

Name of group: Spiritual Movement

Youth Involved: Female 9th-12th graders

Adult Leaders: Shannyn Magee (Primary organizer/Leader), Tonya Cusick (Mentor), Rachel Odland (Mentor), Kristin Porath (Mentor), Denise Shirley-Carter (Mentor)

Time Commitment: 1.75 hours weekly as a group, connections with mentors on a weekly and ongoing basis; Formal and informal meetings and interactions.

Objectives:

- Youth will experience how movement and exercise is a spiritual expression.
- Youth will understand their body as a gift from God and treat it as a temple.
- Youth will use a variety of exercises to improve their physical abilities.
- Youth will learn about positive body image, healthy behaviors, and self care.
- Youth will strengthen their relationship with God, expand and grow in their spirituality, and have growth in their faith formation through relationship development, devotions, personal connections, and mentoring.
- Youth will find their identity shaped in the image of God rather than the media.
- Youth will form relationships and connections with peers and adults of the YMCA.
- Youth will strengthen their relationship with God, expand and grow in their spirituality, and have growth in their faith formation.
- Youth and Adults will be excited and energized about Les Mills programs and will reach out to others and invite them into the club.
- The Les Mills programs will strengthen in participation and bring outside members into the YMCA while encouraging healthy lifestyles because of personal connections, the creation of teamwork, process of invitation, and service to one another.

Background:

My full time day job and education is in the field of pastoral ministry, specifically with youth and families. My passion for spirituality, whole wellness, and youth led me to the idea of creating a “Club Within A Club” called Spiritual Movement. The mission of the St. Paul, MN YMCA states, “The mission of Greater St. Paul YMCA is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.” Using the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s designated Wellness Wheel as a guide (See Below) I designed a program called “Spiritual Wellness” for high school female students. The purpose of the wellness wheel has the description of, “The wheel reminds us that being truly healthy and whole is about being in balance and intentionally nurturing all aspects of health surrounded and supported by spiritual health.” Therefore, Spiritual Movement focuses around physical, spiritual, social, emotional, and mental wellness within a strong community of peers and mentors. This first group with high

school female students was a pilot program and has the potential to expand to males, adults, and families.

Purpose:

Teenagers in our culture today are very busy and have high expectations place upon them by themselves, peers, and adults. This leads to excessive stress, imbalance at a young age, and unhealthy patterns that have the potential to carry over into adulthood. Spiritual Movement was designed to encourage and guide high school youth in the development and care of their *whole* wellness *lifelong*. This program is meant to encourage community, create adult to youth mentoring, build a desire for physical wellness, teach self care techniques, and provide resources for emotional and mental well-being.

Weekly Schedule:

Youth register for a whole semester at a time because it gives a structure for consistency, commitment, connections with a regular group, and the formation of trusted, authentic relationships.

6:30pm-6:45pm Gather, check in with the group, share any big news from the previous week: accomplishments, goals achieved, any highlights or lowlights.

6:45-7:45pm Group Fitness!

7:45-8:10pm Learning/Sharing/Connection time. This period of time focused on a specific learning topic (e.g. Nutrition, time & stress management, wellness learning, goal setting, faith & spiritual development, etc.)

8:10-8:15pm Prayer, devotion time

Personal Stories:

Personal stories have a strong impact on people for teaching and learning. It breaks down barriers and stigmas that go along with the struggles that a large part of the population encounters. Both leaders and youth shared their stories which served to deepen relationships, create trust, give support, and highlight the importance of healthy behaviors at a young age.

Examples:

Eating Disorders: During our unit on eating disorders and nutrition one of the adult leaders shared her struggles with an eating disorder when she was in middle and high school. She spoke from the heart with passion and genuine concern for others who may be dealing with similar issues. Because of this story, trust was built and the door was opened for a participant who came to the leader separately to admit her struggles with body image and eating.

Anxiety: A leader shared her battle with anxiety that was brought on by stress, transition, high expectations, and a type A personality. She talked about how exercise, counseling support, and intentional self care were the three main factors in overcoming the bouts of anxiety. As she spoke it was astounding to see the group engage in the story and then

share personal experiences of times of anxiety and/or depression. Many had not wanted to share their struggle because there is the stigma of “weakness” that comes along with such experiences. This was now a safe place to share stories and gain support.

Outcomes:

Over the months the youth in the group, some who were athletes and some who were not, became fit and found a love for new forms of exercise. Not only did they become more consistent attendees at the YMCA, but they began inviting friends and family members. These young ladies attracted friends who then joined the YMCA and added to membership increases. In addition, some of the participants began inviting their moms and aunts to come to classes with them and now are consistently participating in classes such as Body Pump and Body Flow, thus creating stronger relationships within their family.

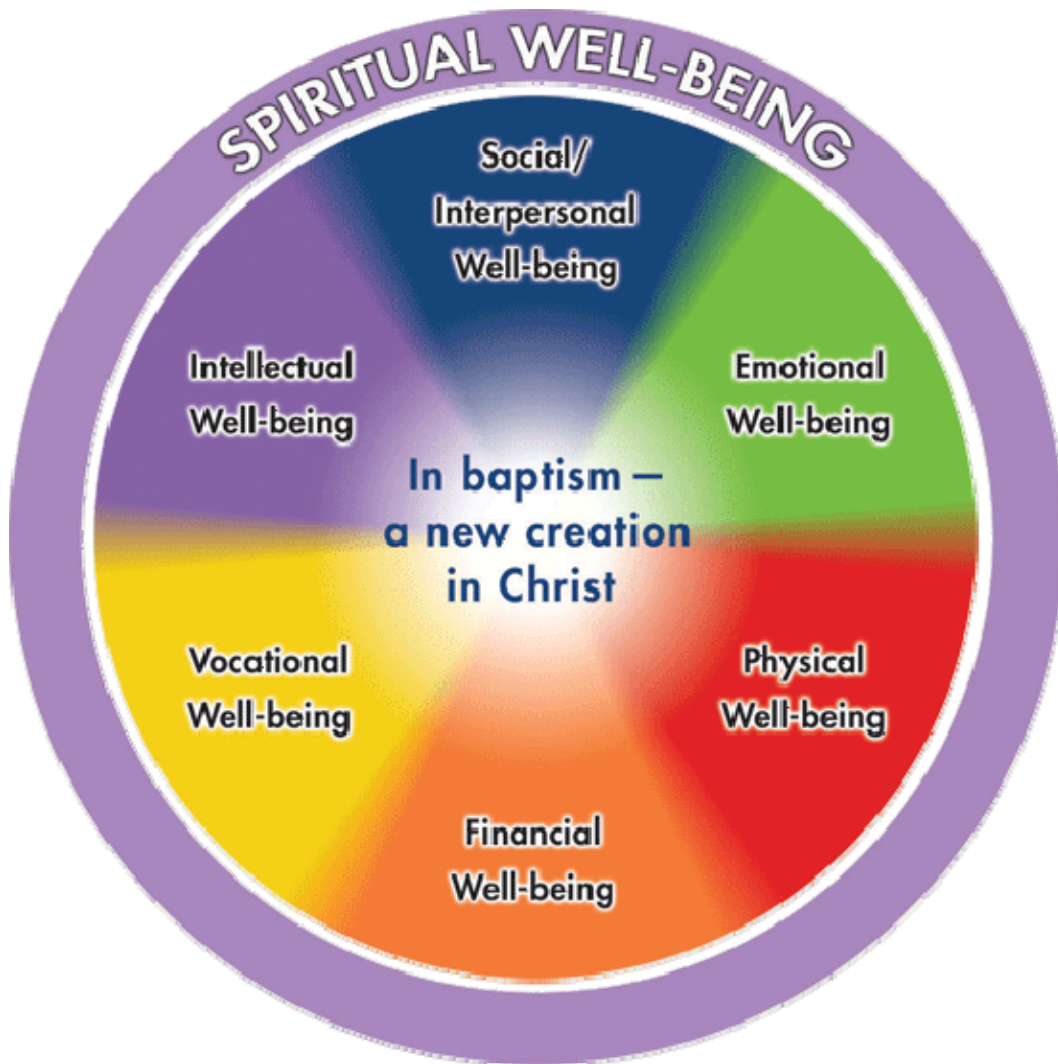
In addition to the physical aspect, the leaders saw the participants grow in confidence, positive attitude, ability to deal with stressful times, and create a community that no one was expecting nor could have predicted. We saw them show support in school and outside of school as they formed connections and bonds with one another. We also saw the incredible importance of mentoring and depth of relationship as youth connected with the adult leaders who could follow up and provide extra encouragement and support. Some of the mentors are instructors and some of the mentors are participants at the YMCA, providing a good mix of leadership.

One example of community formation to note is during the time Spiritual Movement was taking place, there was a death of the father of one of the participants. The youth in group rallied around this young woman with support in her time of crisis. She also found that exercise was a good outlet to help her deal with her pain and grief.

We consider this model to be successful. It does take some training and effort initially but once the connections are made, the “Club Within A Club” becomes more organic in nature as the connections and involvement spread beyond meeting once a week and into the daily life of the club and its participants. We look forward to continuing and expanding upon this model.

Wellness Wheel Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

<http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Vocation/Rostered-Leadership/Leadership-Support/Health/Wholeness-Wheel.aspx>



Martin Luther said:

“This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.”

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