

# Faith-based camaraderie can pave path to longer life



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Guest Columnist

If we could find a magic elixir that could help ease our stress, decrease loneliness and improve our mental and physical health, wouldn't it be great? Well, the good news is the fix has existed for thousands of years.

Researchers have found by attending a faith-based organization (a denomination of your choice) four times a month, we can add up to four to 14 years to your life.

Why is this so?

Harold G. Koenig, MD, Director of Spirituality, Theology and Health at Duke University Medical Center, has summarized his extensive review of the literature on the connection between

faith and health.

First, spirituality and religion are associated with increased physical activity, healthier diets, lower smoking rates and less risky behaviors. Studies also indicate an association between practicing a faith and higher sense of well-being, hope, purpose, gratitude, optimism and self-esteem. In addition, Koenig found a correlation between faith and lower incidence of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and attempts, as well as substance abuse.

Attending a faith-based organization provides fellowship for members who often build meaningful, supportive relationships which can stave off loneliness and isolation. Practicing prayer or meditation helps to induce the body's relaxation response which in turn tends to lower blood pressure, reduce tension often associated with headaches and

muscle aches, decrease insomnia and lower incidence of anxiety.

According to the PEW research study, 90 percent of Americans believe in a higher power. Fifty-six percent call that power God.

Regardless of what one calls that spiritual force, believing in something greater than oneself allows us to turn over some of our stress. We don't have to feel the world is all on our shoulders. That, in itself, is powerful.

Blue Zones Project – SWFL applauds the many faith-based organizations that are collaborating to boost well-being in our community. These champions include: C3 Church Naples Florida, Celebration Community Beach Church, Christus Victor Lutheran Church, Cornerstone United Methodist Church, Naples United Church of Christ, Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Legacy

Church Estero, The Springs of Bonita Church, St Agnes Church, Rock of Refuge Church, Mayflower Congregational UCC and Unity of Naples.

These organizations are further supporting their members' wellness by offering healthy choices at after-service coffee hour and potlucks; encouraging members to form walking or plant-based potluck groups so they can meet new friends while supporting one another's health; offering purpose workshops and Live Longer, Better presentations; and other creative ways to promote well-being.

If your faith-based organization is interested in participating with Blue Zones Project, a free community initiative fully funded by NCH Healthcare System, contact Chante Pemberton at 331-6068, [Chante.Pemberton@Sharecare.com](mailto:Chante.Pemberton@Sharecare.com).