



Healthy Bodies Healthy Spirits: A new pathway to a healthier West Virginia

Are you tired of seeing West Virginia on top of the national worst health lists? Ready to do something about it?

West Virginians of faith are joining forces across denominations to form the new Healthy Bodies Healthy Spirits Network (www.wvhealthyfaith.com). Dallas Seminary graduate Joshua Sowards has been hired to help build the network.

People who sign up will receive faith-based health and wellness “how-to” materials they can use in their churches. The network is also making short videos of outstanding WV church programs, so people in Gassaway can say, ‘Hey look what they’re doing in Delbarton! We could do that too!’

Sowards urges us to announce the network in church and give people a moment to sign up. During January 3 services at the First Baptist Church of Kenova, he signed up 87 people by asking them to pull out their cell phones and go to www.wvhealthyfaith.com. In just four minutes, using an overhead powerpoint presentation, he led the entire congregation through the sign-up process -- right on their cell phones.

His powerpoint is available at www.wvhealthyfaith.com. So are posters, bulletin inserts and a variety of tools we can use to let people know and give them the opportunity to sign up.

“This is literally a lifesaving mission,” said First Kenova’s Pastor, Steve Willis, a member of the network steering committee. Willis is lead pastor at FBC Kenova, author of *Winning the Food Fight* and contributing author of the national best-selling *Daniel Plan*. “We need to set a good example for our kids,” he said.

This coming summer, there will be workshops on topics like healthy cooking, gardening, and healthy child care. Already, in a pilot project, members of ten Huntington-area church members are being trained to lead an eight-week Daniel Plan healthy living program.

The network is partnering with Try This West Virginia, a statewide healthy-communities resource network. The Try This Web site, www.trythiswv.com, is literally a “how-to” resource guide to hundreds of healthy projects churches can choose from.

Churches can lead the way to a healthier future, Sowards said. People who sign up for the network will receive – free of obligation - faith-based opportunities, programs, resources, and funding possibilities. The network will spread West Virginia success stories. They hope to have thousands of people signed up by the end of 2016.

“Taking care of our bodies is service to God,” said Nazarene Rev. Lynn Keener, chair of the network steering committee. “Too many West Virginians are dying before their time. One in four of our eleven-year-olds has high blood pressure, West Virginia University studies tell us. Churches can help change that.”

To register and sign up, go to www.wvhealthyfaith.com.