

Winter 2013

Volume 1, Issue 3

Making the Journey to Better Health

Four Faith Leaders Make the Journey to Better Health: A Message from the Director

Dear Faith Leader,

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As you know, Tennessee is not as healthy a state as it could be. Not only do we have higher rates of disease and illness than other states, we also have lower rates of behaviors that keep us healthy such as physical activity, good mental health, and eating our fruits and veggies (have you had your five today?) and not smoking.

As you may know, Tennessee is also a very religious state. Regardless of the size of the town, there seems to be a faith community on every street corner, and more than half of our citizens affiliate with some type of faith community.

These communities are often sources of trust, of learning, or support. While traveling around the state I often hear from faith leaders that integrating health and faith is not possible, citing reasons of “being too busy” or not having the resources. However, I’ve also noticed several faith leaders and faith communities are making the journey to better health, despite limited time and resources.

This issue is dedicated to those who have taken small steps on the journey to better health and highlights the work of four different faith communities, from four different faith traditions, in making their congregations a healthier place to live, work and worship.

Faith traditions represented in this edition include: Missionary Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Jewish and Muslim congregations. It is my hope you will find inspiration and ideas to help your own faith community begin or continue the journey to better health.

Regards,
Michele Gourley

Director of Faith-Based Initiatives

Special points of interest:

- Learn how to create a wellness team for your congregation
- Do you take care of yourself as well as your car?
- Can faith and health co-exist?

Leading toward Better Health: Congregation Micah

Article submitted by Julie Greenberg, Education Director at Congregation Micah

At Congregation Micah, a Reform Jewish community in Brentwood, the staff and congregants strive to promote a wholeness that embodies both physical and spiritual health. The rabbis take seriously the idea humans are created “b’tzelem Elohim” - in the image of God - and that our bodies are therefore sacred and deserving of good health. Through programming and worship opportunities, Micah’s members consider what they need and desire in the quest for good health. “Shalom” -- most often translated as “peace” -- can also be translated as “completeness,” so the search for personal peace should include the very real sense of balance one finds when working to integrate physical and spiritual paths.

Congregation Micah’s rabbis are a married couple with three children, so they appreciate the many demands working parents and busy families must address. Rabbi Laurie Rice is a committed runner and yoga instructor who shares her beliefs.

“I resonate strongly to the Jewish principle that our body serves as the temple that houses our soul: our soul which is unique and God-given, all our own,” she says. “Our bodies, Judaism suggests, is on loan to us as a resting place for our souls. Just as the morning prayer of *Asher Yatzar* states: ‘God, if the openings of my body are not open and the closings are not closed, I could not physically stand before You and offer gratitude.’ So running and yoga, for me -- physical exercise -- these are all ways that I connect deeply with my soul and with the Divine. And I think that for me, attention to my wellness

and physical health are ways in which I am daily aware that I have a responsibility to myself beyond my base instincts. Yoga, which is union of mind and body, really achieves this.”

Rabbi Flip Rice, a vegetarian and active yoga student and swimmer, shares similar beliefs, noting “Many commentators of the Talmud interpret one of its famous teachings – the obligation of parents to ‘teach their children to swim’ – as a sign of coaching them to become independent. You can hold a child in the water, but at some point, you have to let them go—hopefully having prepared them to float on their own. My father taught me to actually swim, and it is one of my primary forms of exercise. I also practice different forms of yoga to stay in shape physically and mentally. Thomas Jefferson once said, ‘Exercise is as necessary because health is worth more than learning.’ For me as a rabbi, if I am not feeling good, I cannot learn. I love learning and want to do it as long as I can.”

Education Director Julie Greenberg brings her own commitment to health when crafting the Religious School curriculum. She explains, “We have promoted local farmers by being a host site for a Community Supported Agriculture Dropoff, (a program where members support local farmers by committing to buying produce each week from a farm), bringing farmers in to work with our students Sunday mornings, and hosting community-wide ‘Wholly Shabbat’ healthful potluck dinners after Friday night services. All these efforts contribute to a practice thought of as a modernized form of keeping kosher, or ‘kashrut.’ Understanding that fresh, local and, ideally, organic food not only nourishes our body, but helps preserve the precious balance of Earth’s ecology,

has led to the idea of ‘eco kashrut.’ Yet another corollary in Micah’s Religious School curriculum is the promotion of ‘fair trade’ items such as coffee and chocolate because, as Jews, we are obligated to be responsible consumers and ensure workers are treated fairly.”

When Micah constructed its first seven raised garden beds for its Religious School students, congregants imagined the beds representing the seven days of creation as a way of bringing students “back to the garden.” Spiritual and scientific lessons abound from these well-tended beds, and teachers are able to incorporate many of the crops into the curriculum and holiday observances

Congregation Micah has implemented programming for its seniors as well, inviting gerontology specialists from Vanderbilt University to join the lunch-time “Schmooze and Views” group to provide with advice for aging well. Additionally, congregant Carol Orsborn has shared her book, *Fierce with Age – Chasing God and Squirrels in Brooklyn*, with members in a Yom Kippur session and is planning a seminar early next year. Congregation Micah will also host the second annual “Sheket Shabbat” – or Shabbat of Silence – also early next year, inviting participants to embrace the often elusive practice of sustained silent meditation. Both seminars are open to the public; to register or learn more, call 615- 377 -9799.

These efforts seek to orient Micah’s members, young and old(er), to a healthy life, allowing more time and ways to honor and best serve themselves, their families, and their God.



Children at Congregation Micah work in the garden as part of the religious school curriculum, learning to incorporate the scientific with the spiritual.



Julie Greenberg of Congregation Micah of Brentwood, Tennessee speaks to the congregation.

Reverend Kenny Anderson: Leading by Example

Reverend Kenny Anderson of Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in Columbia, Tennessee learned from the military that a real leader “leads by example.” Originally called to serve his congregation as a music minister, Anderson felt the call to serve in a greater capacity: as a pastor. Anderson followed his calling, was ordained as a pastor, a position he has held at Mt. Calvary for twenty years.

Last year, seeing the needs of the community, several nurses in the congregation approached Anderson

about hosting a health fair. The success of that program inspired the congregation to apply for a grant through the Tennessee Department of Health to continue promoting health in their congregation.

In February 2013, Anderson traded his Sunday suit and robe for a track jacket and running shoes to kick off Mt. Calvary’s “Fit for the King” health program. Since February, Mt. Calvary has dedicated each month to a health topic, even having a presentation on sexually transmitted diseases,

presented by one of the congregation’s nurses, and offered opportunities for their congregants to be physically active and learn about healthy eating.

Understanding a real leader leads by example and that if a pastor isn’t willing to change, the people may not want to change, Anderson took the health principles he preached from the pulpit to heart. Since the start of “Fit for the King,” Anderson has lost thirty pounds.

Anderson Cont.

“I want to be well enough to be there for the people who need me,” he said, emphasizing his commitment. “You want to see people well before they die, to celebrate their life before they die and not just when you preach their funeral.”

Anderson’s piece of advice for pastors considering addressing health is: “You have to find what works for you and your congregation. Health needs to be addressed from the pulpit; otherwise, people won’t see it as a significant issue.”



Reverend Kenny Anderson,
Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church

A Natural Partnership at Nashville Seventh Day Adventist

When one thinks about living a healthy spiritual and physical life, one group almost always makes the list. Seventh Day Adventists are known not only for focusing on spiritual health but physical, mental and social health as well. In fact, Dan Buettner, author of *The Blue Zones*, recognized the Seventh Day Adventists as one of the longest living cultures in the world. So why such a holistic approach to faith? Dr. Mel Santos, pastor of the Nashville First Seventh Day Adventist Church, offers an explanation.

“In Scriptures, there’s an emphasis on developing the full individual. There’s instruction in Scriptures to be healthy so we can serve God.”

He also notes that when one is living one’s optimal health, he or she will have more years to serve and honor their faith tradition.

Many Seventh Day Adventists follow the principles outlined in two acronyms to help them approach health from a holistic perspective. One acronym is **NEW START** which stands for:

- * **Nutrition**
- * **Exercise**
- * **Water**
- * **Sunshine**
- * **Temperance**
- * **Air**
- * **Rest**
- * **Trust in Divine Power**

These principles help congregants remember often-overlooked aspects of well-being such as getting adequate sleep and setting aside time to rest and getting adequate amounts of sunshine, air and water.

Another acronym used by Adventists is **CREATION**:

- * **Choice**
- * **Rest**
- * **Environment**
- * **Activity**
- * **Trust in Divine Power**
- * **Interpersonal Relationships**
- * **Outlook**
- * **Nutrition**

CREATION reminds us of the importance of making good choices, the affect that the environment has on our well-being, the importance of having a positive outlook on life, and engaging in mental as well as physical activity.

Nashville SDA Cont.

At the Nashville First Seventh Day Adventist church, many programs address well-being, including the Coronary Heart Prevention Program (CHIP) and the Live Long, Live Well program which works with other churches in Nashville to apply healthy principles.

Santos also acknowledges that congregational change must come from the leadership. Santos was inspired at a young age to change his health after noticing health principles in the Bible and reading *Counsels on Diet and Foods* by Ellen G. White. After following the

principles in the book, Santos noticed not only a change in his health but his family and schoolwork as well.

Santo's advice for other faith leaders is, "Don't just start with food. Change the vision. Change the paradigm so the congregation sees the bigger picture. And live it yourself, not just to be healthier but to have a stronger relationship with God."

"Don't just start with food. Change the vision."

-Dr. Mel Santos

Nashville Seventh Day Adventist

Bola Ajibola: A Whole Person Approach

An ordinary job led one Middle Tennessean to take an unusual path on her journey of faith. Bola Ajibola, a native of Nigeria, followed a desire to improve the nutritional status of those around her by working as the diet coordinator at a clinical hospital. However, her work showed her that it wasn't just food affecting the lives of her patients -- it was their relationships, beliefs and work. Her journey to improve the well-being of others from a holistic perspective led her back to Nigeria to work in the field of worksite well-

ness. Later she returned to Nashville where she worked for five years with Nashville's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health program (REACH), a program to address health disparities in Nashville.

Working with communities in Nashville, she began to realize there was another community with health needs: her own faith community, the Islamic Center of Tennessee. In the spring of 2012, Ajibola partnered with the center to host a health fair. They offered screenings for chronic disease, HIV and mammograms. Though she expected a great attendance few showed up.

Undaunted, Ajibola organized another health fair that summer. This time she sought partnerships with local universities and the Metro Nashville Public Health Department. This time 150



Bola Ajibola, Islamic Center of Tennessee

came to have their blood pressure checked, screened for disease and learn other ways to take care of their health. The event opened the eyes of faith leaders to the health needs of the community. Since that inaugural event, the Islamic Center of Tennessee has hosted three more health

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 : **"Look at the whole person.**
 : **If we take just one element**
 : **[like food] we'll be missing**
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 : **ual."**
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Ajibola Cont.

fairs as well as a flu clinic. Future plans include establishing a medical clinic to serve the community.

In the meantime, Ajibola has also become certified as a wellness coach and operates her own coaching service, just another step on her journey to offer a holistic approach to well-being. When asked what one piece of advice she would give for congregations want-

ing to improve health, Ajibola replied, "Look within your congregation for talents and resources. It's the human resources that make it work. Look at the whole person. If we take just one element, such as food, we'll be missing the well-being of an individual."



The Islamic Center of Tennessee hosts a health fair for the community.

Quick Tips for Creating a Wellness Team:

Excited about incorporating health into your faith community? Check out this easy model for starting a wellness team. For more information visit our CURE website: <http://health.state.tn.us/dmhde/cure.shtml#Cure1>

C: Contact the Right People

When you are ready to begin your wellness team you will want to know who else in your congregation has a "heart for health." The people who agree to work with you will be your wellness team. It is also important to reach out to your faith leader.

U: Understand the Needs of Your Congregation

Once you have created your wellness team, you will want to know what activities, speakers or programs are of interest to your congregation. Consider conducting a short survey of congregational needs to learn of interests and topics.

R: Build Relationships and Gather Resources

You are building relationships between the Wellness Team and the congregation, letting the congregation know the team is a resource and cares about their health as well as developing relationships with community resources that may offer people, materials or funding.

E: Evaluate Your Efforts

You have a successful wellness team. People have taken steps to make a journey toward better health and are making important lifestyle changes they can maintain for a lifetime. However, it is important to assess your efforts to ensure good intentions are actually causing good results and not harm. Consider creating a pre- and post-survey to evaluate events. Get member and participant feedback to see how well the program worked.

Taking Care of Ourselves: Lessons Learned from a Car

By: Michele Gourley, MD, MPH

A few years ago, while working as a medical student in a primary care clinic, I encountered a patient who was in our office to be treated for an upper respiratory infection. While we were discussing treatment options, I noticed the man was significantly overweight and had high blood pressure as well. Realizing his infection would pass but these signs would continue to affect his health, I decided to do something.

“Sir, I noticed your blood pressure and weight are out of the range we consider healthy.”

He told me he knew but didn’t seem eager to make any changes. I really wanted to help him but felt frustrated at his lack of enthusiasm. Then, I had an idea.

“Sir, what happens when your car’s maintenance light goes on?”

Looking at me slightly confused, he replied, “It means that something’s wrong.”

“So what happens if you don’t do anything about that light going on?” I replied.

“Well,” still looking confused, “If you ignore it, eventually your car will break down.”

“And then what happens?” I asked

“You have to take it to a mechanic and have it repaired,” he said.

“Sir,” I said. “These numbers are your body’s maintenance light going on.”

And then I saw the light bulb go off in his head. He got it. And we spent the next 15 minutes discussing various options for bringing his weight

and blood pressure back in a healthy range.

You see, we wouldn’t hesitate to take care of the needs of our car when the maintenance light goes on because we know the consequences are costly, but how often do we do the same with our bodies, which are irreplaceable? Though it would be much cheaper, who puts water in the gas tank instead of high octane fuel? No one. Because we know our cars won’t run well on water. Yet, how many of us invest as much money in fueling our bodies?

When I left town a few years ago for several weeks, I had to leave my car at my parents’ house. They assured me they would at least take it for a spin around the block every few days. Why? Because we all know if you leave a car sitting in the

driveway for several weeks, it won’t run well. Yet, how many of us park our bodies in our houses for days at a time, barely moving them other than to shuffle from one seat to another or to move a fork from a plate to our mouth?

Our bodies are wonderfully designed and more than just a machine. They are irreplaceable and costly to repair, yet we often take care of our cars better than we take care of our bodies. So my challenge to you is to ask yourself the question:

Which is receiving better care? Your body or your car? What is one small step you could take to make sure your body is running well?



Tennessee Department of Health Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination Faith-Based Initiative

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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.

Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination Initiatives

Historically Black Colleges and Universities: OMHDE funds an annual obesity awareness campaign for five HBCUs in Knoxville, Nashville, Jackson and Memphis.

Fact Sheets: The OMHDE offers health disparities fact sheets that cover the major health disparities for racial and ethnic minorities in Tennessee.

Minority Health Initiative:

The OMHDE will be providing funding to various agencies in Tennessee in the near future to address key health issues including: prenatal health, obesity, violence and self-care as they relate to minority health and health disparities.

Hispanic Outreach:

Our Hispanic outreach coordinator recently retired. We are in the process of hiring a new coordinator and will continue our efforts to reach out to faith-based and other community groups that serve the Hispanic community.

Minority Health Disparities Chartbook:

We are currently in the process of producing and publishing a chartbook that will highlight the geographic, gender and racial differences in health disparities for populations across Tennessee. This document will provide easy-to-read information, charts and graphs that provide important information about health disparities in Tennessee.