

BLUE ZONES

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book.” – Irish proverb

Blue Zones Project helps faith-based organizations boost well-being



Mayflower Congregational walking moai at Freedom Park. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

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Blue Zones Project-Southwest Florida

Pastor Emeritus Nolen Rollins with Legacy Church in Estero was happily surprised when he learned about the Blue Zones Project’s Purpose Workshop. He had been teaching his own God’s Purpose in Your Life workshop since 2003.

“When Blue Zones Project came to me and described Purpose as a main mission, I was all over that,” he said. “I had been helping people discover their purpose for years.”

After retiring to Florida, Rollins said he encountered many people who weren’t maximizing their potential.

“I discovered a huge number of people here who have tremendous life experience, abilities, talents, discretionary time and resources who, for the most part, were doing nothing of real significance,” he said.

“They were playing golf or tennis, going fishing or boating, which is good. But you can only do so much without realizing there has to be more.”

Incorporating Blue Zones Project at Legacy Church was an easy decision, he said.

“Blue Zones is all about living a healthier, happier life,” he said. “From a pastor’s perspective, we ought to be all about that. That’s what places of worship are about. It’s part of our spiritual development.”

Faith based organizations benefit from several of the Blue Zones Power 9 principles, including Belong, Purpose and Right Tribe. They can also incorporate other principles such as Plant Slant and Move Naturally.

“Blue Zones is not biblically-based or spiritually-oriented,” Rollins says, “but it’s amazing how in line with spiritual truths it is.”

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida works with 18 local faith-based organizations.

“Faith-based organizations are already set up for people to participate in different volunteer opportunities, which helps identify their purpose,” said Chante Pemberton, Faith-Based Organization and HOA Lead for Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida.

“And so many churches offer small groups like bible study, which is a right tribe coming together with a common purpose.”

“One of our Power 9 Principles is Belong,” she continued. “Our research shows that if you belong to a spiritual community and attend four times a month, it can add four to 14 years to your life. We also know that when families attend church together, they have better communication.”

Pemberton said that faith-based organizations have always helped their members spiritually but today realize that having a healthy lifestyle helps mind, body and spirit.

“Blue Zones Project offers these little nudges that encourage maintaining a healthy lifestyle,



Mayflower Congregational walking moai at Freedom Park.

like adding fruit and veggies to the doughnuts offered after church. It helps people be a better steward of your body, which is God’s gift to you.”

Mayflower Congregational, which was the second faith based organization to sign up with Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, offers a weekly walking moai at sites such as Baker Park and Freedom Park.

Church member Janice Cressman said it’s a wonderful way to connect with other members.

“When you’re walking around a park one-on-one with somebody, and it’s usually somebody different every week, you really learn more about that person.”

Prior to the pandemic, the church offered chair yoga, potluck dinners with a Plant Slant, Purpose Workshops, and volunteer opportunities, such as handing out food at Grace Place and stuffing Christmas bags with socks, books, and other items for families.

“I love the fact that the Blue Zones Project concept is longevity with quality of life,” Cressman said.

Several other faith-based organizations found multiple ways to incorporate Blue Zones Project.

As the pandemic began, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church teamed up with Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida to inspire an Attitude of Gratitude with a daily Bellagram. Each day at 2:20 p.m., the church rang its bell in remembrance of the first American citizen who died of COVID-19 on Feb. 8, 2020, at 2:20 p.m. and later in honor of community members, from healthcare professionals to teachers and store clerks.

C3 Church said it noticed a “marked increase” in the health and activity level of its members after getting involved with Blue Zones

Project.

St. Agnes Church participates to help its members be not only spiritually but physically healthy in order to serve others effectively. The church encourages attending Mass, being physically active, eating a well-balanced diet and by being surrounded by people with shared interests.

Christus Victor Lutheran Church encouraged healthier practices through a Pray and Stretch Class and healthier coffee hour refreshments.

Naples United Church of Christ hosted a Blue Zones Project Purpose Workshop to help their fellowship connect with their unique gifts and talents, added bike racks, offered yoga classes to encourage physical activity, planted a garden, became a tobacco-free site, and promoted community volunteer opportunities to their fellowship.

Other participants include Celebration Community Beach Church, Cornerstone United Methodist Church, Emmanuel Community Lutheran Church, Legacy Church Estero, New Haitian Church of the Nazarene, Rock of Refuge Church, St. John’s Episcopal Church, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Jubilee Fellowship of Naples, The Arlington of Naples, The Springs of Bonita Church, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Greater Naples, and Unity of Naples.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida’s well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.