



Planting Seeds For A Healthy Tomorrow

Sharing What Works

raising up

HEALTHY WOMEN AND GIRLS

W O M E N O F T H E E L C A



A resource from **Women of the ELCA**



When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless and intelligence cannot be applied.

—Herophilos, a physician who lived 335-280 BC

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In 2004 Women of the ELCA's churchwide executive board created a health initiative, *Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls*. The initiative seeks to engage all women and girls in this church in making and fostering spiritually, physically and emotionally healthy choices. The initiative supports women and together we address some of the harsh realities we face, particularly around heart disease and stroke.

Churchwide-initiated efforts for Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls have included:

2005

- *Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls* health initiative launched
- Inaugural Run, Walk and Roll held at 6th Triennial Gathering
- *A Journey to Wellness*, a discussion starter program resource, published¹
- Health column by Molly Ginty begins in *Lutheran Woman Today*
- Annual churchwide grants award money to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls

2006

- Executive board endorses the federal HEART for Women Act (Heart Disease Education, Analysis Research, and Treatment for Women Act)²
- Varied planning resources published to womenoftheelca.org³
- Act Boldly for Health Bible study published⁴
- Two Healthy Heart events held
- Annual churchwide grants award money to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls

2007

- *Living from the Heart of God*, a journal for life stages, published
- Annual churchwide grants award money to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls

2008

- Run, Walk and Roll at 7th Triennial Gathering
- Annual churchwide grants award money to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls

1 This is available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search "journey to wellness."

2 The Heart Disease Education, Analysis Research and Treatment for Women Act was first introduced in both the U.S. House and Senate in 2005 but it did not move out of committee. It was reintroduced in 2007, and the House passed it in September 2008. It was not passed by the Senate and therefore did not become law. It was reintroduced in 2009. As of May 2011, the proposed legislation is stalled in committee.

3 These resources are available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search "heart event" to access a planning guide for holding a Healthy Heart event, including Stations of the Healthy Heart, tip cards and a guide to planning a run, walk and roll.

4 This is available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search for "act boldly for health" (be sure to include the quotation marks).

2009

- *Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls: Connecting with and Supporting Girls* published⁵
- Seed grants program introduced and application process opens to congregational units of Women of the ELCA
- Annual churchwide grants award funding to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls
- Program resources addressing emotional, spiritual and physical health published, including *Sacred Spaces* and *Shared Wisdom: An effective style of leadership*⁶

2010

- Congregational units receive first seed grants
- Annual churchwide grants award funding to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls
- Program resources addressing emotional, spiritual and physical health published, including *Journaling: Create your own sacred writings*, *The Faces of Grief: Finding wholeness and peace after loss* and *Women Over 50 and HIV/AIDS*⁷

2011

- Annual churchwide grants award funding to programs supporting the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women and girls
- Program resources addressing emotional, spiritual and physical health published, including *Knitting as a spiritual practice* and *Resurrection: a holy discipline*⁸
- Run, Walk and Roll at 8th Triennial Gathering

The seed grant program was created to increase the capacity of the initiative to affect the lives of women and girls. These seed grants were given to Women of the ELCA units to continue in raising awareness, educating and promoting wellness among women and girls who were limited by financial resources in moving forward and continuing the work they have started.

This new seed grants program encourages Women of the ELCA units to think big and act boldly in educating, advocating and emboldening women and girls to lead healthier lives in Women of the ELCA units.

5 This is available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search “supporting girls.”

6 These and other program resources are available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search using the resource title or select the Program Resources tab.

7 These and other program resources are available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search using the resource title or select the Program Resources tab.

8 These and other program resources are available for free download. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search using the resource title or select the Program Resources tab.

The first Raising Up Healthy Women and Girl Seed Grants were awarded to congregational units in the following congregations:

All Peoples Gathering, Milwaukee, Wis.
Ascension, Los Angeles, Calif.
Bethel, Chicago, Ill.
Church of the Abiding Savior, Durham, N.C.
First, Mount Carroll, Ill.
Good Samaritan, Lanham, Md.
Martin Luther Church, Charleston, S.C.
Our Savior, Rochester, Minn.
Ray, Ray, N.D.
St. John, Honesdale, Pa.
St. John, Walhalla, S.C.
St. Mark, Chicago, Ill.
St. Stephen, Chicago, Ill.
St. John, Richland Center, Wis.
St. Paul, Port Huron, Mich.
St. Stephens, Hickory, N.C.
Trinity, Kankakee, Ill.

Along with sharing their programs, projects and events for this resource, each unit has planted a seed for the next cycle of seed grants by making a financial contribution to the initiative.

This resource is designed with flexibility and can be used in any number of ways by an individual or a group. Use it to generate ideas, discern new direction and next steps or to begin detailed planning.

- This resource can be used to introduce your unit or, better yet, all women in your congregation to the Women of the ELCA health initiative, *Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls*. The material in the Introduction is especially helpful as is the resource *A Journey to Wellness*. (This free resource is available online. Go to womenoftheelca.org and search “journey to wellness” to download the PDF.)
- This resource can also be used to design and plan your own program, project or event in support of the health initiative. The activities carried out by the first seed grant recipients are unique to their own locations and needs. However, you can adapt their ideas, making them suit the needs and situations facing your congregational unit.
- Women and girls interact in their daily lives and need each other to build community. As you plan your next steps in the health initiative, plan to bring together women and girls of all ages, both in your congregation and your community.

The programs and projects funded by the seed grants met the criteria:

1. Bring together women in the unit and community
2. Meet the goals of the initiative
3. Be replicable in other settings

The grantees were also required to plant a seed (make a financial contribution to the seed grant program) and provide a final report.

The eight categories listed represent the venues used to address the concerns and challenges identified as the focus of the unit's work. Some units are listed in more than one category. There is great similarity in the issues and challenges women and girls face across the country that can be addressed in a variety of ways.

Health/Wellness Fair

Ray Lutheran Church Women, Ray, N.D. 3A

First Evangelical Lutheran Church Women, Mount Carroll, Ill. 5B

Wellness Seminar/Program

St. Stephens Lutheran Women of the ELCA, Hickory, N.C. 9B

St. John's Women of the ELCA, Honesdale, Pa. 7E

Women of John's Richland Center Lutheran Church, Richland Center, Wis. 5K

Our Savior's Lutheran Church Women, Rochester, Minn. 3I

Mentoring/Peer Education

Church of the Abiding Savior Lutheran Women, Durham, N.C. 9B

Women of St Mark Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill. 5A

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church Women, Chicago, Ill. 5A

Good Samaritan Lutheran Church Women, Lanham, Md. 8G

Emotional Health Education/Outreach

St. Paul Lutheran Church Women, Port Huron, Mich. 6A

Church of the Abiding Savior Lutheran Women, Durham, N.C. 9B

Ascension Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, Calif. 2B

Gardening

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church Women, Chicago, Ill. 5A

Healthy Eating Education

Ascension Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, Calif. 2B

Good Samaritan Lutheran Church Women, Lanham, Md. 8G

Exercise/Fitness Program

Bethel Lutheran Church Women, Chicago, Ill. 5A

Women of the ELCA of Martin Luther Church, Charleston, S.C. 9C

Our Savior's Lutheran Church Women, Rochester, Minn. 3I

All Peoples Gathering Lutheran Church Women, Milwaukee, Wis. 5J

Good Samaritan Lutheran Church Women, Lanham, Md. 8G

Health Retreats

Trinity Lutheran Church, Kankakee, Ill. 5C

Health fairs aren't a new idea. That does not mean they aren't valuable and necessary, however. The women of **First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mount Carroll, Ill.**, created a project that offers something not easily found in their county. More than half the population of the mostly rural county is female, and people often travel 25 to 30 miles for healthcare and hospitalization. Few opportunities exist for health assessments and wellness events.

The women of First Evangelical organized their annual Health and Wellness Fair around the ELCA Wholeness Wheel¹ to promote a balanced and healthy life. The fair was open to the community. While their booths and demonstrations addressed many of the wheel's elements, they stressed the social, emotional and physical well-being of women of all ages. They featured healthy snack demonstrations, chair massage, yoga, centering prayer, body mass index calculations, diabetes education, blood pressure checks and resource people to talk about over-all well-being. Local professionals and vendors offered information and assessments while representatives from the American Lung Association and the American Cancer Society educated participants.

First Evangelical's women offered special incentives to come as mother/daughter, sister/sister, aunt/niece, godmother/godchild pairings so the event would encompass an intergenerational group.

Sometimes people hesitate to speak with vendors and those who staff booths at such fairs. However, the women of First Evangelical devised a clever way to engage attendees. Each participant received a card that, once stamped by all the vendors at the fair, could be entered into a drawing to win a prize. That dramatically increased the opportunity for interaction between vendors and participants.

In a slightly different twist, the women of **Ray Lutheran Church in Ray, N.D.**, hosted a healthy supper, then had nurses on hand to check blood pressure and blood sugar as well as offer flu shots. Their annual health fair included three 45-minute sessions, and participants self-selected from different speakers or activities to fill in their three sessions. This year's program expanded to add sessions to focus on specific needs of girls in grades 7 through 12.

9 For more information about the Wholeness Wheel, go to www.elca.org and search "wholeness wheel."

With the current emphasis on fitness and a wholistic view of health, the Faithfully Fit Forever program offered by women of **Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Rochester, Minn.**, stands out. Although Our Savior's women initially started a health initiative in 2009, a Women of the ELCA seed grant allowed them to add the Faithfully Fit Forever segment. Developed by MeritCare Health Systems in Fargo, N.D., Faithfully Fit Forever sessions include enhancement of body, mind and spirit through exercise, education on a health-related topic and devotions.

Four women from Our Savior's Women of the ELCA were trained in January 2010 and then introduced the program to other women in the congregation over the course of 10 sessions during Lent that year. Women of all ages were encouraged to participate. Because the women at Our Savior's wish to help build healthy relationships between girls and their mothers, they invited girls in confirmation and youth group settings. Girl Scouts and community members who use the congregation's facilities were also encouraged to participate. The program encouraged positive behaviors and role modeling as it focused on wholistic and healthy living.

Each week for a 10-week-period in the fall of 2010, participants attended either an 8:30 a.m. class or a 4 p.m. class. Each class was one hour in length. The afternoon sessions were scheduled around confirmation instruction to increase the likelihood of including girls from that group. Morning classes had the most regular attendees, however.

They offered the morning class again during Lent in 2011 and linked it with morning prayer already scheduled by the Our Savior pastors. Also during Lent, the women placed arrows around the church to mark a path for walkers to "take it inside." They put inspirational messages on the arrows so participants could reflect on their Lenten journey. And they added a challenge for participants to track their activity on a chart in the church narthex—a challenge to walk the equivalent miles to Mexico, where a church mission group was headed. They are now considering a 2012 "Road to Jerusalem!" challenge.

Our Savior's women moved the exercise bands and weights they'd purchased for this program into a room of the church that was accessible to others in the congregation, too. That move brought a positive response, and more people could achieve their fitness goals.

Program facilitators also offered to be a resource for the Girl Scouts with their program needs—offering to be available for fitness, wellness badges or events.

Another congregation in Rochester also had women trained to lead Faithfully Fit Forever sessions, and a schedule exchange was arranged to provide more time choices for participants.

Women of all ages are now invited to Our Savior's women's events as a result of this program. Several teen girls attended the 2010 Fall Retreat; and young girls, teens, college-age women and young adults joined the group for the Spring Alleluia Celebration.

In addition, the women invited families of all ages to gather at a local nature center for a January afternoon of skiing, snow shoeing, hiking and sledding. This afternoon activity drew more than 25 people, allowing the program to touch even more lives.

Because MeritCare Health Systems offers the Faithfully Fit Forever training across the country, any women's group should be able to start a program.

St. Stephen's Women of the ELCA in Hickory, N.C., hosted a health seminar last fall for women and girls 18 and older in its congregation and 50 area congregations. Eight presenters covered a range of health issues that included cancer screening, hypertension, bone health, stress, nutrition and diet, along with emotional and spiritual issues. In 2011, the group is focusing attention on nutrition and obesity through development of an institute at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory.

And in **Honesdale, Pa.**, **St. John's Women of the ELCA** unit provides blood pressure screenings monthly for members of its congregation and bimonthly for its community during what it calls Saturday Together Luncheons. The luncheons draw large numbers of people, with special attention paid to bringing in participants who don't have medical insurance or access to good health care.

A 12-week wellness program offered by the women of **St. John's Lutheran Church in Richland Center, Wis.**, focuses on empowering women of all ages to make healthy choices in all aspects of their lives. The program encourages spiritual growth through Bible study and time spent with other Christian women, physical growth through healthy eating and regular exercise and emotional growth by building good self-esteem and healthy relationships.

A popular poem making the rounds as an email forward is about “The Flaw in Women.” The poem touts all the positive things about women and ends with: “However, if there is one flaw in women, it is that they forget their worth.” The women of **Church of the Abiding Savior in Durham, N.C.**, are trying to change that.

They partnered with the congregation’s campus ministry outreach program to offer Spoken Word, a form of poetry writing and reading that helps women and girls gain skills for self-expression. Through the program, women and girls learn to speak up for themselves and others. They learn how to listen to themselves and strengthen their discernment skills when listening for God’s voice.

We all know the power of words. Abiding Savior’s women want to empower women and girls, through the power of words, to challenge the stronghold of poor health that impacts the lives of many women of color. Perhaps then these women can break that cycle for the girls in their lives as well.

This project is all about helping women and girls speak out knowledgeably about their own health and spiritual needs—including topics such as the HIV/AIDS and obesity pandemics and mental illness, which still carries a stigma.

The project targets women and girls 12 and older. Other Women of the ELCA units and community churches were invited to participate as were young women on campus—offering good interaction between Abiding Savior’s girls and women, young women on campus and women and girls in the community. Women and girls build trust and confidence as they participate.

At **St. Mark Lutheran Church in Chicago**, members know that it really *does* take a village to effect healthy change so all can live well. Its Women of the ELCA unit committed to working with the young girls (ages 9 to 18) and women of the community on a year-long process starting in October 2010. The program includes life skills, information, education and prevention methods for promoting health and wellness, as well as a component on mentoring, body image and self-esteem. The program encourages cross-generational sharing and caring. An earlier workshop for teenage girls addressed sex and self-esteem, healthy eating and the importance of water.

The Generational Garden program of **St. Stephen’s Lutheran Church Women in Chicago** uses a vegetable garden to help women and girls lead healthier lives. The project fosters relationships that combine the wisdom of seniors, the energy and excitement of youth and the passion and promise of mature women—and it’s open to women of the surrounding area and young women in the local grade schools.

The women of **Good Samaritan Lutheran Church in Lanham, Md.**, created a program with three elements: a peer-to-peer event in homes—where neighbors are invited in to hear an educational program on breast cancer awareness and prevention, healthy eating classes open to the public (and to those who attended the peer-to-peer events) and exercise classes at the church.

St. Paul Lutheran Church Women of the ELCA in Port Huron, Mich., created Heart Works as a prayer shawl ministry. It began in 2008 and with a Women of the ELCA seed grant, has expanded. Initially the group gave prayer shawls to those who were weary, lonely or in pain. Now the women give away “magic hug squares” (12-inch knit or crocheted squares) to wrap around beanie babies that comfort hospitalized pediatric patients; red scarves for Women’s Heart Health month; and warm hats, scarves and mittens to share at the holiday season. In addition they make pink scarves to give women affected by breast cancer. Members of the prayer shawl ministry discovered that they, too, benefited from the ministry: Knitting and crocheting help manage stress and depression and keep them healthier in body and mind.

The seed grant allowed Heart Works and the St. Paul Women of the ELCA to host a health retreat to teach women and girls to care for themselves physically, spiritually and emotionally. They set up several “Stations of the Heart” with materials available from Women of the ELCA to encourage healthy living. (Visit womenoftheelca.org and search for “stations of the heart” for more information about these materials.)

The Spoken Word poetry writing and reading project mentioned earlier and undertaken by the women of **Church of the Abiding Savior in Durham, N.C.**, offers a rich resource for emotional health since it teaches women and girls how to use poetry to express their feelings and thoughts. Once they learn this technique, they gain the power to speak out for themselves and other women and girls.

And in **Los Angeles**, the women of **Ascension Lutheran Church** are taking on the issue of obesity, a serious problem in our country and one that causes health problems as well as low self-esteem. Read more about this in the section “Healthy Eating Education,” page 16.

The Generational Garden project of **St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Chicago** demonstrates how a garden works from the earth to the table, and it provides the centerpiece for discussing healthy eating habits and health concerns from diabetes to obesity to hypertension. This project involves elders and mature women to young girls. They participate in everything from tilling the ground, building raised beds, growing and planting seedlings, upkeep and watering to harvesting the crops to be sold on-site. Women of all ages learn to lead healthier lives and to take ownership in growing their own food.

Participating in each phase of gardening helps girls and women of all ages see their role as co-creators with God. Gardening can be a meditational experience that deepens a relationship with God.

The garden also provides a symbol for the community of what can be done when a community works together. The garden's harvest is sold on-site on Saturday mornings in August and September. The women at St. Stephen's plan to start gardens at several other area Lutheran churches.

Ascension Lutheran Church Women in Los Angeles partner with two groups in their congregation, Sisters2Sisters (a program in which women 40 and younger mentor girls in their congregation and community who are primarily in elementary and middle school) and My Friend's House (the congregation's outreach center, which provides food and clothing to those in need in the community). Together they host a healthy eating and cooking workshop, using the expertise of members who are dietitians and professional chefs.

The program reaches out to members of Ascension; recipients of My Friend's House food distribution program; the immediate community; the women's groups of nine sister congregations in New City Parish, Inc., a coalition of Lutheran congregations; and churches of other denominations in Ascension's neighborhood.

The intent of this program is to help women and girls make healthier choices in eating and cooking. This helps them reduce their caloric intake and increase their intake of essential nutrients so they can lose weight or maintain a healthy weight. This educational piece helps them to reduce their chances of serious illness such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. It addresses the very real problem of obesity, a problem in our country where one in three adults is obese.

The grant funds helped My Friend's House to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from the Los Angeles Food Bank for its food distribution program. This is especially important because low-income communities are filled with fast-food establishments but limited in numbers of grocery stores with fresh produce. This project shows women how to increase the intake of fruits and vegetables by purchasing fresh or frozen items and preparing a tasty, nutritious and well-balanced meal in about 30 to 45 minutes.

The women of **Good Samaritan Lutheran Church in Lanham, Md.**, also promote healthy eating education. One piece of their three-part project is a healthy eating cooking class (the other two pieces are peer-to-peer education and exercise classes). To embrace the diversity of the area, they tailored the class with ethnic cuisine cooking tips.

Do you remember the '50s phenomenon of hula hoops?

Think you're too old for it? Think again.

Hula hoops are making a comeback in **Charleston, S.C.**, where Hooping for Health gets girls and women moving in a fun and exciting way. Begun by the **Women of the ELCA at Martin Luther Church**, Hooping for Health is great for everyone from toddlers to elders. Participants create their own hula hoops and learn how to burn calories, tone muscles and sculpt their bodies. While becoming healthier through movement, participants also share life experiences and moments of growing in God's grace. They learn, through the use of charts and nutritious meals, to see the correlation between what goes into their mouths and what happens to their bodies and in their lives.

The group begins slowly with the hoop making and training and then transitions into learning steps and moves to increase the level of fun and the level of exercise. An outside event leader helps all girls and women choose the correct size hoop for their body and helps them in the design and decoration of their hoops. The concentration needed to maintain hooping movements is conducive to meditation and prayer, too.

The community is invited to participate, and everyone is encouraged to invite friends and neighbors. To add to the fun, prizes are offered for those who meet hooping challenges.

Some communities have easy access to exercise facilities, health and wellness education and places to learn about good nutrition. Not everyone has such access, however. Recognizing that hurdle, the women of **Bethel Lutheran Church in Chicago** started Fit Folks of Faith. Partnering with Bethel's Men's Ministry, the women focused this fitness and wellness education program on ESP: the emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of the lives of women, girls and whole families.

Bethel offers a safe place (both physically and spiritually) to exercise, unwind, reflect and pray. Through this program, Bethel's women can affect the self-esteem of women and girls by encouraging them to develop healthier eating habits, body images and by learning new ways to prepare meals to combat diseases plaguing the community (obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes).

Fit Folks of Faith offers exercise classes twice a week, along with time for prayer, meditation and nutrition education sessions. The program shows participants how faith and fitness are connected, using the messages in Daniel 1. Fit Folks of Faith also includes health screenings to document where people are when they begin the program.

An additional community piece of the program involves local businesses and healthcare agencies that are invited to connect with the residents of their underserved community. As part of the classes, girls and their caregivers look at the issue of obesity and discover the obstacles to healthy eating in their community. To do so, they use an interactive community game called "Where Can I Find a Kiwi? Navigating the Food Desert," which lets them search their community for nutritious foods and discuss food justice issues.

The Faithfully Fit Forever program of **Our Savior's Lutheran Church Women in Rochester, Minn.**, also includes a focus on exercise as one of its elements to enhance body, mind and spirit.

In **Milwaukee, Wis.**, the women of **All Peoples Gathering Lutheran Church** based its Fit to be Faithful program on TV's *The Biggest Loser*, adding elements of physical and spiritual health. All Peoples' parish nurse educates women of all ages on health, nutrition and exercise while she also demonstrates the importance of managing high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke-avoidance. The seven-week program includes devotions, prayer, education, an initial weigh-in followed by weekly weigh-ins and 30 minutes of group exercise.

Good Samaritan Lutheran Church Women in Lanham, Md., also included an exercise component in its program. The organization supplied exercise bands and paid for a certified instructor to teach the exercise classes.

The women of Trinity Lutheran Church in Kankakee, Ill., felt that due to the high unemployment, crime rates and medical/health concerns in their community that affect women and girls, a Mind, Body, Spirit Workshop was needed. Trinity's women wanted to help area women and girls discover their bold and then put it into action. With that in mind, they used the Bold Women's Day litany at a worship service; held a movie night screening of *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, the account of Liberia's brave women who demanded peace for that country; and had a spring retreat with the theme of "Body, Mind, Spirit: Coming to Wholeness." The retreat used Women of the ELCA materials such as *I Am She*, *Finding Your Bold* and *Our Journey to Wellness*.

First, identify and consider the needs of your particular congregation, community, and broader area. What do girls and women there need to be healthy? What's missing for them now? For example, you noticed in the description of various units' events that some planners realized there wasn't good access to health care and education in their area, and they sought to fill that need. Or some communities had better access to fast food than to nutritious produce. Discerning need helped each Women of the ELCA unit determine what to offer.

Next, consider your resources. What are your women and your congregation uniquely qualified to offer? Do you have dietitians and nurses in your congregation? What particular resources do you have right in your women's group or in your community's backyard?

Once you determine the need and your resources, decide which of all the wonderful ideas shown here your group wishes to try. You'll also want to decide which elements of that idea to include in your customized version. Do you want to mix and match pieces from two or three of the programs mentioned? No doubt you will wish to add some pieces to the program that are your own group's creation. This is a time to get creative.

Then ask: How will this program or event connect women and girls with resources, with each other and with God? How will you create a program that builds good interaction to ensure sustainability and the most growth in the lives of the girls and women you reach?

Next, plan the logistics for the program or event. When will the program start, or what date will you host the retreat or event? What do you need before you can begin? Can you offer it in your congregation's facilities, or do you need to arrange another site? What props will you need—exercise bands, hula hoops or extra cooking utensils? Will you need space for a garden?

What about promotion and welcoming? Whom will you invite? Your members? Other congregations? The community? Will you include young girls? What ages? Think intergenerationally. How might you connect the enthusiasm of youth to the yearnings of midlife and the wisdom of the elder years?

What outside resources will you need? Will you need speakers from local hospitals or businesses? Do you want healthcare vendors to have tables or booths?

What different committees will you need to plan and carry out the program? While you don't want unwieldy committees, remember that it's good to engage as many as possible in planning and carrying out your program. It increases the buy-in and ensures greater participation.

Finally, execution. It's always helpful to break down your planning so that you know what you need to do a year out from the event, nine months out, six months, three months, etc. Make a good check-list and follow it. Don't forget to plan for the advertising/marketing piece. How will you get the word out, to whom and when?

If you want to know just how one of the Women of the ELCA units mentioned earlier did its project, contact them. No doubt any of these women's groups would be honored to be asked how they did their project. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Sharing is a wonderful way of giving back—or of paying it forward. It's another example of the collaborative way women operate. To locate contact information for a congregation, go to www.elca.org and use the "find a congregation" search feature available on the top right corner of each Web page.

Blessings to you and your unit as you plant more seeds.