

Spirituality, Seniors and the African American Church

**THE ROLE CHURCHES PLAY IN THE SPIRITUALTY
HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF SENIOR MEMBERS**



Reason for Research/Areas of Interest

Advanced certificate study for the Collaborative for Palliative Care, Finger Lakes Geriatric Education Center (University of Rochester) and Interdisciplinary Aging, Public Health, and Palliative Care (IAPHPC) Certificate Program

- ▶ What role does spirituality and the church play in the health and wellness of seniors
- ▶ What health and wellness issues are seniors facing and how is the church addressing them
- ▶ How does the church support senior members
- ▶ How can clinicians partner with the African American Senior community?

Definitions

▶ Spirituality

- ▶ Being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things

▶ Religion

- ▶ A particular system of faith and worship

Church

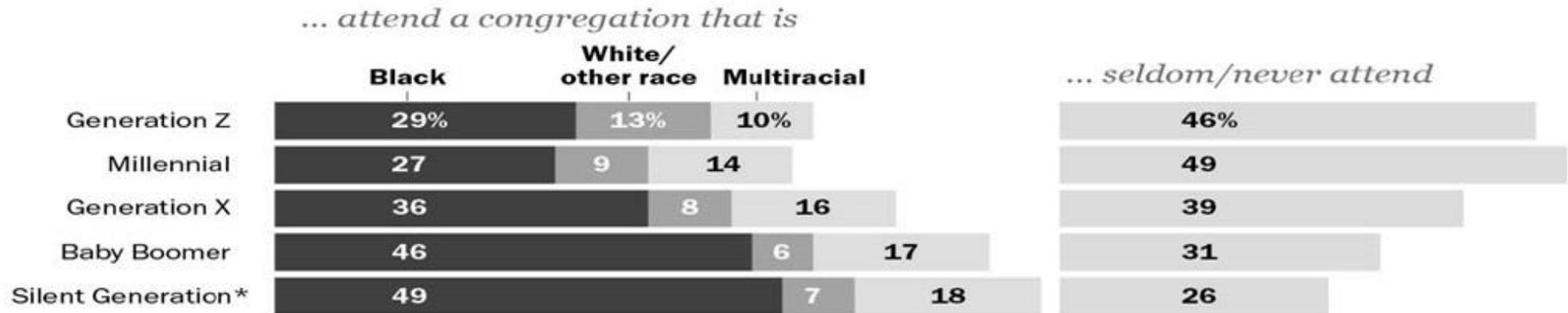
- ▶ Many seniors were brought up in the church and attend services on a regular basis
- ▶ It's a place where seniors fellowship with other members and seniors
- ▶ The church provides support, care and extended family



Are African American Seniors More Connected to the Church?

Younger Black Americans less connected to Black churches than older generations

% of Black Americans who ...



*Includes a very small number of those in the Greatest Generation (born before 1928).

Note: Those who did not give an answer not shown. The "seldom/never" column includes those who did not answer the question about how frequently they attend religious services.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults.

"Faith Among Black Americans"

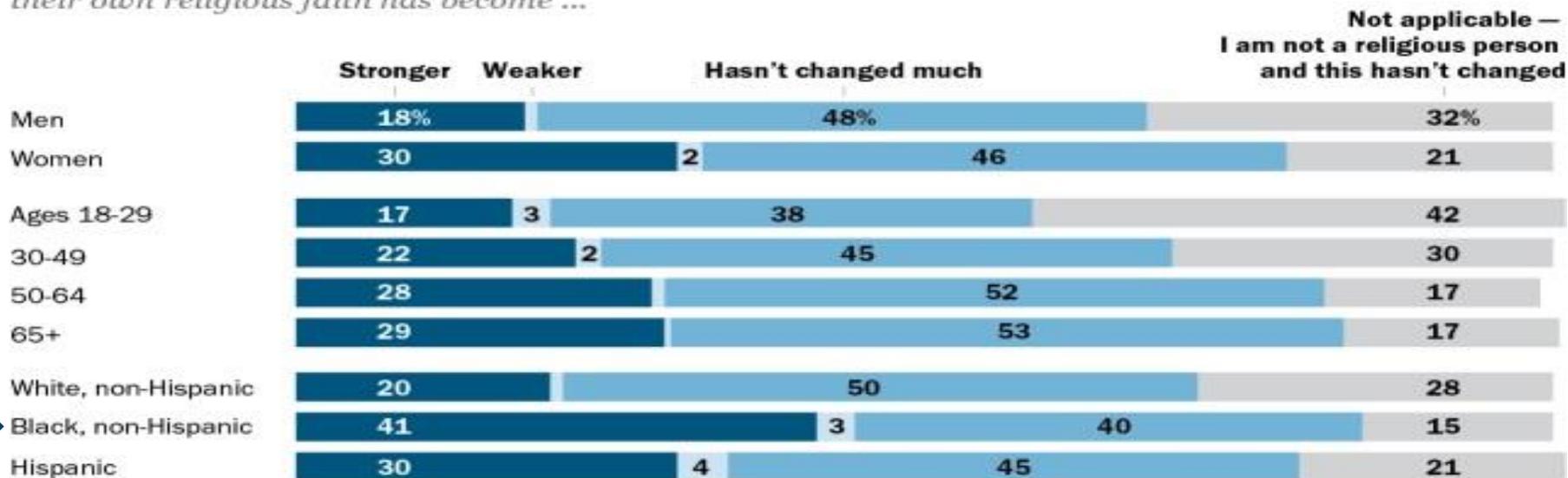
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Generation Z	6 - 24 years old
Millennial	25 - 40 years old
Generation X	41 - 56 years old
Baby Boomer	57 - 75 years old
Silent Generation	76 and above

Churches are Closed But Faith is Stronger

Black Americans more likely than whites and Hispanics to say their faith is stronger because of pandemic

% of U.S. adults who say that, as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, their own religious faith has become ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 20-26, 2020, among U.S. adults.

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The Role Spirituality Plays

Prayer, praise and worship are vital tools seniors use to connect to God

- ▶ **Psalm 103:1** Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name! (NKJV)
- ▶ **Psalm 63:3-4** Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. (NKJV)

Seniors believe in God and have faith that God will take care of them

- ▶ **1st Peter 5:7** Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. (NLT)
- ▶ **1 Cor. 5:7** For we walk by faith, not by sight. (NKJV)
- ▶ **Jeremiah 17:14** O LORD, if you heal me, I will be truly healed; if you save me, I will be truly saved. My praises are for you alone! (NLT)

Prayer

Prayer is one of the most powerful – well, I don't want to call it a weapon, but it's a tool, an instrument, a way of reaching out that humankind has.

We pray because we believe that praying can make what we believe, our dreams and our visions come true.

John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*
A Memoir of the Movement



Health and Wellness

Changes in Health

- ▶ Seniors believe their bodies are the temple of God
- ▶ Poor health can affect the spirituality of seniors positively or negatively
 - ▶ Seniors may feel that God has abandoned them in their senior years or their faith brings them closer to God
- ▶ People should be taught that as they get older their health will decline but that doesn't mean their spirituality has to decline

Health and Wellness Challenges

- ▶ Isolation/Loneliness/Loss
- ▶ Abuse
- ▶ Mental Health

Qualitative data collected previously from open-ended guided questions with clergy confirmed that many people who are faced with mental health issues and concerns look to church and religion to mitigate their challenges.

In focus group discussions with pastors, it was found that faith-based community leaders were addressing serious health and mental health issues in their respective congregations.

Spirituality and Religion: A Faith-Based Perspective on Mental Health and Well-Being (Denise Lawson, Gloria Anderson NASW Specialty Practice Sections Mental Health Fall/Winter 2020)

Health and Wellness Challenges

- ▶ Abandonment
 - ▶ Many seniors feel alone and abandoned
- ▶ Ageism
 - ▶ We are a society that does not value or respect age. Youth is glorified and age is demonized.

And now, in my old age, don't set me aside. Don't forsake me now
when my strength is failing.

Psalm 71:9 (NLT)

I will be your God throughout your lifetime until your hair is white with age.
I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.

Isaiah 46:4 (NLT)

Case Study – Loneliness/Abandonment

A senior member has a granddaughter (only local living relative) that promises to visit but never does. Her only contact with her granddaughter is via phone (pre-pandemic).

How can the church assist this senior member?

1. Pastor picks up other senior members and they visit her and take her out to lunch.
2. Congregation calls and visits this senior member so they become her extended family.

Covid-19 in 2021

Disparities Exposed by Covid-19

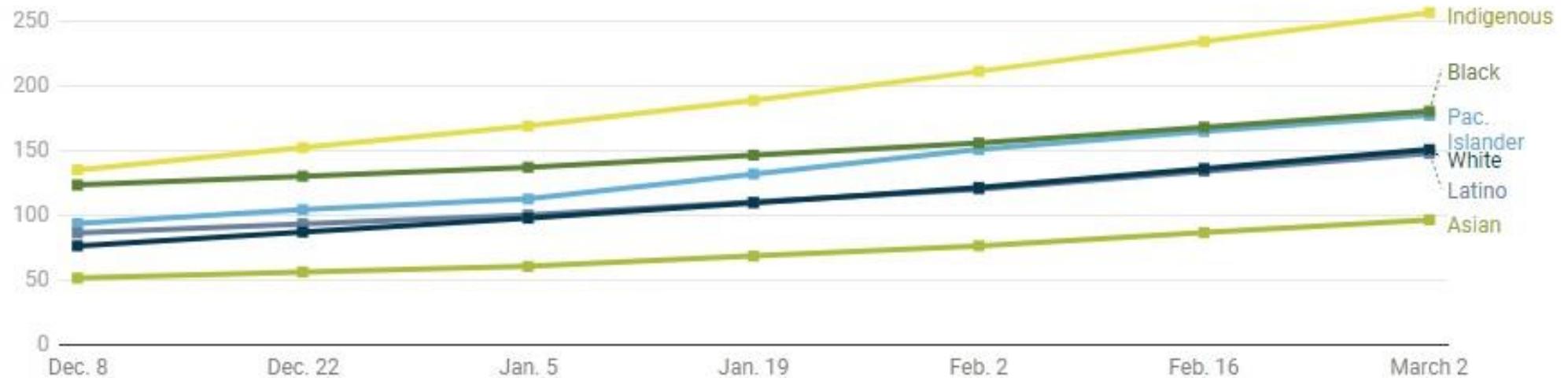
Not surprisingly, the pandemic has further exposed other interconnected factors, including preexisting conditions; lack of affordable healthcare; educational, income, and wealth gaps; and crowded housing where contagion may be heightened.

(Diane J. Chandler - Teach Me What I Do Not See: Lessons For the Church From a Global Pandemic, Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care 2021 Vol. 14(1) 7-30)

Death Rates

Indigenous, Black & Pacific Islander Americans have experienced the highest death tolls from COVID-19

Cumulative actual (crude) COVID-19 mortality rates per 100,000, by race and ethnicity, Dec. 8, 2020-March 2, 2021



Population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, latest American Community Survey. Five-year estimates have been used for Indigenous and Pacific Islander rates, to improve data reliability.

Source: [APM Research Lab](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Vaccination

Percentage of U.S. residents who have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, by race/ethnicity, across all states with comparable data



Data gathered May 17, 2021, from the District of Columbia and the following 33 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. Indigenous data was not available for the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Indiana, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas. Latino data was not available for Hawaii. Asian data was not available for the District of Columbia and Florida. Pacific Islanders are combined with Asian Americans in Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina and Virginia. All denominators are from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey and have been aligned to each state's method of data collection.

Source: [APM Research Lab](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Covid-19 Challenges

- ▶ Many churches have services via the internet (Zoom, Live Stream, Facebook Live, YouTube)
- ▶ Seniors may not be “tech savvy”
- ▶ Some churches are holding indoor services with limited seating
- ▶ Fear of contracting Covid-19
- ▶ Are these challenges adding to the feelings of abandonment and isolation?

Social Isolation

Being unable to meet regularly with church members, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, represents an additional challenge that places older Black adults at higher risk for experiencing social isolation and loneliness and associated mental health challenges (e.g., depression).

Older Black Americans During COVID-19: Race and Age Double Jeopardy
Linda M. Chatters, PhD, Harry Owen Taylor, PhD, MPH, MSW,
and Robert Joseph Taylor, PhD, MSW 2020 Society for Public
Health Education



Churches Support Their Seniors

The Support System

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:1-2 (NIV)

The Church - The Support System

- ▶ Love/Caring Members
- ▶ Companionship/Friendship/Fellowship/Meals



For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.
I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.
Matthew 25:35 (NLT)

Multi-Generational Churches

- ▶ Younger members are involved with senior members (Grandparents, Great Grandparents)
- ▶ Special days where seniors are acknowledged
- ▶ Ministries - ushers, choirs, after school programs
- ▶ Mid-week daytime bible study and church services so seniors don't have to come out at night



Advocacy

- ▶ Churches assist senior members with needed services
- ▶ Provide health and wellness seminars to seniors and caregivers
- ▶ Clergy are active in the community (meeting with local politicians, agencies)
- ▶ Churches belong to councils and denominational organizations that help disseminate information to congregations



Why Spirituality and the Church is Important for Seniors

- ▶ Spirituality
 - ▶ God is a present help
 - ▶ Worship is empowering
 - ▶ Prayer comforts and keeps people close to God
- ▶ Church gives seniors sense of:
 - ▶ Belonging
 - ▶ Community
 - ▶ Family



Spirituality, Religion, and the Clinician

THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY BUILDING A STRONG BOND WITH THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Should Clinicians Ask Questions About Religion and Spirituality?

- ▶ Clinicians are starting to have dialog about religion and spirituality concerning their patients and themselves
 - ▶ Does religion and spirituality play a role in health and wellness?
- ▶ When working with religious communities clinicians should be comfortable asking patients questions regarding religion and spirituality
- ▶ Some specialties are more comfortable with these discussions than others
 - ▶ Palliative Care
 - ▶ Hospice
 - ▶ Social Work

Studies

- ▶ Many studies on medicine and spirituality aren't recent
- ▶ Studies focus more on spirituality/religion of patients than clinicians
- ▶ A lot of studies conducted overseas
- ▶ Clinicians want to have these conversations but it is rarely done
 - ▶ Clinicians will pass spiritual/religious conversations to chaplains
- ▶ Spirituality discussions occur more in the cancer and palliative care specialties
- ▶ Should spiritual assessments be done by primary care physicians?

Do Physicians Incorporate Prayer Into Patient Visits?

Despite the influence of religion on physicians' lives and medical practice, the majority have not incorporated prayer into patient encounters.

Religious and Spiritual Beliefs of Physicians

Kristin A. Robinson, Meng-Ru Cheng, Patrick D. Hansen, Richard J. Gray

Study by Mayo Clinic Hospital, Phoenix and Scottsdale, AZ Published online

April, 2016



COMMUNITY UNITED

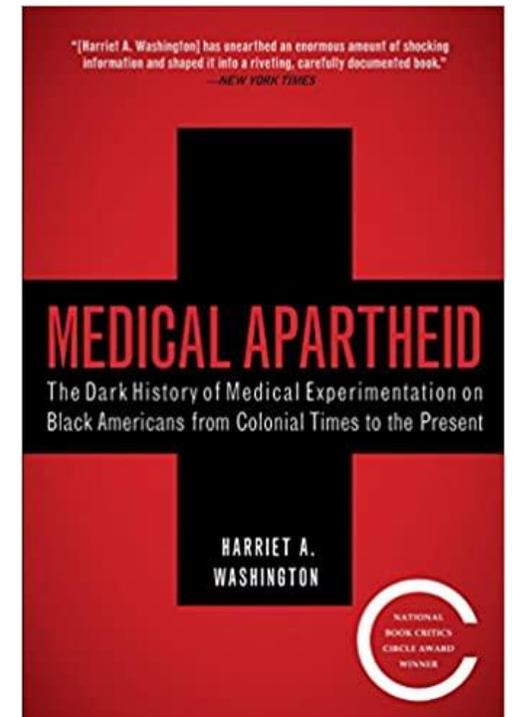
THE CHURCH AND MEDICAL COMMUNITY COMING TOGETHER

Clinicians and African American Seniors

- ▶ Do Clinicians understand the importance of religion and spirituality to African American Seniors?
- ▶ Are Clinicians comfortable talking about religion and spirituality?
- ▶ Are clinicians culturally aware?
- ▶ Clinicians should have a general knowledge of religion and spirituality since African American seniors are religious, spiritual people
- ▶ General knowledge includes prayer, basic bible principles

Medical Community and African American Community

- ▶ The relationship between the medical and African American community has been a strained one
- ▶ Now that the medical community wants to help the African American community, they must overcome atrocities of past and present treatment and the distrust of the African American Community
 - ▶ Covid-19 vaccines
 - ▶ Telehealth
- ▶ Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present by Harriet A. Washington



The Good Samaritan – Who is My Neighbor?

Luke 10:25-37

- ▶ Man robbed, beaten and left for dead
- ▶ Priest didn't help
- ▶ Levite didn't help (temple helper)
- ▶ A Samaritan helped (a stranger)
- ▶ The real neighbor was the one that showed pity and helped the beaten man
- ▶ Fiduciary duty to help those in need

Cultural Awareness

Spiritual preferences of different cultures

Cultural competence is a tool that assists us with bridging the gaps and gaining better understanding of the need to eliminate disparities.

It is important to work towards becoming culturally competent. Cultural humility is essential, but insufficient, in that it is not **action oriented**.

It is important for the clinician to understand our patients' diverse needs so that these can be incorporated into the treatment planning to ensure a holistic, **person-centered care experience** for all.

Professor Karen Bullock, PhD, LCSW, APHSW-C, FGSA
School of Social Work, Head, NC State

Cultural Awareness

- ▶ African American seniors are religious, spiritual people
- ▶ They have a strong belief in the Holy Trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit)
- ▶ God and God's healing power
- ▶ They have strong faith
- ▶ Prayer plays a vital role in their day to day lives
- ▶ The church is vital

Action in Motion

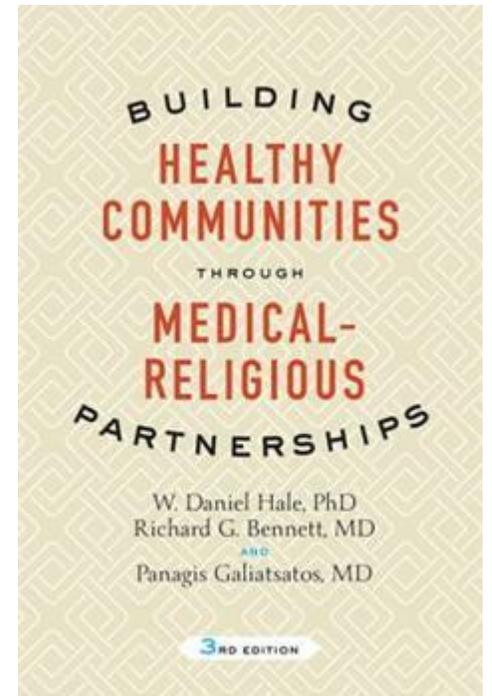
Try to bring somebody in to talk to us about it (diabetes). They'll send somebody every once in a while. It's not something consistent, and I think you need consistency with this. Maybe once a month you need to come and meet and just sit down and discuss the problems that you're having with your diabetes. Maybe somebody can help you.

“I did not want to take that medicine”: African Americans' reasons for diabetes medication nonadherence and perceived solutions for enhancing adherence

Olayinka O Shiyabola, Carolyn M Brown, Earlise C Ward
Division of Social and Administrative Sciences, School of Pharmacy, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, USA; Division of Health Outcomes and Pharmacy Practice, College of Pharmacy, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA; School of Nursing, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, USA Dove Press Journal Patient Preference and Adherence 2018:12

Resources – Working Together

- ▶ Building Healthy Communities through Medical-Religious Partnerships
 - ▶ Great examples of the medical and faith-based community working together to address diseases and treatments needed in minority communities
 - ▶ This text book addresses “taboo” topics like depression and cancer
- ▶ Alzheimer’s Association “Purple Sunday”
- ▶ Soul Shop Faith-Based workshops for addressing suicide



Ministers Fellowship Council of White Plains, NY Covid-19 Webinar

PANELISTS



*Judith Watson, RN, BSN, MPH
Executive Director
Mt. Vernon Health Center*



*Left: Dr. Mill Etienne
Right: Dr. Gizelka David West
Westchester Medical Center*



*Dr. Glenn Davis
Greenburgh Health Center*

GET THE FACTS

ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINE



How Do Vaccines Work?

Why Is There More Than One?

How Were They Developed So Quickly?

Are Vaccines Safe and Effective?

When Is It Available?

Should Children Get Vaccinated?

Should Recovered Covid-19 Patients Receive?

Will The Vaccine Make You Sick?

Will Masks And Social Distancing Be Required?

Where Can I Find More Information?

Have Different Manufacturers Collaborated?

*Get Your Questions
Answered*

Date

Monday 1/25/21

Time

6:00 PM

Zoom Contact

*Free Registration by email at
vaccine@greenburghny.com*

Watch Live Online

www.greenburghny.com

*Watch Live on Television at
Greenburgh Channel 76 for
cablevision &
Channel 35 for Fios*

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Tap In!

- ▶ Toolkit for training clergy and congregations on Dementia



Case Study 1

A local church approaches your organization. The Pastor explains that 20% of the senior membership has Cancer.

1. What suggestions/services can you provide to this congregation?
2. How can your organization build a relationship with this congregation?

Case Study 2

Many churches have members that are aging and need senior services. Their families need caregiver education and support.

1. What advice or resources can you give the Pastor?
2. Can you think of a creative idea where you can collaborate with this church?

Bridging the Gap

- ▶ Grassroots process
- ▶ Host health events (health fairs, mobile unit screenings, information sessions at local churches)
- ▶ Sponsor a luncheon or holiday events
 - ▶ Thanksgiving/Christmas – Jazz band, singers, poetry, word of encouragement
- ▶ Attend special church events

Know Your Local Community

- ▶ Meet with local pastors and build relationships with them
 - ▶ Find out what services and support the congregations need
 - ▶ Get to know church leadership and their work experience
 - ▶ Use churches as a resource for patient referrals
- ▶ Be humble, respectful and willing to implement what is discussed. You must listen outside of your comfort zone. Understand that the conversation will be uncomfortable. Discussion and action is key to bridge building.
- ▶ When people see that there are people that are willing to change what is going on, more people will get on board. You will have opposition, but build community relationships.

Bridge the Gap Action Plan

Area of Interest:	
Issues:	1. 2. 3. 4. Notes:
Short-term objectives (short measurable steps):	1. 2. 3. 4. Notes:
Long-term objectives final goals/achievements:	1. 2. 3. 4. Notes:
Action Steps:	1. 2. 3. 4. Notes:

Use Your Voice!

Isaiah 40:3

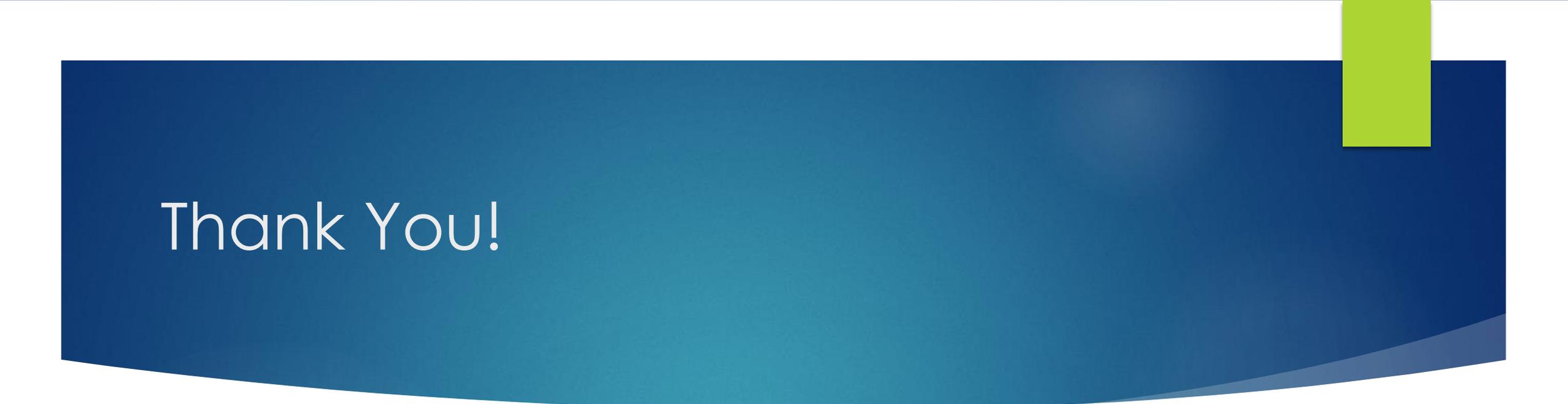
- ▶ Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, "Clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!"

Love Thy Neighbor

- ▶ Fiduciary responsibility
- ▶ Citizenship

Showing kindness and concern for the things that are important to our patients is really what matters here, and it's what the art of medicine is all about.

Dr. Harold Koenig, *Spirituality in Patient Care*, page 94



Thank You!

Q&A

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