

# Health Happenings



Kansas Health Foundation

September 2010

“Congregations participating in Leadership and Faith Transforming Communities have reported great new insights into their communities, their ministry opportunities and their leadership functions. While participants have said the training sessions have stretched them, it has been the kind of learning that helps them individually, and as congregations, to be more effective and fruitful.” – Bishop Scott Jones, Kansas Area United Methodist Church

So far, 201 Kansans from 37 United Methodist churches across the state have participated in the Leadership and Faith program, which is funded by the Kansas Health Foundation and facilitated by the Kansas Leadership Center.

Leadership and Faith teaches people ways to energize others, communicate more effectively and understand barriers as well as opportunities for more effective ministries inside and outside the church.

After four days of training, the program’s participants bring home new skills and ideas for positive changes. The program calls for each church to carefully examine needs in their communities and then choose specific issues to target as a team.

“Before a church group goes back and gets the church involved in a community activity or issue, they need to really think that through,” project director Sue Dondlinger said. “Get all the people involved that have some stake in that issue. We really encourage them to look out in their whole community.”

Churches that choose an issue involving children or poverty are each eligible for a \$1,500 grant that they can use for their project if their congregations agree to chip in an equal amount of money.

In Lyons, the Rev. Quentin Bennett and others who went through this leadership training decided to start a nutrition program called Grapple Kids for sixth-graders. The short weekly sessions with a hospital worker helped the kids learn about a variety of topics including the high levels of sugar in soft drinks, the importance of drinking water and how much fat certain foods contain. About two-thirds of the children involved in Grapple Kids don’t attend his church, Bennett said.

After the success of Grapple Kids, Bennett’s team wanted to add exercise to the mix, so they started a summer biking and running program for middle schoolers. They recruited adults in the community to help with Bike and Run, which aimed to train the kids to do a 5K run or a 20-mile bike ride. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, they went on bike rides. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, they met at the high school track to run.

“The kids had a ball,” Bennett said. “We didn’t just concentrate on exercise. We taught them things like safety, personal development and learning your limits.”

About 18 youth participated in Bike and Run, and 15 of them completed the 5K run or 20-mile ride in July. Those who crossed the finish line were rewarded with a trip to see a Kansas City Royals baseball game.

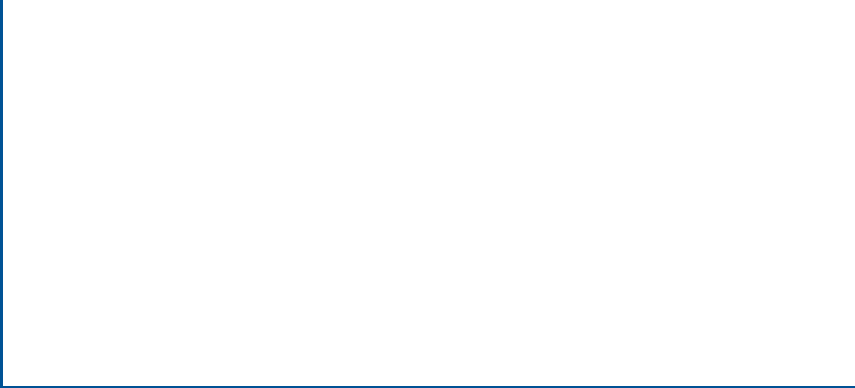
Bennett hopes to continue the program for years to come.

“If we stay with this group of kids across three years, we really think we could make a difference in their behavioral patterns,” Bennett said.

The next Leadership and Faith training session will be held Jan. 23-26, 2011. Interested United Methodist churches can get more information at [www.kansasleadershipcenter.org/leadership-and-faith](http://www.kansasleadershipcenter.org/leadership-and-faith) or by contacting Sue Dondlinger at [sdondlinger@kansasleadershipcenter.org](mailto:sdondlinger@kansasleadershipcenter.org). Applications are due by Nov. 10, 2010.

The Leadership Center hopes to expand this program to additional faith-based organizations in 2012.





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## Leadership and Faith

New leadership skills are helping Kansas churches exercise their faith by identifying and tackling community health issues.

The First United Methodist Church in Lyons started a nutrition and fitness program for kids. A Pomona church expanded a food pantry. A Dodge City church wants to help the town discuss race relations.

These are just some of the projects that are sprouting from Leadership and Faith Transforming Communities, a partnership between the Kansas Health Foundation, the Kansas Leadership Center and the United Methodist Church.