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# Making the Journey to Better Health

## *Fifty Faith Leaders Take the First Steps*

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Usually when you think of the words “Christian,” “Muslim,” “urban,” “rural,” “old,” and “young,” you think of differences. However, when fifty faith leaders, of various faiths, ages and professions came together on May 2, 2013, they came together with the same goal in mind: to improve the health and well-being of Tennesseans. On May 2, 2013, the Tennessee Department of Health Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives hosted the “Making the Journey to Better Health” symposium at the Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Fifty leaders, from both the Department of Health and

faith communities, represented the state from as far away as Johnson City and Greenville in northeast Tennessee to Memphis and Somerville in southwest Tennessee. Representatives from various Christian, Muslim, Baha’i and Church of Scientology faith traditions were present at the meeting.

Director of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Dr. Michele Gourley, gave opening remarks, urging participants to consider the skills needed to make one’s life journey to better health and how the Department of Health and faith communities can collaborate to help each other make a journey to better health. Commission-



*Lesia Walker, Director of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination begins the day by giving welcoming remarks.*

er John Dreyzehner spoke of the mission of the TDH and how faith communities could play a role in fulfilling the vision the Department of Health. Cont. pg. 2...

### Special points of interest:

- Fifty faith leaders come together to discuss better health.
- How to take your walk from weight-loss to well-being
- What does water have to do with well-being?

## *Walking by Faith: A Journey of Three Faith Communities*

In the early morning hours a soft rain fell on the waters of Radnor Lake, but neither rain nor colder than normal temperatures would keep a small group from St. Augustine’s Episcopal Chapel in Nashville from gathering to express their

faith through their footsteps as they walked around the shore. The group is part of a month-long “Walking Bible Study” led by Mary Murphy and Christy Beesley of St. Augustine’s Episcopal Chapel. During the month of May, participants

met each Friday morning at the park where they read from Rev. Becca Steven’s book “The Path of Peace” and discussed the reading. Then, as members began the hike, they discussed their thoughts about the reflections. Cont. pg. 2

## *Fifty Faith Leaders cont.*



Two panel discussions, one led by representatives from the Department of Health, Dr. Martha Buchanan and Ms. Lishunda Park, and one led by faith leaders Dianne and Dorcas Young and Dr. Art Lee, allowed faith leaders to learn about TDH initiatives and TDH employees to learn about faith-based initiatives.

In the afternoon, attendees participated in one of four

round table discussions:

Healthy Communities through a Healthy Start, Healthy Communities Mind and Bodies, Healthy Communities for Special Populations, and Healthy Communities through Healthy Policies. Joan Cook, Rick Canada and Rosalind Kurita represented the Tennessee Department of Health as discussion moderators. Overall, partici-

pants gave positive feedback regarding the symposium and hoped the discussion between the Department of Health and faith communities would continue. The symposium was the first statewide gathering of this new initiative aimed at connecting faith communities and TDH to work towards creating a healthier Tennessee.

## *Walking by Faith cont.*

The hike also included a “silent walk” and ended with a closing meditation.

Last winter in northeast Tennessee, five faith communities were on a journey. The “Walk to Bethlehem” was a twelve-week walking program designed by St. John Providence Health System Parish Nursing to help increase the physical, spiritual and emotional health of participants. The “imaginary” trip was accomplished by participants within each faith community recording the miles they walk each week using pedometers. Participants also could participate in a weekly devotional that highlighted historical places they may “stop at” along the way if they wished. Five churches participated in the program. The churches represented the Southern Baptist, Methodist and Lutheran faith traditions.



*Barred owls are one of the many species of wildlife found at Radnor Lake.*

In total, 34,000 miles were recorded by participants. In honor of the destination, one congregation, Cherokee United Methodist Church, hosted a group meal cooked by a member raised in the Jewish faith tradition that featured foods traditionally represented at Hanukkah, the Jewish holiday celebrated near the end of the year.

Members gained their miles by using local parks and greenways, school walking tracks and exercise classes. One member who was dependent on a walker and leg braces, walked miles each day inside her home. Many of the faith communities who participated in the program are considering participating in the program again.

When designing their new facility in 2009, members of the Islamic Center of Murfreesbo-

ro realized they wanted a place where congregants could have the opportunity to be not only spiritually healthy but physically and mentally healthy as well. Seeing the beauty of their property, including a pond, they decided to construct a walking trail around its perimeter.

The track is slightly more than a mile long and includes pavilions, a playground and trees so families can enjoy the beauty of the surroundings while they walk. The surface of the track is soft enough so children and elders can easily walk as well.

The track, as well as ICM's policies of no sugary sodas and no smoking, are part of the daily practice of the Muslim faith which seeks to engage in daily worship that promotes the health of the body, mind and soul.

## *Walking: From Weight Loss to Whole Person Well-Being*

Often when one thinks of going for a walk, one thinks about how many calories will be burned or how many miles will be walked. However, walking doesn't just have to be about weight loss. Rather, it can be an experience that nourishes one's entire well-being.

When you walk, think about how you move. How is your posture? What about your breathing? Try taking a few deep breaths while you walk and see what happens.

What about your senses? What do you see when you walk? What do you smell? What do you hear?

What about the thoughts going through your head? While your feet may be carrying you along the trail, are your thoughts dragging you down? Think about the company you keep.

If you're walking with friends, what type of conversation are you having? How does this experience affect your relationship?

Consider taking a "mindful walk."

Walk slowly. Try to notice what is around you at the present moment instead of the thoughts in your head that may be in the past or future.

Though a simple movement, the act of walking can give our bodies, minds and souls a chance to be fulfilled and nourished and not just "exercised."

## *Small Step on the Journey to Better Health:*

One small step that everyone can take on the journey to better health is to drink more water. Since our bodies are made up of 70 percent water, drinking enough water is important in keeping not only our bodies working well but also our minds. Did you know that drinking enough water can lead to clearer skin, decreased appe-

tite, improved sleep, strong muscles, better thinking and less achy joints?

Set a goal to drink one more glass of water for three of the next five days. Make sure you consider whether or not you'll have access to water at work, worship or play. If not, make sure you have an adequate con-

tainer to keep your water.

Write reminder notes or set up "water appointments" on your calendar so you remember to drink that extra glass. Water: it's a small step on the journey to better health!

**"Write reminder notes or set up "water appointments" on your calendar to remember to drink that extra glass."**

## *Find a Local Park or Trail Near You*

Tennessee Parks and Recreation Park Finder:

[www.trpa.net](http://www.trpa.net)

Tennessee Greenways and Trails:

<http://connectwithtn.com>



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We're on the Web!

<http://health.state.tn.us/dmhde/faith.shtml>

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"Protect, Promote and Improve the health and prosperity of Tennesseans."



In our journey to better health, we often think about the destination, avoiding detours and possible dead-ends like death and disease, how many pounds we'd like to lose and how many years we'd like to live.

However, by thinking in these terms, we often forget about the many steps along the way that lead us to our detours, dead ends and destination. This newsletter is an effort to highlight those small steps that will help us along our journey, as well as share success stories of communities of faith across Tennessee who are already focusing on those steps.

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### *How Can You Start a Walking Group in Your Community?*



*Walkers on the Appalachian Trail at  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee*

Starting a walking by faith group in your community is easy. It does not require a large investment of time, money or human resources. A few friends from your faith community, a pair of shoes and a safe path are all you need to get started.

Looking for a local park or trail?

We've included a link in this newsletter to Tennessee Parks, Greenways and Trails.

Check them out, grab your shoes, grab a friend and let's walk!

