

# NEWS

## Greetings!

In the spring 2007 newsletter, I reintroduced the Community Needs Assessment Map (revised, see page 2) that the founding director of Congregational Health Partnership introduced four years ago. I previewed the next several issues of this newsletter as addressing the root causes of death from the faith community perspective.

Now, I sit mulling over how a meaningless existence may be seen as the root cause behind persons engaging in unhealthy behaviors and lifestyles. I am aware that admonishing faith communities to address a meaningful life is like instructing educational institutions to teach. Or a restaurant to cook and serve food. Of course! It is self-evident that meaning and purpose in life is the very core of faith.

Why get up and exercise? Why spend money on toothpaste instead of a lottery ticket? Why not eat mostly “comfort foods”? Why go through the hassle of arranging and enduring a colonoscopy? Why wash your hands or drive carefully? Why not just get drunk or high and forget it all? The range of attitudes—from nonchalance to tepid apathy to life-choking cynicism which are the root cause of the dis-ease of individuals and the slow demise of the entire planet—are, at their core, spiritual issues.

The answer of faith has always been: Choose life. Live in abundance! There is meaning and purpose in your existence. You are of infinite worth. You are loved by that which is infinitely greater than you can imagine. You matter. Your well-being is important!

Implicitly, faith communities are about the business of expanding and nourishing a life of meaning at every moment. Every prayer and meditation, every act of worship, every reading and commentary on sacred texts, religious education across the life span, acts of compassion and justice, connecting persons in community—all the things that make up a congregation of faith—aim to promote meaning. My invitation to you today, as clergy, health ministers, and faith community health providers, is to make a conscious, intentional, explicit health connection in your preaching, teaching, and community life.

Will it affect the root causes of death and lead to wiser, healthier life choices and behaviors? Let’s find out.

**L’Chiam! To life!**

**The Rev. Sandi John, MDiv, MS, APRN, BC  
Senior Manager, Congregational Health Partnership**

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# Spiritual Writings on the Meaning in Life

We were at work in a trench. I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious, “Yes” in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant

farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. “Et lux in tenebris lucet”—and the light shineth in the darkness.

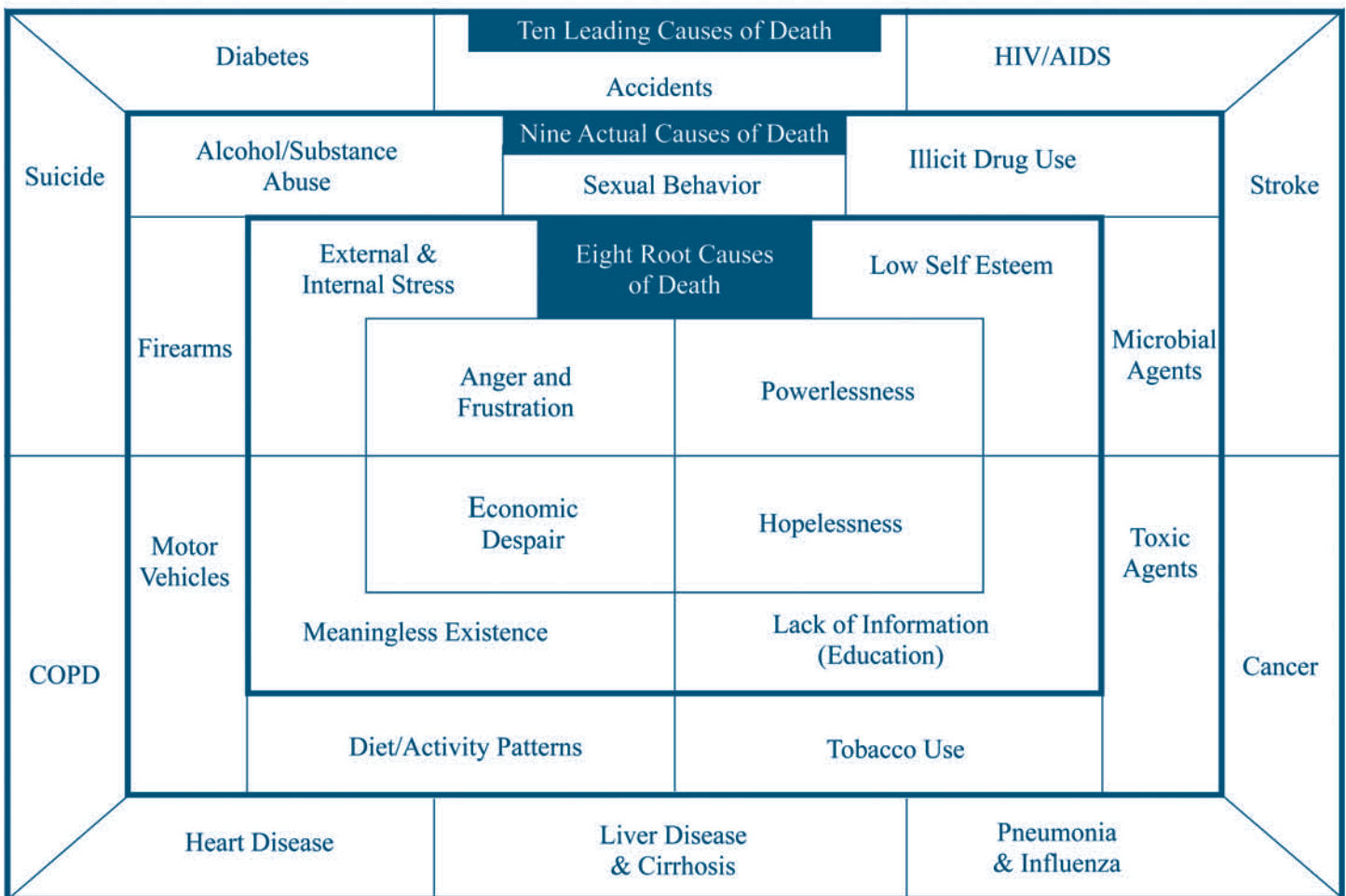
There were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your

inner freedom. It is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that makes life meaningful and purposeful.

Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on.

*Viktor E. Frankl,  
Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist,  
from Man’s Search for Meaning,  
Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.*

## Community Health Needs Map



Reprinted with permission, Dr. Randy Johnson, M.D., Marquette County Public Health Department

# Meaningful Existence: Compassionate Service and Justice-Seeking Activities

The questions of “why am I here, what purpose am I to serve, what does this all mean?” begin for many of us in our teenage years, and may very well follow us into adulthood. Perhaps, with proper guidance, teenagers and even younger children may receive answers to these questions through compassionate service projects and justice-seeking activities with their family, a church youth group, or even through their school. However, not every child is fortunate enough to have these opportunities available to them. Others may inadvertently miss the guideposts along the way. This may plague the conscious-minded child, possibly causing them to distract themselves with less than positive behavior. In my case, it was substance abuse (smoking, drinking and more), which I used to try to numb what I thought was a meaningless existence.

Preparation for college, college and graduate school, and then transitioning into the workforce

*He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.*

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

quelled, but did not eliminate these nagging questions for a time. Eventually these same thoughts of a meaningless existence returned with a vengeance in my early 30s. This caused me to indulge in substance abuse again, question the path I had taken in life, and put an enormous strain on my marital and family relationships.

During several years of self-imposed misery, I sought the counsel of friends and professionals, but nothing seemed capable of freeing me from the spot where I was stuck. My freedom began when I took action to help others by serving in a soup kitchen as a line cook. Over the course of several years, my activity level increased, and the breadth of my volunteering did as well. Not only did I cook, but I became knowledgeable about the plight of homeless persons through training and through interaction by distributing clothing, toiletries and over-the-counter medicines to them.

In time, I started to care about those less fortunate than myself, and then, I became open to additional opportunities to serve others in my community and even the world. Now, I often cook for others in need of food and fellowship several times a month. I look forward to helping them with their nutritional and, sometimes, emotional needs. In addition, I have become involved

*I was sent to preserve life.*

*Genesis 45:5*

*We all have the purpose of preserving life.*

with an international organization that cares for children and their families in regions suffering from drought, civil wars, government oppression, and disease. Presently, my involvement includes donating money and some personal interaction with the organization, but for the future, I hope to have opportunities to serve with my time. Maybe abroad? Maybe as a political advocate? Maybe a bit of both?

Does my life have meaning now? You bet it does! My service has pointed me toward a faith-based life and a passion to help others toward a more meaningful life that includes good nutrition, medical assistance and educational opportunities. During this journey, I found that having a life centered on me is meaningless. Now, I see hope for a richer and fuller life through compassionate service and justice-seeking on behalf of others.

*Stephen Francis, Little Falls  
Presbyterian Church*

# Sustaining a Meaningful Life in the Senior Years

“I wish God would just take me or I could just not eat and sleep away. My purpose on this earth is over. I’ve lived my life,” confided 82-year-old Margaret to the church visitor.

At 90 years old, Walter told his rabbi, “I’m not ready to go off my medicine. I feel I have lots of support that I can still give others, and there are still things I want to learn.”

What makes the difference for these two older persons in how they view their lives? A major difference seems to be their ability to see themselves as having a meaningful and purposeful life.

What can the faith community do to promote a sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of the older members?

- Be the presence of the Holy as you listen, with intention, without making judgments.
- Preach and teach a culture that values the experience and wisdom of older folks.
- Honor older persons as saints and crones, the wise ones. Give respect.
- Encourage control of one’s own life as long as possible. Don’t assume that because someone is old, he or she is no longer capable. When deci-

sion-making is removed, confidence is lost and then self-respect. False assumptions are sometimes made because people are not taking the time to listen (back to square one). When our elders feel disrespected, they lose hope.

- Actively seek out the wisdom and experience of older folks. Ask for their perspective and ideas based on their life experiences.
- Match up younger folks and older folks for mentoring and teaching.
- Affirm older folks as examples of **BEING** rather than **DOING**, which this culture desperately needs, living an example of serenity and integrity.
- Share with older folks how much their prayers and meditation mean to the faith community, that they are literally sustaining it. Ask them to be the keepers of the prayer list.
- Ask older persons for help with specific tasks that they are able to perform.
- Video or audiotape storytelling and life reviews.
- Connection, socialization, and companionship decrease the

*The capacity to care is the thing that gives life its deepest meaning and significance.*

*Pablo Casals*

isolation that often leads to feelings of meaninglessness. Bring seniors out to congregational and community events as much as possible, or go visit them.

*Sandi John with Judy Crooks,  
Community Specialist,  
Senior Navigator.*

**For more resources to support seniors in living a meaningful life, check out SeniorNavigator at [www.SeniorNavigator.org](http://www.SeniorNavigator.org).**

“The capacity to bless life is in everybody. The power of our blessing is not diminished by illness or age. On the contrary, our blessings become even more powerful as we grow older. They have survived the buffeting of our experience. We may have traveled a long, hard road to the place where we can remember once again who we are. That we have traveled and remembered gives hope to those we bless. Perhaps in time they too can remember this place beyond competition and struggle, this place where we belong to one another.”

*Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.,  
from My Grandfather’s Blessings,  
New York: Riverhead Books, 2000.*

CHECK OUT OUR WEB SITE!

[www.InovaHealthSource.com](http://www.InovaHealthSource.com)

- Download past issues of e-bulletins.
- View detailed documents on hosting a health fair or starting or sustaining a health ministry.
- Find the community resource you’ve been seeking.
- Let us know what impact your ministry has had so we can celebrate with you and have data to advocate for ministry expansion.



## Cup of Meaning

*Life is contained  
in a cup of meaning.  
You drink from that cup.  
The cup of meaning is sometimes full,  
sometimes empty.  
At times the cup is broken;  
And somehow—because you must—you find  
the resources to mend it,  
not just once but time and time again  
in the varied losses you suffer.*

*So, lift the cup of Life  
And drink deeply of Life and to Life.*



*Ed Searl, Unitarian Minister,  
from Beggar's Bouquet: A Circle of the Seasons,  
LaGrange, IL: Royal None Such Press, 1990,  
[www.searl.net](http://www.searl.net)*

To meditate is to be aware of what is going on—in our bodies, our feelings, our minds, and in the world. When we settle into the present moment, we can see beauties and wonders right before our eyes—a newborn baby, the sun rising in the sky. We can be very happy just by being aware of what is in front of us.

One way to help us dwell in the present moment is to practice reciting gathas or mindfulness verses.

## Waking Up

*Waking up this morning, I smile.  
Twenty-four brand new hours are  
before me.*

*I vow to live fully in each moment  
And to look at all beings with eyes  
of compassion.*

*Following the Breath  
Breathing in, I calm my body.  
Breathing out, I smile.  
Dwelling in the present moment,  
I know this is a wonderful moment!*

*Thich Nhat Hanh,  
Vietnamese Buddhist Monk,  
from Present Moment,  
Wonderful Moment, Berkeley:  
Parallax Press, 1990.*



*Inova Health System  
respects the unique nature  
of a congregation's health  
ministry, its forms of  
spiritual expression, and the  
objectives that emerge from a  
congregational needs  
assessment.*

## How to Contact Us

If you would like more information about Inova HealthSource Congregational Health Partnership, to volunteer, to update your contact information, or to be removed from the mailing list, please contact CHP at:

2832 Juniper Street, Suite 201  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
703-208-3628

Inova Health System is a not-for-profit health care system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services including emergency and urgent care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health and blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community we serve through excellence in patient care, education and research.

[www.inova.org](http://www.inova.org)

*Your contribution to the Congregational Health Partnership program will help ensure that other congregations receive similar health related benefits. To make a donation, please contact the Inova Health System Foundation at 703-289-2072.*

# What's Happening in the Faith Communities?

We Asked. You Responded. Thank you!

## *Sharing Stories of Teaching Health Literacy*

Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, 6304 Lee Chapel Road, Burke, Va., teaches two ESL classes. They meet Tuesday evenings, from 7 to 8 p.m., and Wednesday mornings, from 10 a.m. to noon. Health literacy is covered in the classes. We are working together for the community. Call 703-455-7500.

*Submitted by Linda Liptak*



## *Health Literacy*

In teaching health literacy I have found that giving very simple instructions is extremely important. Visuals help! A calendar showing the number and times to take pills each day, marking what days to begin and finish, can make the instructions clear.

I also use these principles for teaching low health literacy persons:

- Give opportunity to the patient to use as many senses as possible in understanding and gaining health knowledge.
- Use pictures, picture dialogs, sequencing instruction, seeing/hearing a video of “how to”

instruction, giving the patient time to repeat instruction and/or ask questions to create a meaningful learning situation.

- Remember that low literacy individuals are just that; they are individuals and deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion. They may not have the literacy skills of others, but that does not mean they lack the ability to learn those skills.
- Time is important to the health care giver. Plenty of time is also a very critical step in helping the low literacy patient learn and be successful in understanding the information given by the health professional. Rushing through a medical session could cause disastrous results.
- Watch the person’s body language and eyes to gain clues as to when understanding is reached.

*Submitted by Linda Whaley, ESL Teacher Trainer for the NorthStar Church Network.*



## *Eat Your Way to a Healthier Lifestyle*

St. John’s United Methodist Church in Springfield held a Health Discussion Series led by Beth Rehberger, BA ED and MS Health Promotion, and chairperson of the church Health Committee. It has been a wonderful class, meeting on Sunday morning for about 40 minutes for six sessions. We will continue to meet once a month. A book, “I Must Decrease: Inspiration for Dieters,” is the basis for the class. The program incorporates prayer with daily reading and journaling. The stated goal/mission is “to guide and provide answers to those people wishing to eat healthier and searching for the motivation and guidance to do so.” One person in the group has already lost at least 12 pounds. Others of us have lost lesser amounts, and learned much about the importance of “right” eating.

Beth is willing to talk with anyone interested in knowing more about the program. She can be reached at 703-941-5519.

*Submitted by Fran Matkins, Faith Community Nurse*

# What's Happening at Inova?

## *Preparandose Para Su Bébe*

Inova HealthSource presents a one-session, 4-hour class presented in Spanish that prepares families for labor and birth. It includes a discussion about medications during labor, relaxation techniques, the role of the support person, newborn care and infant feeding. Class meets monthly on a Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Cost is \$75. For more information, or to register for the class, call **703-204-3366**.

## *“Ask the Expert”*

Jack Cochran, MD, FACP; Chair, Department of Medicine/Inova Alexandria Hospital; Director, Neurodiagnostics Lab/Inova Fairfax Hospital; Director, Cerebrovascular Services/Inova Fairfax Hospital; and Co-Chair, Operation Stroke/Northern Virginia will present a free community lecture on stroke May 24, 2007, at 7 p.m., at Inova Fairfax Hospital Physicians Conference Center.

## **Namaste!**

*This is a yogic greeting which is most often translated, “The Spirit in me meets the same Spirit in you.” Life has meaning as we honor the Spirit in ourselves and one another. I also like the translation, “I see the divine spark within you.” If you carry a divine spark within, you will care for your health.*

## Inova WeightNET

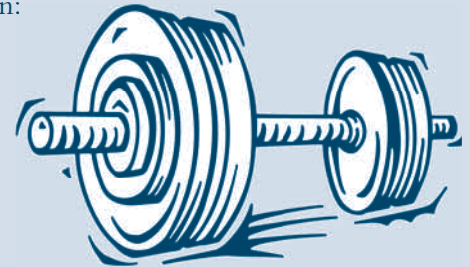
### Personal Weight Coach

Are you ready to tackle your weight, but can't make it to meetings? Then Personal Weight Coach is for you. This Internet-only program will address managing your weight through making healthier lifestyle choices—not by “dieting.” Classes are located on a private Web site and you will communicate with your Coach primarily through email. Cost is \$200 for the 12-week program. When can I start? Right away! We start working with you when you are ready. For more information, visit **[www.InovaHealthSource.com](http://www.InovaHealthSource.com)**.

### More Classes

Check out a wide variety of classes in:

- Fitness and well-being
- Birth and parenting
- Nutrition and weight
- Senior fitness
- CPR and first aid



Visit **[www.inova.org](http://www.inova.org)**. Click on “Health Info and Classes.”

## “Partners Together: Empowering Faith-based Leaders for Vibrant Health Ministries”

**A faith-based health conference focused on congregational responses to life-threatening diseases including HIV/AIDS.**

Friday, June 15, 2007

Keynote Speaker: Pernessa Seele, founder of the Balm in Gilead (funded by CDC) which works with churches and other faith communities to develop faith-based HIV programs/ministries both nationally and internationally. For more information, visit **[www.balmingilead.org](http://www.balmingilead.org)**.

### Workshops include:

- Starting a health and wellness ministry
- Working with teens
- Living with HIV
- Mental health/substance abuse concerns
- Promoting Latino health and wellness

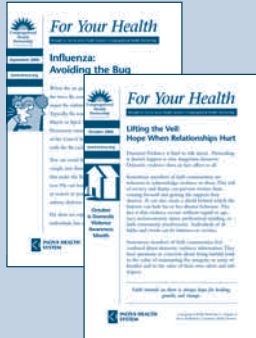
**Fee: \$35**

**Location TBD**

**Register Today!**

**Call 703-321-2600**

## e-BULLETIN CORNER



The CHP e-bulletin is a monthly health information pamphlet on various health topics. It is sent electronically for you to print, copy, and distribute in your congregation. If you would like to receive the monthly e-bulletin, e-mail [sandi.john@inova.com](mailto:sandi.john@inova.com).

### *Future Topics:*

Child Safety

Humor

What topics would you like to learn about?

## FAITH COMMUNITY NURSE NETWORK (FCNN)

This network is open to all faith community health ministers. Meetings offer networking opportunities, information about community resources, updates on health topics, education on the integration of faith and health, and sharing of experiences for developing your health ministry. The group has been meeting monthly on the third Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. A daytime meeting is being considered, as it seems to work better for others.

For more information, or to provide input on when and how often you would be able to meet, please contact Marsha Komandt at [mgkomandt@verizon.net](mailto:mgkomandt@verizon.net), or Sandi John at [sandi.john@inova.com](mailto:sandi.john@inova.com) or 703-208-3628.



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