

# Faithful Families Thriving Communities

## 2021 Annual Report

### What is Faithful Families?

Faithful Families Thriving Communities (Faithful Families) is used in communities of faith across the country to promote health for individuals, families, and communities. Faithful Families is open to all religious traditions and engages religious communities across the socio-ecological model, through direct education, environmental supports, and community-wide efforts aimed at chronic disease prevention.

### *OUR VISION*

Faithful Families believes that communities of faith are important health advocates, particularly in communities affected by health disparities or lacking access to crucial resources. We empower faith communities to become changemakers to help their communities thrive – physically, mentally, and spiritually.

### Improving Health

Faithful Families recognizes that faith communities play a special role as they support their community's health and work to decrease health disparities. They offer unique resources and perspectives to connect a community's faith or religious traditions with messages and changes to support long-term health and chronic disease prevention. These changes can have long term impacts on families and communities and decrease the risk for developing chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

### North Carolina Flagship Program

Faithful Families was developed and first implemented in North Carolina, where it continues to build statewide capacity through a strengthened partnership with Steps to Health, NC State University's SNAP-Ed program. Through this partnership, Faithful Families prioritizes work with NC communities that lack access to resources to support health.

Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, in 2021, 14 faith communities participated in Faithful Families. 42 individuals across North Carolina participated in Faithful Families classes, and facilitators continued to utilize virtual/hybrid program materials and guidance in new and innovative ways to engage faith communities.

### Taking Steps to Reconnect with the 2021 Faithful Families Virtual Walking Challenge

Faithful Families Thriving Communities modified our annual Virtual Walking Challenge with a new theme, Taking Steps to Reconnect, in order to promote connection within communities and self-care as a response to the social isolation and stress many people have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge ran for 4 weeks during the summer of 2021. During these four weeks, participants were challenged to increase how much they walked from week to week and to try out new ways to connect with themselves, with nature, with their community and with hope. Participants reported improved feelings about their overall health at the end of the challenge.

Some highlights from the challenge:

- Across the country, 16 teams participated in the challenge.
- 84 people participated in the challenge.
- 37 survey responses were received from participants revealing:
  - 93% of participants identified as female
  - Age range of participants was 26-73 years old (Mean age = 53 years old)
  - 62% of participants participated as a part of a team
  - 38% of participants participated as individuals
  - Participants walked an average of 12.24 hours per week
- 10 counties in NC had teams: Stanly, Nash, Bertie, Wake, Edgecombe, Northampton, Pitt, Person, Alamance, and Vance
- 18 counties in NC had individuals participate: Orange, Franklin, Forsyth, Nash, Edgecombe, Brunswick, Halifax, Franklin, Granville, Jackson, Pitt, Caldwell, Catawba, Durham, Wake, Orange, Person, and Henderson
- Teams from Florida, New Jersey, and Kentucky also participated, as well as individuals from Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, and Michigan.

At the end of the challenge, the Faithful Families team distributed a survey to evaluate impacts. 37 valid responses were collected. The following themes emerged:

- Participants reported that the walking challenge helped with decreasing loneliness while increasing social connections, life satisfaction, and family connections.
- Participants reported that the most important benefit of the walking challenge was improved feelings about their general health.
- Based on participation, the challenge encouraged participants to engage in similar activities and would recommend the program.
- Participants reported that their physical activity increased through the challenge and were motivated to continue to be active after the challenge.

We asked participants to tell us what they appreciated or liked about the challenge. Common open-ended responses included:

- The most helpful aspects of the challenge were social and motivational aspects.
- Suggested improvements included a better points system/point collection, help with social connections, and the addition of more resources.

### **Rising Above: A 7-Week Journey Toward Well-Being**

In the Spring of 2021, to address the persistent mental health needs faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Faithful Families Thriving Communities program (a program of NC State Extension) partnered with researchers at California State Fullerton to implement a seven-week self-care program, titled Rising Above. The intervention included weekly practice modules for seven weeks that focused on the practical application of self-care and stress management techniques. Participants received access to a private website with self-care content that included videos and suggested reflections and practices not meant to exceed three-15 minute increments per week. The goal of this intervention was to provide vital self-care practices for individuals who were struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or who wanted to incorporate self-care into their daily routine. The program was free and open to anyone age 18 or older in the US, and prior participation in a Faithful Families program was not required. A total of 205 participants signed up for the program, and 167 participants completed the initial intake form. While participation in the exit survey was low, we were able to gain important

insight about the motivation of participants to participate in a program addressing mental health needs and challenges, which we will use to inform future efforts to incorporate stress management and self-care resources into our programming and support.

## **Partnership and Training**

In 2021, Faithful Families scaled back our National Partnership model, making it easier for organizations outside North Carolina to access both training and curriculum materials. Online training continues to be available to organizations outside NC through the NC State Reporter system and Moodle platform, and digital copies of curriculum materials are available for purchase online through an eCommerce platform facilitated through NC State Office of Information Technology. While the formal partnership model has been discontinued, we continue to support facilitators and organizations outside NC with ongoing technical assistance and support through webinars and newsletters and connection to resources that can supplement programming. 42 new facilitators from two states completed the online training in 2021.

The Faithful Families team will continue to enhance virtual and hybrid program guidance and resources (including focus on enhancing the discussion-based curriculum guidance and incorporating mental health concepts and resources) to support faith communities across the U.S., as we work to meet community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond as we begin to address the long-term impacts of COVID.

## **Learn More**

For more information visit [FaithfulFamilies.com](https://FaithfulFamilies.com)

