

Talitha Arnold, UCC pastor, among leaders launching national campaign to prevent suicide

On a national weekend of prayer, congregations lifted up people struggling with mental health issues, mental health professionals, faith leaders, and those seeking help.

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [October 10, 2017](#) issue



Talitha Arnold. Photo by Clay Ellis.

After Talitha Arnold lost her father to suicide when she was a child, [no one talked about mental illness in church](#). Now a United Church of Christ minister, Arnold is among the leaders launching a national campaign striving to promote mental health

and prevent suicide.

“The intention is not to add one more thing for clergy and congregations,” she said. “It’s possible to build on the strengths the church already has and to find the gaps.”

Arnold co-leads the Faith Communities Task Force for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, which sponsored a National Day of Prayer for Faith, Hope, & Life the weekend of September 8–10. The alliance received an estimated 74,550 pledges from people to pray on their holy day of the weekend. More than 50,000 viewed the campaign's video, and thousands of people interacted with the topic on social media.

At Arnold’s congregation, United Church of Santa Fe, New Mexico, both morning services were devoted to suicide prevention and mental health. Youth in their confirmation program lead a prayer for people struggling with mental health issues, those affected by suicide, mental health professionals, faith leaders, and those who are seeking help.

“To have 13 and 14 year olds lead a prayer that talks about suicide and mental health,” she said, “that’s quite powerful.”

They wanted children as young as sixth grade and up in the service, so that they could hear that church was a place where they could talk about their struggles.

“This isn’t just a do-gooder thing,” she said. “It’s grounded in what our faith calls us to be about, which is to offer hope and healing.”

The alliance is a public-private partnership started in 2010 by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Defense, and Veterans Affairs, along with various national mental health and business organizations. The campaign [offers worship and spiritual resources](#).

Arnold is hoping to start a video campaign similar to the It Gets Better campaign reaching out LGBTQ youth facing bullying. Arnold envisions faith leaders recording 60- to 90-second-long videos about suicide prevention and mental health.

“Shame and secrecy are still there,” she said. “The work goes on.”