



How a rural church decided to take on the physical *and* spiritual health of its congregation: A Case Study

Holly Springs Baptist Church (HSBC) plays an important role in both the spiritual and physical health of its community. For HSBC, however, they are one and the same thing; taking good care of your body is as important as taking good care of your spirit.

Obesity is a common challenge in rural communities, and Macon County is no exception. A lack of faith was not the issue. Most obese people know they'd be healthier if they could lose weight, but ordinary diets that held them to unrealistic expectations almost always backfired.

A diet that linked healthy eating and exercise to spiritual practice was just what the congregation needed.

Taking an Active Interest in the Health of its Congregation

Jan Lee, Chair of the Holly Springs Health Care Committee, sought out the help of Dawn Wilde-Burgess, Community Health Promotion Supervisor for the Macon County Public Health Department. Wilde-Burgess is a trained facilitator in the **Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More (FFESMM)** program, and knew this intervention would be a good fit for HSBC.

FFESMM is a practice-tested intervention developed by Center of Excellence for Training and Research Translation (Center TRT). The curriculum helps individuals in faith communities deliver lessons that encourage families to connect healthy eating and physical activity to their religious or spiritual beliefs.

At the backbone of such a curriculum is a supportive social network, which HSBC already had in its congregation. Everyone already knew each other, and the healthy cooking classes, nutrition programs, and opportunities for exercise only strengthened that connection. Group-oriented goal setting and problem solving have been that much more effective as a result.

Lay leaders are responsible for bringing lessons from Scripture and spiritual elements into the sessions. Central to each session is the discussion amongst the group. Through questions and discussion prompts, lay leaders prompt group members to talk about their eating habits, physical activities, and their faith. Lay leaders help group members connect the dots between the health of their souls and the health of their bodies.

FFESMM covers these concepts:

- How to choose healthy foods, and know which options are healthiest
- How to budget for healthy foods by being good stewards of food dollars
- How to keep food safe during preparation and storage
- How to get moving, and make physical activity a part of daily routine.

Red Tablecloths: Changes for Individuals and Systems

Individual behavior change is easier when surrounding systems support the change. HSBC introduced water policies, food policies, and “moving more” policies.

When a red tablecloth appears on a table at a church meal, that’s where a congregation member can find the heart healthy foods. HSBC also offers more fresh fruits and vegetables for their ministry program, thanks to a silver certification from Partners in Health and Wholeness. Next year, HSBC will apply for gold certification, and use the money to install a paved walking trail for public use.

Strengthening Spirits and Bodies

Holly Springs Baptist Church did more than bring healthy foods and healthy cooking to its congregation. They connected the dots between spiritual and physical health in a program that fostered deeper connections between its members. Exercise and healthy eating are now the natural choices for its members. They are MountainStrong.

Resources

- Partners in Health and Wellness: www.healthandwholeness.org
- WNC Healthy Kids: <http://www.wnchn.org/wnc-healthy-kids>
<http://www.521almostnone.com/resources/faith>