

Rural S.C. Church Improves Heart Health

Issue

Having high blood pressure, being overweight, and living sedentary lifestyles are all risk factors that contribute to the number one cause of death in Marlboro County, heart disease. In 2006, according to a report from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), all of these risk factors were more prevalent in Marlboro County than overall in the state of South Carolina. Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church in Clio, located in rural Marlboro County, took these statistics seriously. In 2008, Rev. Robert Powe, the church's pastor, became very concerned about the health of his congregation and he decided to take action.

Intervention

Rev. Powe appointed the Young Women's Auxiliary (YWA) to implement a health ministry. To launch this initiative, the YWA coordinated a health event to share information about prevention of chronic conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes. DHEC Region 4 and other local health agencies were invited to participate. One of the DHEC Region 4 Chronic Disease Health Educators presented information on chronic disease risk factors, signs, symptoms, and prevention. As a result of this event, the congregation members agreed that positive changes were needed.

Rev. Powe encouraged the congregation to participate in activities offered at the church. The DHEC Region 4 Chronic Disease Health Educator, supported by the DHEC Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Division, provided education on the importance of proper nutrition, physical activity, and early detection. Because of these efforts, Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church has become qualified as an American Heart Association *Search Your Heart* church. To become qualified, the church must complete at least two educational sessions on heart disease prevention and complete an American Heart Association "cause event" to raise awareness about heart disease and stroke prevention.

Impact

New policies and procedures have been developed at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church as a result of the efforts of the church's health ministry. The policies include the following:

- Providing an environment supportive of active living:
 - Incorporating movement into faith-based gatherings and events
 - Three registered nurses, who are also members of the church, providing assistance with the implementation of the "Biggest Loser" program to challenge the congregation to be physically active; an initiative in which 30 church members are actively participating
- Providing an environment supportive of healthy eating:
 - Incorporating healthy food options during faith-based gatherings and events
 - Establishing a church garden for senior citizens
- Providing education to congregation members:
 - Inserting prevention and control education into church bulletins
 - Incorporating *Power to End Stroke* and *Families Eating Smart Moving More* (FESMM) healthy lifestyle curriculum into worship services and other church events
 - Making members aware of health screenings and encouraging them to participate

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