



**Ecumenical International
Youth Day
Event Toolkit
12 August 2020
Young People and Mental Health**



**World Council
of Churches**

Ecumenical International Youth Day 2020

Young People and Mental Health

August 12, 2020



World Council
of Churches
Publications

Young People and Mental Health

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This publication is developed and produced by the WCC's Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement programme, in collaboration with WCC Health and Healing programme, and WCC Spiritual Life.

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ISBN: 978-2-8254-1730-0

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Introduction

The United Nations, since 2000, has declared 12 August as International Youth Day (IYD). This is to raise awareness about the issues young people in different countries care about the most. Youth organizations and organizations working with young people are invited to highlight the efforts of young people in creating a better world.

The World Council of Churches launched Ecumenical International Youth Day in 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland for the first time in the past decade to highlight the contributions of young people to the ecumenical movement. The event was organised in partnership with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

In Geneva, we had more than 50 participants from the three organizations (WCC, LWF, WSCF) and ecumenical partners in the city. On the same day, around 100 young people—the WCC ECHOS Commission on youth and all participants of the Youth Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the Korean Peninsula—in Seoul, South Korea also observed together the Ecumenical IYD. The two celebrations in Geneva and South Korea were linked online, where both groups in two different locations got to be in solidarity with one another on the issue of Transforming Education, which was the UN IYD 2019 theme.



Following the successful launch of the Ecumenical IYD, especially on connecting two different areas to celebrate together, WCC is expanding the invitation to all its member churches and ecumenical partners around the world. The fellowship is encouraged to organize an Ecumenical IYD celebration in local churches, national councils and regional bodies. WCC provides this toolkit as a resource for the fellowship to plan and organize unique celebrations of Ecumenical IYD 2020. You will find a description of this year's theme and suggested programme format to use and adapt in your own context. A virtual celebration on 12 August 2020 is planned to bring together a variety of events on Ecumenical IYD from different parts of the world.

This year as we continue to observe Ecumenical IYD, we will address the topic of Mental Health. This is a result of several recommendations from young people within and outside the WCC networks, among the pressing issues that young people would like to explore. The WCC programmes on Youth Engagement in the ecumenical movement and Health and Healing are collaborating for this year's focus area.

Background

1. What is Mental Health?¹

The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”² Well-being includes emotional, psychological, and social aspects. It is present and important in every stage of a person’s life. First is the emotional aspect, which refers to the human response to a certain situation, such as happiness, love, anger, or fear. A person has optimal mental health when they respond accordingly to an event. For example, fun experiences evoke positive emotions, while unpleasant ones evoke negative emotions. Next is the psychological dimension, pertaining to a person’s mental state, whether they are rational or irrational. It could also be understood as the ability to cope with stress and to manage emotions. Each individual has a unique way of dealing with stress, but in some cases people can be easily overwhelmed. Last is the social dimension, involving one’s ability to establish and maintain relationships with other people. Giving attention to these three dimensions can help improve mental health, while neglecting them can lead to mental health problems.

Mental health should be treated with the same level of importance as other areas of health. Helping professionals now coin the term mental health hygiene, emphasizing the regular and conscious attention to achieve an optimal sense of mental health.



¹ See also Mwai Makoka, ed., *Health Promoting Churches: Reflections on Health and Healing for Churches on World Health Days* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2020), available at <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Health-Promoting-Churches-Reflections-Health-Days.pdf>

² World Health Organization, “Mental Health,” 2018, at: https://www.who.int/mental_health/who_urges_investment/en/

2. What are mental disorders?

Mental disorders display a wide range of symptoms, mainly abnormalities in thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and relationships with others. Common conditions include these:

- Anxiety and depression are common mental disorders, in which affected people show persistent sadness and loss of interest in normal daily activities. Symptoms also include loss of energy, changes in appetite and sleeping patterns, anxiety, reduced concentration, indecisiveness, restlessness, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or hopelessness. Thoughts or attempts at self-harm or suicide are also common. Globally, more than 300 million people suffer from depression.
- Suicide claims about 800,000 lives annually. Many other people survive suicide attempts – mainly among youths. Suicide is strongly linked to depression and alcohol abuse. Other risk factors include loss, loneliness, discrimination, relationship breakups, financial problems, chronic pain and illness, violence, abuse, conflict, and other humanitarian emergencies.
- Dementia refers to several diseases that affect memory, cognitive abilities, and behaviour significantly enough to interfere with a person's ability to maintain normal daily life. Although most dementia appears as people grow old, it is not a normal part of ageing. Around 47 million people are affected by dementia.
- Mood disorders are characterized by serious changes in mood that disrupt life activities. Three major states of mood disorders are: depressive, manic, and bipolar. Manic episodes include elevated or irritable moods, overactivity, pressured and excessive talking, impulsive action, inflated self-esteem, and a decreased need for sleep. Depressive moods have symptoms opposite to manic moods. Bipolar conditions exhibit intermittent signs of mania and depression. About 60 million people worldwide are affected by mood disorders.
- Neurological disorders include epilepsy, headaches, Parkinson's disease, and dementia, as well as complications of stroke and other diseases. About 50 million people, for example, have epilepsy.

Rationale

Young people under 30 years old comprise 50.5 percent or more than 2 billion of the world's population, according to the 2012 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) report in their statistics on youth. The largest generation of young people in history, this significant surge is also reflected in the fellowship of the WCC, with 350 member churches that represent more than half a billion Christians around the world.

Mental health is a vital aspect of well-being throughout a person's life—it is the ability to be self-awareness, manage one's emotions, and cope with problems. Of all the lifespan, childhood and adolescence have been found to be the most crucial for developing strong mental health. Psychology has found these stages to be a time of exploration and personality development. Presently, it is estimated that around 10-20 percent of adolescents worldwide suffer from mental health conditions that are untreated and undiagnosed.³

Mental health issues are increasing among adolescents and young adults. Researchers point to cultural trends as the cause for this rise.⁴ Not only that, mental disorders are the leading cause of disability among the youth.⁵ According to the World Health Organization, common problems found among adolescents include emotional disorders, childhood behavioral disorders, eating disorders, psychosis, suicide and self-harm, and risk-taking behaviors.⁶ The American Psychological Association and WHO strongly suggest mental health promotion and intervention, as well as addressing mental health problems early in order to prevent serious complications later.

Objectives

To help you observe this year's Ecumenical International Youth Day, this resource is aimed:

1. To provide a starting point for member churches and ecumenical partners to engage on issues of mental health among young people
2. To identify key issues affecting the mental health of young people in the different WCC regions
3. To provide a toolkit for Ecumenical IYD 2020 that includes the information document, suggested programme (event schedule, format), a liturgy, and response workshops
4. To promote observance of the Ecumenical IYD 2020 at different levels of the fellowship with the common theme.

³ See World Health Organization, "Adolescent Mental Health," October 2019, at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

⁴ Twenge J, Cooper A., Joiner T., Duffy M., Binau S., "Age, Period, and Cohort Trends in Mood Disorder Indicators and Suicide-related Outcomes in a Nationally Representative Dataset, 2005-2017" [published online March 14, 2019]. *J Abnorm Psychol*. doi: 10.1037/abn0000410.

⁵ Caroline Cassels, "Mental Disorders Leading Cause of Disability in Youth," 2011, published in Medscape at: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/744116>

⁶ See WHO's World Youth Report, 2019, at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/02/world-youth-report/>

Topical issues to consider on mental health among young people

1. Industrialization and employment

This refers to the rapid increase of cities, population, and the economy. A study by Srivastava⁷ found that mental health is affected by overpopulation, pollution, high crime rates, and decreased socialization. The increasing demands of the modern world can also lead to a significant amount of stress. For example, the expectation of earning a college degree, finding a stable job, obtaining a home, material possessions, etc., can stress young people. Because of the growing population and automation, in many regions there has been increased competition for employment, even as automation means less dependence on a human workforce.



2. Intergenerational conflict

The generational gap can create conflict among different age groups. This is further amplified by cultural systems (individualism in the West, collectivism in the East). The continually changing modern world makes it increasingly difficult for young people to connect with the older generation. This could be the difference in taste of music, lifestyle, political view, or career choice. This can bring stress because it limits social support but brings a lot of expectations. In some cases there has also been an observed gap or even conflict in acculturation, which typically occurs in migrant families. The parents hold high expectations for their children to adhere to the former culture. This brings stress because children are inclined to adapt to the new culture.⁸



3. Cultural expectations

Culture plays a huge role in people's lives. It is a part of our identity and influences most of our behaviors. Men and women have been assigned gender roles that could date back to early human groups (e.g., men were hunters while women gatherers). These certain responsibilities were universal and deeply embedded in the culture. For example, men are expected to be manly while women to be feminine, however those traits are defined within a culture, governing clothing, social behavior, etc. Deviance from cultural expectations brings unpleasant consequences on the personal and public levels. For the personal, feelings in conflict with cultural teachings create confusion and inner conflict. In the public sphere, inability to conform with the society could lead to humiliation or even harm.⁹ Moreover, certain gender roles may prove harmful or toxic to others and require re-examination for the sake of fairness, justice, and love.



7 K. Srivastava, "Urbanization and Mental Health," *Ind Psychiatry J* 18(2009): 75-76. Available at: <http://www.industrialpsychiatry.org/text.asp?2009/18/2/75/64028>

8 "How Do Family Expectations and Stress Affect Asian American Mental Health?" published by Psychology Benefits Society, 2013, at: <https://psychologybenefits.org/2013/05/31/how-family-expectations-and-stress-affect-asian-american-mental-health/>

9 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Rockville, Md.: Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

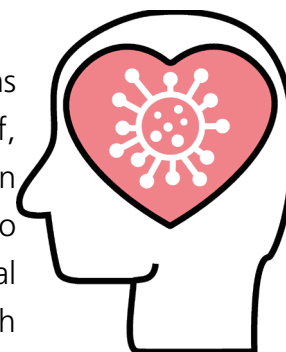
4. Climate change

Things happen beyond one's personal control, and people can develop psychological issues when exposed to life-threatening situations. Common responses are fear, frustration, and anger. People's experience of these events (either directly or indirectly) and how they are portrayed by the media can influence their mental health. One article by Weir¹⁰ showed how the decade-long looming threat of climate change led to certain psychological consequences for people.



5. COVID-19 pandemic

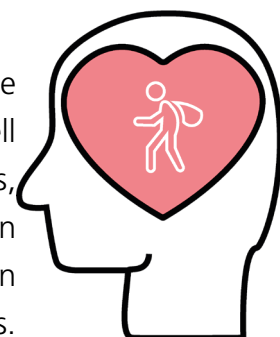
Presently, COVID-19 is bringing global distress and anxiety. COVID-19 has drastically changed people's lives. The uncertainty of the situation itself, unavailability of services, financial consequences, and social distancing can be overwhelming. Since humans are inherently social, people have had to adjust the social dynamics that were typical before the virus outbreak. Mental health in the time of pandemic varies among the population. It is much more difficult for people who have a history of mental health problems¹¹ to cope, as it is for those at or below the poverty line.¹² Countries that are in total lockdown reportedly experience increased vulnerability to domestic abuse.¹³ There are global concerns that mental illness could increase in post-COVID-19 society. Some are even urging researchers to conduct mental health studies as an intervention.¹⁴ During this time, it is important to develop appropriate self-care strategies for our body, our mind, and connection with significant others.¹⁵



6. Migration and refugee crisis

Wars and calamities are some of the causes for the movement of people in large numbers around the globe. The displacement of people, as well as the unwelcoming policies for migrants and refugees of some countries, can result in mental health problems. The presence of racial discrimination leaves people feeling different and hated. The process of acculturation can lead to confusion, isolation, and other mental health issues for the migrants.

Not only that, knowing the dire situations of people as reported by the media can also bring distress especially to vulnerable age groups.¹⁶



¹⁰ Kirsten Weir, "Climate Change Is Threatening Mental Health," *American Psychological Association* 47/7 (July/August 2016): 28. See at: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/07-08/climate-change>.

¹¹ See article in CBC entitled "Mental Illness Will Be Next Wave of COVID-19 Pandemic, Epidemiologists Say," at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/months-isolation-mental-health-covid-1.5521649>

¹² See article published in World Bank Blogs entitled "The Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on Global Poverty: Why Sub-Saharan Africa Might Be the Hardest Region Hit." At: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/impact-covid-19-coronavirus-global-poverty-why-sub-saharan-africa-might-be-region-hardest>

¹³ Reported in BBC News, UK, which consulted the Scottish Women's Aid on the increased opportunity of abusers for domestic violence during COVID-19-induced lockdowns. See article at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-52338706>

¹⁴ Reported in CNN health section, with the title: "Experts Warn of Urgent Need for Covid-19 Mental Health Research" at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/15/health/covid-19-mental-health-pandemic-wellness-intl-scli-gbr/index.html>

¹⁵ See article published by the Mayo Clinic with the title "Covid-19 and Your Mental Health," at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/mental-health-covid-19/art-20482731>

¹⁶ A.J. Pumariega, E. Rothe, & J.B. Pumariega, "Mental Health of Immigrants and Refugees," *Community Mental Health Journal*.. 41/5 (2005): 581-97. DOI: 10.1007/s10597-005-6363-1

Suggestions for Observing Ecumenical IYD

Observing Ecumenical IYD 2020 may be done at different scales, whether it be for focused groups, small groups (20 or fewer persons), middle-size groups (between 21 and 50 persons), or large groups (50 persons or more). In the context of COVID-19, young people's creativity and innovative ideas are strongly encouraged to implement the celebration of the Ecumenical IYD 2020.

As you begin to plan your event, you may consider reflecting on the questions below:

1. How does our church respond to mental health issues, and particularly mental health issues among young people? What are the stories and testimonies in our church and context?
2. If discussing mental health is taboo in your context, how do we deal with the taboo in our communities in order to address the issues?
3. How do churches provide spaces of dialogue on healing of memories, and spaces of accompaniment to people living with mental illness, their families, and the people around them? How are we creating spaces and helpline networks among our congregations and leadership to provide a safe and judgment-free environment for people dealing with mental disorders, especially in this time of COVID-19?
4. How are we creating temporary home-like space for those on the frontline, who are unable to visit or use their housing due to their high exposure to COVID-19?
5. How can we, as young people, take leadership in building awareness and education tools for our churches and communities about young people and mental health during and post-COVID-19?

The suggested event is divided into three parts: Presentation, Interactive Zones, and the Mental Health Response (individuals and church). The first part will be a space for speakers, including a young mental health professional or clinical psychologist, to present their stories and proposals (to move forward) with regard to the theme in the plenary. The second part is the Interactive Zones.¹⁷ After the presentation, participants will disperse into smaller groups (5-10 persons per group) and are invited to go deeper on the topic. Finally, participants will gather back in the plenary to learn basic training on mental health response skills that they can apply as individuals and as a community or church.

¹⁷ The Presentation allows space for the speakers to share their experiences and relate to the audience. We hope that the sharing will spark deeper conversations and proposals among the participants in the Interactive Zones. In the event that this is done online, the interactive zone may be modified according to the flow of the conversation. Consider adding a creative piece to the interactive zone, allowing participants to express their reflections through painting, drawings, dance, songs, poems, articles, Bible study, etc.

Suggested programme flow

| Time | Methodology | Description | Speaker/Resource Person |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| 10 minutes | Common Prayer | Common Prayer (see suggested prayer in the Toolkit) | |
| 5 minutes | Introduction | Brief presentation of speakers and sequence of activities | |
| 20 minutes | Presentation | Young People and Mental Health (see topical issues to consider on mental health among young people) | 2-3 young persons, clergy, mental health practitioners (young person preferred), clergy with mental health counselling experience |
| 20 minutes | Interactive Zones & Creative Space | Participants go deeper on the topic in small groups (5-10 persons per group) and add creative piece | |
| 25 minutes | Mental Health Response | Basic training for mental health response | Mental health responder professional |
| 5 minutes | Conclusion | Brief summary and wrapping up | |
| Total: 90" | - | - | - |

Suggestions for the presentation and interactive conversation on mental health

1. Invite speakers qualified to give a topic on mental health.¹⁸ Qualifications may vary each country but generally, these individuals could be a licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker.
2. Talk about mental health and connect it with religious faith and spirituality.
3. Encourage openness and connection with your activities.
4. Normalize human emotions and break the stigma on mental health. This depends on the situation of the country (e.g., Asian cultures are highly stigmatized about mental health compared to the West).
5. Discuss creating policies in the church related to mental health.
6. Create protocols in your church for dealing with a person who has a mental health crisis.

¹⁸ Mental health professional qualifications for consideration:
 - Refer to your region for basic qualifications of a psychologist, social worker, or psychiatrist
 - A licensed mental health practitioner (this may vary within countries) with experience in dealing with mental health issues
 - A mental health practitioner with personal practice or an institutional affiliation.

Moving Forward: Beyond the Ecumenical IYD 2020

Continue the awareness and conversation on mental health. Invite your peers and our churches to hold trainings and workshops.

1. Churches' response: "we are all health workers," promoting awareness of mental health and providing training for response to all.
2. Create a mental health policy and module for your church and community.
3. Identify mental health workers in your congregation and the community, and create support groups.
4. Encourage mental health programmes and activities.
5. Organize mental health response training or a workshop that could be conducted with identified professionals in an area. This could be in conjunction with Mental Health First Response (MHFR) <https://www.mhfirstresponse.org/>, a global, non-profit organization that gives training to individuals and organizations in efficiently responding to people who are in a mental health crisis.

Suggested Common Prayer

Ecumenical International Youth Day

Wednesday, 12 August 2020

The prayer begins with a procession of approximately ten youth carrying the following items toward the designated altar area. (May skip this part if celebration is being done virtually.) The following items are placed on the altar or in a graphic version if celebration is being done virtually:

Bible
Candles
An Icon and/or Cross

The following are placed on the floor around the altar or a graphic version if celebration is being done virtually:

Individual posters with the following words written clearly:
Industrialization
Intergenerational Conflict – Modern Living
COVID-19 Pandemic
Climate change
Cultural Expectations
Migration and Refugee Crisis

During the procession, a song or hymn is sung or played that reflects this year's theme. Alternatively, there can be drumming or other musical instruments to accompany the procession.

L: We gather to celebrate the one, true, eternal God
– the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
We gather to commemorate and celebrate the 2020 International Youth Day.
We gather to pray, to reflect, to be in solidarity with one another
as we live together in community.
We gather to affirm that God cares for us all and all of us
– our minds, our bodies, our souls.

Prayer

- L: O Lord our God, all might and majesty, honour and glory are yours.
Accept our praise which we now give unto you.
We praise you, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made, reflecting your divine image.
We praise you for your marvelous works, that our souls know right well.
We give thanks that you are a merciful God, always ready to pardon; that you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in great mercy.
We are grateful that you satisfy our mouths with good things; so that our youth is renewed as the eagle's.
As we celebrate and commemorate the Ecumenical IYD this year, remind us of your unconditional love for us. Renew our minds as we are transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ.
- C: **Amen.**

Song/Hymn (*from your own context*)

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 16:14-23

⁸ Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. ¹⁵ And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better." ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me." ¹⁸ One of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him." ¹⁹ So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the sheep." ²⁰ Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. ²¹ And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. ²² Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." ²³ And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

The Word of the Lord,
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

King Saul was by far the most powerful person throughout the nation of Israel. Yet, it can be surmised in our reading of the above portion of scripture, that he was experiencing some form of mental turmoil. The one solution when such melancholy came over him, was to have a musician play some music. David, who was a very skilled musician, would come and play for him. The music soothed King Saul and was so impactful and effective that he was employed in the king's service.

As we reflect on this portion of scripture, let us consider the following questions:

1. In what ways can music help to contribute to the improvement of our mental health?
2. Conversely, can it also be said that music can cause a deterioration of our mental condition?
3. How could music lead us to have a deeper spiritual encounter with God?

Song/Hymn *(optional)*

Prayers of Intercession

L: Holy God, you are just, patient, faithful God who is long-suffering and rich in grace.

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

L: God of compassion for the suffering God of all consolation, you console us like a mother, in whose womb we are safe. Give rest and peace to all youth who need it and remind them that they are never forgotten by you.

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

L: God, whose name we know, who has taken us in hand and calls us by name, today remind all youth that they belong to you and that you are with them because you are their God through all of life's conditions and circumstances...*(pause to mention the following conditions: Industrialization, Intergenerational Conflict – Modern Living, COVID-19 Pandemic, Climate Change, Cultural Expectations, Migration and Refugee Crisis).*

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

L: God of the poor and small and helpless, who leads us out of captivity. whose goodness extends as far as the sky, renew the minds of all youth especially those who are dealing with ongoing mental challenges.

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

L: God of all who are plagued and have to bear heavy burdens, who knows what we need, may the Holy Spirit touch the hearts of all youth who today feel lost and alone. May they be reminded that you are the God who seeks the lost.

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

L: God who is greater than our hearts, who gives hope to the hopeless, who is gracious to us sinners, whose mercy saves us from death, rekindle your divine love and hope in the hearts of all youth especially those who feel as if they have no reason to keep on living. Be their Saviour.

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

L: God of life and God of mercy, you take sin seriously, but you give us the opportunity to repent and when we do you, in love, invite us to a new beginning. We thank you for being merciful and for giving young people everywhere the courage to turn their lives around and the strength to start again.

C: Lord, have mercy and hear our prayers.

Song/Hymn (optional)

Benediction

May the grace of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit always be with us. Amen

The Global Ecumenical IYD 2020: Solidarity around the World

The World Council of Churches on 12 August will host an online celebration of the Ecumenical IYD 2020. We hope to incorporate different celebrations, whether local, regional, or national, from all over the world. If you and your church are interested to be featured at the WCC online event, please confirm with us on or before 30 June 2020 at youth@wcc-coe.org. We welcome any material (video greeting, photos, songs, dance, other forms of showcasing your Ecumenical IYD 2020 observation) that you will share with us to be a part of the WCC-hosted Ecumenical IYD on 12 August. All materials we receive will be included in the presentation.

In this time of COVID-19 and looking beyond the pandemic, we, young people, are continually living out our common calling in faith—and on 12 August we celebrate our gifts, we address our challenges, and we reclaim our space in the ecumenical movement!

Additional Resources

- Mwai Makoka, ed., *Health Promoting Churches: Reflections on Health and Healing for Churches on World Health Days* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2020), available at <https://www.cih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Health-Promoting-Churches-Reflections-Health-Days.pdf>
- Jeremiah Edward Bohol, RPsy, "Promoting Mental Health Wellness during COVID-19 Pandemic," at: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1vZcahZhWT6jB6Js71BRCCk9V-j4h0l8Kn>
- Voices of Youth, an initiative of the United Nations' Children's Fund or UNICEF <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/>
- Mental Health First Response <https://www.mhfirstresponse.org/>



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