 21, 2023 from 6:30 to 7:30 PM.

Other services and a curated database of resources can be found at www.offerhopenow.com for those who are seeking additional information.

Article adapted from "[Blue Christmas services a comfort for many](#)" by Tiffany Vail and "[Blue Christmas Service offers refuge from Holiday Cheer](#)" by Deena Prichep.

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In Loving Memory...



Dr. Edgar Nace, a pillar in the field of addiction psychiatry, died on September 23, 2023 at the age of 83 due to pancreatic cancer. His life's work had an undeniably positive impact on the population that experiences enormous suffering and those afflicted with addiction and mental illness.

Dr. Nace graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, trained at the Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia, and was a Major in the Army Medical Corp as a research psychiatrist at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Nace established numerous substance abuse programs in hospitals, including The Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital, the University of Texas Medical Branch Hospital, and Timberlawn Psychiatric Hospital.

Dr. Nace was part of a small group that planned the birth of the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry (AAAP). He was a member of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology's (ABPN) committee that developed the first subspecialty examination and certification in Addiction Psychiatry. He was active in many organizations promoting the treatment of patients with addiction and dual diagnoses and was a Fellow of the American College of Psychiatrists, the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, and the American Psychiatric Association.

Dr. Nace served as president of the North Texas Society of Psychiatric Physicians for three terms, and president of the American Academy of Addition Psychiatry for two terms. He was Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, received the Distinguished Service Award from the Texas Society of Psychiatric Physicians, was voted Top Doctors in Dallas by D Magazine multiple years, and served on the Board of the Grant Halliburton Foundation.

Above all, Dr. Nace loved his family and led a life of service to his community. He is survived by his wife, Carol, and sons, Brad and Randy. His legacy lives on not only in his family, but in the countless lives he touched throughout his journey of compassion, dedication and grace.

Dr. Nace was instrumental in launching and building of the Mental Wellness Interfaith Alliance of North Texas. He led the MWIANT Consultation Roundtable where he provided support to clergy and our faith community leaders throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth area. His primary focus of serving those with addiction never wavered as he also sought to bring long-acting injectables to the homeless community fighting dual diagnoses.

We honor Dr. Nace's commitment to community and the MWIANT will strive to continue his legacy to serve those within the DFW community bringing his dream to life.

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Encouraging Word...

In 2017, Harvard published the results of a longitudinal study that highlighted an important finding for living a longer, healthier and happier life. The result? Joy. It is not surprising that in this study it found that those in supportive and healthy relationships were more likely to live well and live longer than those who reported loneliness. Does this surprise you? Probably not. We are wired for connection. We can enjoy solitude but we were not created to live in solitude.

Some reading the findings of this study may feel affirmed that they are on the path to a long and healthy life. Others may read the findings and feel defeated. During the Advent season, those who are lonely or isolated, struggle. Those who have lost a loved one, struggle. There is a reason that the Christmas season can increase anxiety, depression and suicide risk. It's a season of relationships and every Christmas commercial will remind you of what and who you need in your life to make the season merry and bright.

Joy is mentioned over 100 times in the New Testament and the Old Testament. In almost every mention of joy, you will find the presence of relationship. As Ezra read scripture to the Israelites, they began grieving the relationship that they believed was lost with their God. The Prophet Nehemiah intervened and told them to not only go enjoy the festival but to give generously to others for the joy of the Lord is their strength. He turned them toward a relationship with one another and with God.

As the Prophet Nehemiah points out, joy can be present through grief. Joy can be present in the most difficult of circumstances. It is present when there are no gifts under the tree and it is present when we are far away, physically or emotionally, from loved ones. These are gifts that are available to everyone: love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The gifts were meant to be shared in relationship with others.

We hope you find joy this holiday season.



UPCOMING EVENTS



Pathways to Hope is a free, in-person conference bringing together mental health professionals, social workers, educators, the judicial system, law enforcement, faith community leaders, caregivers and individuals living with a diagnosis to help improve the mental health care system.

Save the Date for

Pathway to Hope Conference

August 23 and 24, 2024. Times and locations will be announced here. Portions of the conference may be streamed.

Join us on February 22, 2024 for our Welcoming Open House for those interested in learning more about the MWIANT. Location and time to be determined.

Interested in becoming part of a faith community that supports individuals and families facing mental health challenges? St. Luke's Community UMC partners with community organizations to offer monthly support, including support groups and mental health referrals. For more information, check out their [website](#).

Have an event you would like to share? Reach out to amy.lynn.curtis@hotmail.com.