

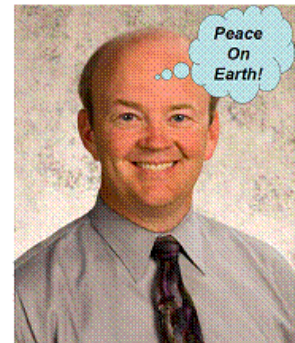


**Do You Know What I Know?
*Pray for peace, people everywhere***

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Dec. 21, 2011

Gallup polls show 40 percent of Americans report regular attendance at religious services. This time of year, that number soars.

Lately, increasing numbers of Americans pray about their health. Rates have more than tripled in an eight-year span, leaving researchers puzzled about the "... primary, overwhelming issue that would have so globally affected people." (Amy Wachholtz, Director of Health Psychology at U of MA, quoted in NY Times, 6/3/11).



Maybe people pray about their health because they know it helps. In the National Health Interview Survey, almost 60 percent of the 22,000+ participants said they have prayed for their health. These people also saw a physician more frequently, participated more often in vigorous exercise and used more relaxation techniques, support groups, meditation and complimentary and alternative medicine therapies. "People who pray for their health participate in more health promoting behaviors than people who do not pray for their health." (Harrigan JT, J Relig Health. 2011 Sep;50(3):602-7).

This seems to have remarkable benefit. Dozens of studies have shown that people who regularly attend religious services live longer than their non-religious counterparts; up to a maximum of seven years. The McCullough meta-analysis of 2000 confirmed this strong association. It found a 37 percent reduction in death rates among people who practice their faith, which happens to equal the amount that anti-cholesterol drugs reduce mortality following heart attacks! And, practicing religion nets about ten times more lives saved than these medications do, since about ten times as many people attend religious services as the number of people who have experienced a heart attack.

Religious practice specifically reduces the effects of stress-related illness and cardiovascular disease. It probably does this through several mechanisms. Practitioners make better life choices, adopt healthier lifestyles, cope better, and have more social support. A report this year from Yeshiva University of Manhattan involving nearly 100,000 participants in the Women's Health Initiative found that "People who attend religious services regularly are more likely to have a positive outlook on life and are less likely to suffer from depression . . . Those who attend religious services on a regular basis have a 56 percent higher chance of having an optimistic view of life, and a 27 percent lesser chance of suffering from depression than those who do not" – (summarized by Marco Tosatti 11/16/11, Vatican Insider).

This brings "Occ Doc in a Christmas Box" to the end of my carol-themed series. Like the Mighty King said to the people everywhere: "pray for peace, people everywhere." Peace begins in your heart, gives you hope, and brings you health of mind and body. I pray that for all of you in the coming year.