

Social Support Promotes a Long Life

Bestselling author and National Geographic Fellow Dan Buettner has studied the habits of people who live in blue zones for years. Blue zones are the five places in the world where a disproportionately high number of residents live to 100.

Based on his research one of the key practices that he recommends is: Have a solid social circle and believe in a Higher Power. There are numerous studies that bear this out. Social relationships lead to longer and more fulfilled lives. Part of that socialization often includes religion. Buettner found that regardless of denomination or religious affiliation, people who attend faith-based services four times a month add up to 14 years to their life expectancy.

“Diverse faith traditions support the importance of community and of seeking meaning beyond oneself,” says Chaplain Corky DeBoer, manager of Spiritual Services at Advocate Christ Medical Center. “Spirituality embraces supportive relationships, which in turn helps to reduce the sense of pain and anxiety often experienced when isolated or cut off from such support,” says Chaplain DeBoer.

Chaplain DeBoer says that believing in a Higher Power often shifts the focus off of oneself and can result in living more out of a sense of gratitude. “As people reach out to others or join others to make a difference in their communities or in our world, they experience more fulfillment and meaning in their lives, which also seems to increase longevity.”

As people of faith, we can embrace this news as one of the many natural ways that we promote the health and well-being of our members. Whether we have formal health programs or not, paying attention to the ways that we bring people together and offer support in times of need is profound health promotion activity.

Wishing you joy and good health,
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