

COMMUNITY COMING TOGETHER (CCT)

April, 2013

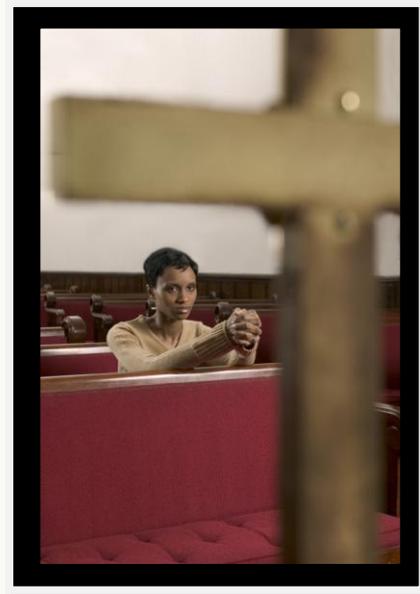
This month's theme is *Faith*



WHAT IS FAITH & HOW DOES IT INFLUENCE MENTAL HEALTH?

The field of health is often driven by science, although mental health has always been an imprecise science because of the unique characteristics of each individual. Faith is defined as “belief that is not based on proof” (Dictionary.com). In today’s modern, scientific world, is there room for faith? Is it possible to believe in something without empirical evidence to back it up? Perhaps, now more than ever, faith offers us extra resiliency from the many pressures of our daily lives. Several studies show the positive impact that faith has on our emotional well-being:

- The Alameda County Study, which trails nearly 7,000 Californians, showed that West Coast worshippers who participate in church-sponsored activities are markedly less stressed over finances, health and other daily concerns than non-spiritual types (Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences, 1998).
- A recent review of several studies suggests that spirituality is linked with low suicide rates, less alcohol and drug abuse, less criminal behavior, fewer divorces and higher marital satisfaction (Religion and Clinical Practice, 1996).
- Women with devout moms are 60% less likely to be depressed in 10 years than women whose mothers aren't so reverent, according to a Columbia University study. Daughters belonging to the same religious denomination as their mothers are even less likely (71%) to suffer the blues; sons were 84% less likely (Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997).
- A Duke University study of 577 men and women hospitalized for physical illness showed that the more patients used positive religious coping strategies (seeking spiritual support from friends and religious leaders, having faith in God, praying), the lower the level of their depressive symptoms and their quality of life (Journal of Mental and Nervous Disorders, 1998).



HOW DO I NURTURE FAITH?

Given the various positive findings related to maintaining and practicing a faith, it would seem that not only is it possible but highly desirable for us to develop our faith. Here are some suggestions for how we can accomplish that:

- **Relaxation & meditation:** taking time out of our busy lives to just be quiet and still can make a great difference, not just mentally but physically and spiritually. Listening to our inner self, relaxing our bodies, and opening our minds can have a profound effect on our lives.
- **Prayer:** Prayer may be the oldest spiritual practice and almost all world religions consider some form of prayer as central to a spiritual life. The mental and emotional release, along with a sense of connection to a higher power may be at the heart of prayer's effectiveness.
- **Spiritual reading:** browse at a local or online bookstore or the Public Library until you find something that “speaks” to you.
- **Spend time in nature:** in our largely urban existence, reconnecting with nature is a way to enrich us on so many levels, particularly in the way

“ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” **Jeremiah 29:11**



we experience our relationship to God.

- **Keep a Gratitude Journal:** for most of us, it is far easier to focus on all the things that are NOT going right in our lives that we lose sight of all the gifts we have on a daily basis. Even in our bleakest, darkest moments, there are things to be thankful for (the support of friends and family, the roof over our heads, the breath in our lungs). Start to keep track on a daily basis some of the things that you are thankful for, starting with a list of three items. You will be amazed how quickly this process begins to encourage you to pay attention to all the wonderful experiences you have throughout your day. Colors will seem brighter, and you will observe so many small but fabulous occurrences that would have previously escaped your notice!
- **Follow your passions:** do what makes you happy and brings you joy. When we experience those moments of making our hearts sing, it brings us inner peace, contentment, and a sense of fulfillment.

Source: Spirituality, Psychology Today, September/October, 1999

UPCOMING CCT & COMMUNITY EVENTS

Parent Survey: each year, our program is evaluated along with all the MHCB projects in the province. We would VERY much appreciate as many parents as possible filling out the parent survey which is available online and only takes about 5 minutes to complete. Simply go to <https://survey.albertahealthservices.ca> and when prompted, type in the code **2013p**. Thank you to all who participate!

CCT Logo display: Now that our logo contest is completed, we wanted to share all the wonderful entries with the rest of the community! The logos will be on display at the Medicine Hat Public Library for the next few weeks. Go check them out (and while you are there, you can also check out a few good books or DVD's!).

Easter program: CCT will be having activities on April 2 & 3 for any students from St. Mary's, Notre Dame or McCoy to participate in. For further information or to register a student, contact Caitlin (403-527-7616), Ashley (403-527-5118) or Kaley (403-527-8161).

We are nearing completion of our CCT website which will SOON be up & running! Please check us out!
www.communitycomingtogether.weebly.com