

Faith Based Walking Programs

Faith-based organizations hold a special place in most communities. Not only do they minister to the spiritual needs of the community, but they also minister to the physical, social, psychological, and economic needs. In addition, many conduct health programs or have incorporated health messages into their traditional programs. Faith-based institutions are a natural venue for health-related programs because they:

- Are well-respected institutions, known for their concern for the well-being of their members and of the community as a whole.
- Provide existing infrastructure and related resources for health programs.
- Offer the opportunity to reach large numbers of people.
- May be seeking to involve the community with their organization.
- Foster a spirit of leadership and volunteerism.

Walking programs at faith-based institutions can be a terrific way to reach community members and encourage fellowship. Try these steps for starting a walking program at your church.

Talk to Your Church Leaders

Consult with your church leaders about starting a walking program at the church. If your church has a health committee, enlist their help to determine the walking program format that will work best for your church.

- Find a walking route.
- Establish meeting times when people can meet and walk. Consider offering different times to accommodate different work and life schedules.
- Will you invite parishners from neighboring churches to join you. Consider setting special walking times for specific audiences, e.g. seniors, youth, parents.
- How will you walk? Will you track your miles on log sheets? Will you make it a competition or make it a spiritual journey by adding scripture readings?

Get Members Involved

There are a number of activities that can be conducted by faith-based organizations to promote your walking program. There are six activities described below.

Bulletin Inserts

Many organizations have a weekly bulletin that is distributed to each person attending the service. An effective way to reach the group is with a message in the bulletin. The organization may create their own insert using the campaign message, or use a flyer or insert created by the campaign staff.

Church Newsletter

An article about the campaign or a Calendar of Events can also be included in the church newsletter.

Walking-Related Sermons or Announcements

Ask faith-based leaders to incorporate a health message into a sermon. A sermon combining a spiritual and physical health message can be an effective way to motivate participants. For example: A pastor could present a sermon on "Walking with Jesus". This message can be very effective and can inspire the congregation to participate in a prayer walk.

Speakers

A guest speaker is another effective way to inform the congregation. Arrange for a speaker, from the campaign's Speakers Bureau, to talk with a youth group, women's group, or prayer group.

Testimonials

Many faith-based organizations have a tradition of personal testimonials from members. This is an especially effective way of encouraging others to make positive changes in their own lives. Encourage members of the congregation who walk regularly and have benefited from walking to share their experiences.

Sign-up Drive

On a designated Sunday, all participating churches tried to recruit walkers to the campaign. One person within the church was designated to gather registration information and forward it to campaign staff.