

February is heart month

by Carol Sullivan

Monthly health observances in general can be confusing, overlapping, redundant, and otherwise hard to keep track of. Not so with heart month. Sharing the calendar with Valentine's Day, almost everyone knows that this is the month to take particular care of your heart. Because there are so many ways to take care of your heart, I would suggest that it is also a good month to start some formal health ministry in your parish.

This could take any of several paths. A walking or other exercise program, blood pressure screening, weight control, healthy eating, red dress day, and CPR classes – these all fall under the umbrella of both heart health and health ministry. The National Episcopal Health Ministries, NEHM (on the web at www.episcopalhealthministries.org), has ready-made walking and eating programs available on CDs for minimal cost. As the diocesan liaison, I can also help you with these as well as with the other activities. Perhaps you have some ideas of your own based on the needs and resources of your parish.

Physical health is not the only way to a happy heart. The heart is also, figuratively, our emotional center – at least in this culture! What about caring ministries such as a visiting team to keep shut-ins connected with the parish? Transportation volunteers to help with visits to physical therapy, chemo or radiation for those with no available family members are very valuable. Taking food to those temporarily unable to fix their own is – in a word – heartwarming! Prayer shawls, beads, and quilts are ways to use the arts and crafts skills of parish members to bring joy to the hearts of others. Lynne Shand will be doing a workshop on this very issue at the Diocesan Convention during Heart Month! If you have ever done any of these crafts or would like to learn, plan to attend. As long as your church or parish house has a restroom, you can utilize back door readings for health education. Each CD of twelve monthly issues has a “circulatory system health” entry for February! These are also available from NEHM – see above – and if there is a problem with the cost (\$10 per year), see me for help.

May your heart sing and leap for joy, be loyal and of good cheer; may it be tender, warm, light, and above all, healthy! Don't forget that dark chocolate, in moderation, of course, is also heart-healthy! Contact Carol Sullivan, the Diocese of Easton liaison to NEHM at 410-827-6907; or songofjoy@dmv.com.

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