

It Worked for Us!

Fitness challenge motivates church to 'Walk to Jerusalem'

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Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, members of [Epworth United Methodist Church](#) are walking a collective 6,240 miles – the distance from Indianapolis to Jerusalem.

About 100 members of the Indianapolis church are participating in "Walk to Jerusalem" after their Lenten Fit for Life Challenge sparked enthusiasm for healthy lifestyles.

"The Lenten Fit for Life Challenge got them started. Now there is a lot of momentum," said Carolyn Kirkendall, parish nurse. "We figure between all of us we have to walk 63 miles a day."

All types of people are recording their mileage this summer, including young children, cross-country runners, retirees and even a nursing home resident who walks with a cane. "Everyone walks. If you wear a pedometer you can count all of your walking," Kirkendall said.

The Epworth Wellness Committee initiated both programs to encourage healthy practices, both physical and spiritual.



Participants in the Lenten challenge earned points daily with actions such as drinking six glasses of water, eating five vegetables, wearing seatbelts, not using cell phones when driving and exercising for an hour. Even a good belly laugh was worth a point a day.

They also earned points for reading the Bible, praying and participating in any activity with a church group. "People wanted to get points, so some people tried walking the labyrinth for the first time," Kirkendall said. "People came to Sunday school because they got points."

Nearly 100 people in 20 teams competed. Jennifer Crawford was part of a two-family team — the Stephens and the Crawfords — that came in first place, winning dinner theater tickets. "One of the best parts of the challenge is that it rewards positive behavior," Crawford said. "Often during Lent we think of giving things up, but this is an opportunity to be more intentional about what we want to do."

Walking the labyrinth earned devotional points during the Lenten challenge. Susie Dorrell meditates as she walks.

Joe Hatcher, a member of another team, quit smoking. "The Lenten Challenge at Epworth was a group effort. I didn't feel like I was doing all the things in the challenge by myself," he said. "Others were exercising, eating better, working on their spiritual growth with me. It is much easier to do these things when you know your church community is working with you."

Most people were motivated by the group support rather than the possibility of winning a prize, Kirkendall said. "It's a way of worshipping and honoring God in a positive way."

As part of the Walk to Jerusalem, Hatcher enjoys walking to church for his Tuesday night book study. "It is great exercise for me, supports the Epworth Wellness Committee in their efforts to make us all healthier and also is good for the environment. It also is cheaper to walk than buy gas!"

For more information about the Lenten Fit for Life Challenge, e-mail Carolyn Kirkendall at carolyn@onsite-network.com or call Epworth United Methodist Church at (317) 251-1481.

For more information about Walk to Jerusalem, go to the Web site of St. John Health at www.stjohn.org/WalktoJerusalem/, a health care system in Michigan that developed the program.

—By Deborah White, associate editor of Interpreter magazine, with contributions from Cathy Hinkle, member of Epworth United Methodist Church.