

Recommendations for Faith Based Organizations

Humans are holistic (interdependence of parts for the good of the whole) beings, meaning that an individual's physical health will help to determine their mental health which will influence their spiritual health, etc. The key to a life of wellness and wholeness is to find a healthy balance between all these areas. With this in mind, faith based organizations must realize that in order to increase the spiritual health of their members, the physical, mental, financial, and social health of their members must also be attended to.

Faith based institutions are in a unique position to address these "non-spiritual" issues. A large percentage of the population attend regular services at faith based institutions. Therefore, almost all of the population could be educated, motivated, encouraged, and helped toward better health through faith based avenues. In addition, faith based organizations only exist because people put value in the interactions, teaching, and practices they experience as a member. If this value could be tied into a value for physical health, large strides could be made toward ensuring "whole person health" of people associated with that organization. In time, healthier individuals, congregations, and communities would be the result.

There are several key points to keep in mind if you want to greatly increase your chances of success when trying to improve the health of your congregation.

1. The leaders (pastor, priest, elders, etc.) of the organization must buy-in to the program and be actively involved. In order to create long-term change, members must see that their leadership values the health program activities and is willing to participate in them and work toward a healthier lifestyle along with everyone else.
2. Establish an individual health planning position or committee (comprised of a cross-section sampling of the congregation) that is primarily concerned with and personally passionate about improving the health of the members through a nutrition and or exercise program.

Here are some tips to help your faith based institution establish a culture and environment that values wholeness and health in all aspects of life, specifically through movement and healthy eating. Every organization is different and has different needs and resources. Use ideas that fit you best and change other ideas to better fit your population and area. Better yet, put on your creative thinking caps and create some ideas and changes of your own

- Encourage, facilitate, and promote healthier practices among members of faith based organizations
 - Serve only healthy foods at church functions
 - Low-fat potlucks
 - Fruit and vegetable snacks at social functions instead of chips and cookies
 - Serve whole-grain breads and healthy muffins instead of donuts and other pastries during coffee hour
 - Facilitate the sharing of healthy recipes
 - Encourage members to provide recipes for the healthy dish they cooked and served at a function

- Publish a cookbook of members healthy favorites
 - Include healthy recipes in newsletters, bulletins, or other communication pieces
 - Provide exercise facilities in or around the organization property
 - A walking track on the grounds around the building
 - Convert an empty or multi-use room into a classroom for aerobics or yoga classes
 - Encourage and facilitate active lifestyles
 - Offer incentives and recognition to those that participate in a movement program or meet a goal
 - Facilitate the formation of exercise buddies among members perhaps through a bulletin board or circulation of an e-mail with opportunities
- Educate about the importance of health and ways to improve
 - Teach from the front about the importance of physical health, its relationship to spiritual health, and challenge members to make strides toward a healthier lifestyle
 - Invite other professionals in the area to come and speak to the congregation
 - Offer healthy cooking classes
 - Offer exercise classes
 - Step Aerobics
 - Walking
 - Pilates
 - Include health tips about exercise and eating right in publications
- Plan health related activities
 - Have a health fair to educate and encourage healthier lifestyles
 - Cooking demonstrations with taste testing
 - Health screenings
 - BMI
 - Blood Pressure
 - Flexibility
 - Activity stations
 - Musical chairs
 - Dance revolution
 - Relay races
 - Correct form for resistance training
 - Plan “surprise outings” to area points of interest
 - Have members meet at the facility then lead them to the “surprise” location, perhaps a park or other members property, then lead a hike, scavenger hunt, or plan activities at that place
- Share your success with others
 - Invite and involve other faith based organizations to take part in your activities

- Network with other faith based organizations and plan events together
- Invite the community to come and take part in the events happening at your faith based organization.

Remember, good physical health is a key component to spiritual health. And, with the community's involvement, this could be a great witnessing tool!