

VOLUME 5

A PUBLICATION OF THE WEST OHIO CONFERENCE



Spark Magazine

Where inspiration meets action

HEALTH & WELLNESS





CONTENTS

3	Prioritizing Your Well-Being	11 - 13	Spiritual Well-Being
4 - 5	Five Dimensions of Well-Being	14 - 15	Health Resources
6	Physical Well-Being	16	Social Well-Being
7	Health & Wellness Stories: Rev. Jennifer Applegate / Sara Thomas	17	Promoting Health & Wholeness
8	Health & Wellness Stories: Rev. Brad Olsen / Johnny Steiner	18	Health & Wellness Stories: Rev. Peter Matthews
9	Financial Well-Being	19	Health & Wellness Stories: Kris Shoaf / Rev. April Blaine
10	Emotional Well-Being		

Every year, thousands of Americans make New Year's resolutions. A 2023 poll from Forbes Health found that most people abandon these promises after less than four months. In fact, the second Friday of January is known as Quitter's Day—an unofficial day when people give up on the resolutions they committed to just days earlier. One key reason for this is that people often try to “go it alone.”

This issue of Spark Magazine focuses on Health & Wellness and serves as a reminder that you are not alone. Inside, you'll find numerous stories and resources to help you stay on track with your goals.

We also thank our partners: Grace Welch, West Ohio Conference Benefits Officer and Director of Human Resources; Wespeth Benefits and Investments, a not-for-profit organization that manages retirement, health, and investment plans for The United Methodist Church; and the pastors and laity who shared their inspiring stories with us.

This magazine is produced by the West Ohio Communications Team: Kay Panovec, MacKenzie Kuhn, Jillian Thompson and Amy Graham. Please send your comments and suggestions to: westohio@wocumc.org.

// PRIORITIZING YOUR WELL-BEING

As we enter this new year, I encourage each of you to take a bold step toward prioritizing your Well-Being. Life's demands can often feel overwhelming—juggling family responsibilities, work, health challenges, and the emotional strain that comes with life's unexpected turns. But through it all, God calls us to care for ourselves, not just for the benefit of others, but as an act of stewardship over the body, mind, and spirit he has entrusted to us.

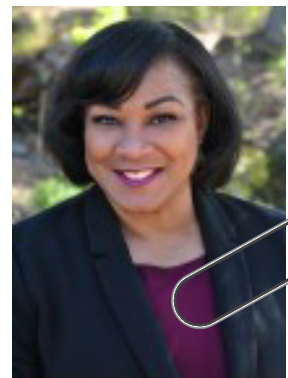
At the West Ohio Conference, we deeply value Wellness. This year, we are focusing on 5 Dimensions of Wellness: Physical, Financial, Emotional, Spiritual, and Social well-being. In partnership with the Communications Team, we will be sharing stories and resources to support you in nurturing each of these areas. Whether you are clergy or laity, active in HealthFlex or not, tools are available to help you thrive.

Remember, wellness is not one-dimensional. It is interconnected. If financial stress weighs heavily on your heart, or if emotional challenges cloud your spirit, these burdens can spill over into physical exhaustion, strained relationships, and even spiritual disconnect. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37) Caring for yourself is a way to honor God and the gifts He has given you.

I challenge you to take time for self-reflection, be courageous in seeking support, and engage with the "Wellness Magazine," programs and resources available to you. By embracing the fullness of God's plan for your well-being, you will be empowered to serve others with a renewed spirit. May you become the healthiest, most whole version of yourself, for your loved ones, for your church, and for God's glory.

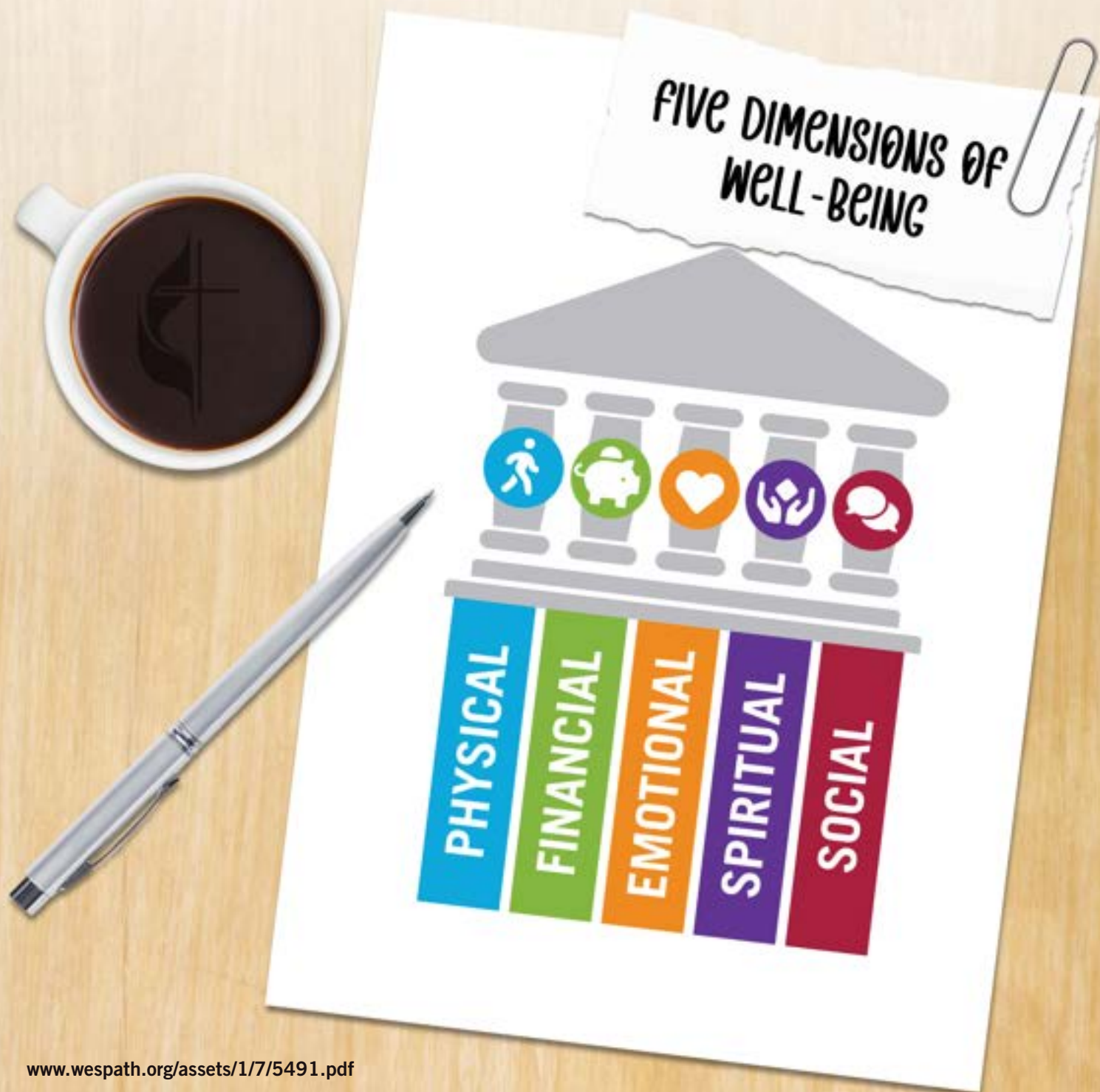
Blessings,

Grace S. Welch,
Conference Benefits Officer and Director of Human Resources



// FIVE DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

Your overall well-being depends on five interrelated dimensions. Health and well-being are closely connected, and improving well-being in one area can have a positive effect on other dimensions. We believe the well-being of those who serve the Church affects the whole United Methodist connection, including family, congregation and community. Find resources and support to help you make positive changes in each of the five dimensions.



www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/5491.pdf

www.wespath.org/health-well-being/health-well-being-resources

// FIVE DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING



PHYSICAL

Taking care of your body is essential for your physical health, and physical health is closely linked with many other aspects of your well-being. This dimension focuses on the importance of moderate daily activity, proper nutrition, maintaining a healthy weight, preventive care and managing chronic health conditions. Research shows that physical activity lowers the risk of many chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity and bone and joint problems. It can also improve your mood and boost your energy.



FINANCIAL

If you feel stressed or insecure about your finances, it can be difficult to focus and be your best in your career and other areas of your life. Studies find that those who feel financially secure are more likely to be healthier than those who don't feel they are in control of their finances. Keep in mind that being financially healthy isn't about how much money you make, but rather how you manage what you have. This dimension focuses on attitudes toward money, building sound financial habits and using tools to effectively manage financial resources.



EMOTIONAL

The mind-body connection is powerful. Caring for your emotional well-being can help you feel better physically, and vice versa. Emotional well-being includes the ability to manage your feelings and related behaviors, cope effectively with stress, and adapt to change.



SPIRITUAL

Spiritual well-being can bring inner peace—a contentment with your current situation and yourself. This dimension centers on relationships and activities that support and enhance your spiritual well-being, such as prayer, meditation and worship.



SOCIAL

Having a social support network can help you get through the ups and downs in life, and it may be the key to happiness and good health. Research has shown that having a strong network of support can protect against several health problems. This dimension focuses on building healthy, supportive relationships with family, friends and peers.

// PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

“Ministry is much like a team sport: you don't do it alone - you sweat with others, you feel others' pain together, and you help others get up when they get hurt. Korean American pastors come together to play soccer regularly to fulfill their God-given callings and minister to Korean and other ethnic groups. By meeting regularly and exercising with their ministry colleagues, they build basic physical fitness and relieve stress.”

HEALTHY MINISTRY FROM HEALTHY PASTORS



// HEALTH & WELLNESS STORIES

Self-Care isn't Selfish—it's Essential

An energetic, joyful, and highly functioning pastor of Williams Street UMC, Jennifer Applegate prioritizes her health and wellness.

"Let's admit it—ministry is hard. It just is," she said. "Focusing on my health and well-being makes me a better pastor."

She compares self-care to the safety lecture given by flight attendants: put on your own oxygen mask before helping someone else. "The healthier we are when caring for others, the better it is for those we serve," she added.

Her wellness journey includes healthy eating, exercise, and getting enough rest.

She also works with a spiritual director—something she does for herself, independent of her congregation—providing a safe space to focus on her own connection with God.

"At this point in my life, I am doing the things that help me fully embrace who I am. It is part of my identity—discovering myself. Everything I am doing is working together to shape me into who God intends me to be, helping me grow into the best version of the person He has created me to be," she said.

Believing that pastors should take full advantage of available resources, she sees a therapist when needed and meets with a coach from Healthy Congregations, who challenges her to try new things.

Journaling is another key part of her self-care practice. Whether through creative writing, purging thoughts, or poetry, her reflections sometimes find their way into her preaching and teaching.

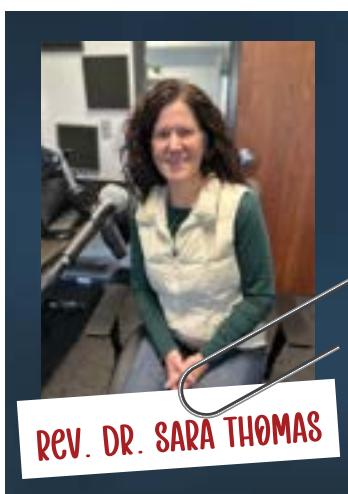
She also prioritizes time with clergy colleagues, family, and friends.

"If you don't take care of yourself and know who you are, you risk getting lost in a world telling you who you are—or who you should be," she said.



Coaching

Rev. Dr. Sara Thomas is a Certified Dare to Lead™ Facilitator, a Certified Gallup Strengths Coach, and an ICF (ACC) Leadership Coach. An Ordained Elder in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC), she partners with busy leaders and overwhelmed teams to unlock their potential—helping them excel both at work and in life.



// HEALTH & WELLNESS STORIES

The Powerlifting Pastor

There we were. Moments before competing in the National Powerlifting Championships. None of us realized how much the altitude in Salt Lake City would affect us. We had the hardest judge in the federation. A friend turned to me and asked, “Will you pray for me?” I thought, “What do I say?” He was my competition, so I wanted to pray that he would break something. Instead, I prayed, “Lord, keep us humble in victory, and courageous in defeat.” I think that was a healthier way to handle the situation.

John Wesley liked to ask, “Is it well with your soul?” I wish he didn’t use the word ‘well.’ Let’s be honest, being well is so much work. I know I can’t make it happen; it is a gift of grace, but I can affect the conditions. I can decide to eat right, drink

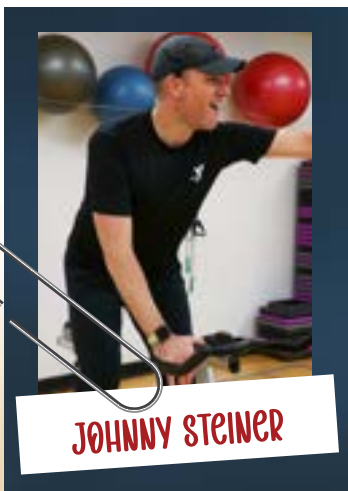


enough water, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, manage my stress, set healthy boundaries, and develop trusting relationships. I won’t pretend I have figured it out, but I do believe that it is a goal worth chasing. Will you join me making it a goal to hear Jesus say what he said to the tenth leper (Luke 17:19), “Your faith has made you well”?

Rev. Olson is a four-time World Powerlifting Champion and seven-time National Champion over four decades. He is the Lead Pastor of the Loveland and the Morrow United Methodist Churches. His web site is powerliftingpastor.com.

Physical Wellness

Johnny Steiner never played sports as a child and rarely thought about exercise. But at age 30, everything changed. Now, as the Director of Worship, Arts, and Music at Church of the Messiah UMC in Westerville, Johnny balances his passion for music with an active fitness lifestyle. A certified group fitness instructor for the YMCA, he can often be found running races across Central Ohio. Listen in to hear what sparked his transformation.



// FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

Nine Ways to Eliminate Clutter, Organize Accounts & Streamline How You Manage Your Money

You can find many reasons to organize and simplify your financial life. Eliminating clutter, saving time and reducing stress are surely among them. And here's another motivating factor: Not keeping tabs on your finances can be costly if it results in fees or interest charges you could have avoided, investment losses, additional taxes or other pitfalls. Below you'll find a checklist of nine basic things you can do to get your money matters in order...and keep them that way.



1. Use direct deposit
2. Automate recurring bills
3. Explore online banking
4. Put some savings on autopilot
5. Consider consolidating accounts
6. Look into automated money-management tools
7. Update your will and other legal documents and make sure your family knows where to find them in an emergency
8. Get your other papers under control
9. Don't let a disaster catch you off guard

[Click Here](#) to read the full Wespeth article.

By the Federal Deposit Insurance Commission (FDIC). Public domain.

Focus on Your Financial Security

If you feel stressed or insecure about your finances, it can be difficult to focus and be your best in your career and other areas of your life. Studies find that those who feel financially secure are more likely to be healthier than those who don't feel they are in control of their finances. Keep in mind that being financially healthy isn't about how much money you make, but rather how you manage what you have. This dimension focuses on attitudes toward money, building sound financial habits and using tools to effectively manage financial resources.

[Click here](#) for more helpful resources from Wespeth.

// EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Therapy: A Sign of Strength, Not Weakness

By Lisa Riddle, MACMHC, LPC

If you're anything like me, you may have grown up believing that therapy is only for people in crisis. Maybe you saw this idea reinforced in movies and TV shows, or perhaps it was passed down through your family. These beliefs have kept so many from seeking the support they need. But the truth is, therapy isn't a sign of weakness—it's a sign of strength.

Reframing Therapy

Think of it this way: If you broke your leg, you wouldn't just "tough it out" and hope it healed on its own. You'd see a doctor to get the care you need. Your mental and emotional health deserve that same attention.



LISA RIDDLE

Seeking therapy doesn't mean you've failed; it means you recognize something feels off and you're choosing to address it rather than ignore it. Therapy is an investment in yourself and your relationships—an act of saying, I matter. My relationships matter.

Strength in Vulnerability

Asking for help takes courage. Acknowledging your struggles and committing to growth require strength. Therapy isn't about dwelling on problems—it's about learning how to navigate life's challenges in a healthier way.

In therapy, you gain tools to manage stress, improve communication, set boundaries, and understand yourself on a deeper level. These are life skills that benefit everyone, not just those in crisis.

Changing the Narrative

The more we normalize therapy, the more we break the stigma surrounding it. Imagine a world where talking about therapy is as common as talking about going to the gym. A world where prioritizing mental health is seen as responsible, not shameful.

If you've been hesitating to take that first step, I encourage you to rethink how you see therapy. Seeking help isn't a sign of weakness—it's one of the bravest things you can do.

When you choose therapy, you're choosing growth, healing, and a better version of yourself. And that is true strength.

If you've been considering therapy, take that first step.
You are worth it.

YOU MIGHT HAVE HAD THOUGHTS LIKE:

"THERAPY IS ONLY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE REALLY MESSED UP."

"I SHOULD BE ABLE TO HANDLE THIS ON MY OWN."

"PEOPLE WILL JUDGE ME IF THEY FIND OUT I'M IN THERAPY."



SCRIPTURAL REFLECTIONS
FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

// SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Eight Ways to Nurture Faith in Young Children

By Laura Buchanan

It's never too early to begin sharing faith practices with our children. "Helping kids to know God's love and to know that God loves them is a really foundational concept that little ones, even from diapers, can be taught," says the Rev. Kathy Pittenger, Children's Initiatives Coordinator for the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Joanna Cummings, pastor with children and families at East End United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, agrees, "I believe that children are spiritual beings and I believe that they have a lot to show us about who God is."

Weave Faith Formation into the Everyday

Nurturing faith in babies, toddlers and preschoolers is not only meaningful; it can also be a lot of fun. It is possible for your busy family to incorporate this important work into day-to-day life. You just have to find the spiritual practices that work best for your unique family.

Cummings and Pittenger Share These Practical Ideas:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Evaluate your daily rhythms | 5. Welcome hard questions |
| 2. Pray in different ways | 6. Offer a blessing |
| 3. Read, play and learn | 7. Help others |
| 4. Model your faith | 8. Find connection |

Encouragements for Parents

"[Parents] may not be the expert on all things theological, but they are the expert on their kids. We don't have to have all the right words or all the right answers," says Pittenger.

Cummings shares, "Parents, give yourself grace. You are loving and nurturing the faith of your child in the middle of a season that's really difficult and challenging, especially for young families. Anything that is intentional about sharing the love of God, about sharing the story of God, or even just sharing your faith with your child in conversation is really impactful."

For the full UMC.org article, [click here](#).

// SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

A spiritual practice is an activity that turns our attention towards having an encounter with the Divine. They are practices geared towards making us aware of God's loving presence. Practices include prayer, meditation, worship, reading and service to others.

Spiritual practices keep us centered and mindful that the world extends beyond our own inner voices and feelings. Regular use of spiritual practices has been linked to better health through less hypertension, more positive feelings, reduction of symptoms of depression and greater psychological well-being. Many practitioners report spiritual practices provide a healthy means for handling stress.

For full UMC.org article, [click here](#).

WHAT IS THE BREATH PRAYER?



STATE OF CLERGY SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING WITH REV. MIKE BAUGHMAN



// SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Wespath's Rachel Miller interviews Kim LaRue, director of Adult Ministries at Powell United Methodist Church, about current factors influencing clergy spiritual well-being and steps that individual clergy and the church can take to cultivate greater spiritual consistency and vitality.



// HEALTH RESOURCES



Making Peace: Tips on Managing Conflict

Irritated? Frustrated? Angry? Ready to explode? You're not alone. Whether it's an argument with a friend, aggravation because a driver cuts in front of you, or a disagreement about the best way to do a job—conflict is part of everyday life.

Read more [here](#).



Global Health Ministries

Through United Methodist conferences and health boards, Global Ministries works to strengthen whole networks of health responses, from revitalization of facilities and staff training to building better water sources, developing sanitation facilities and promoting nutrition.



Health & Well-Being Programs

Wespeth offers benefit programs so you're prepared for whatever life brings. Learn about group health insurance, Medicare supplemental health coverage, life and long-term disability coverage.

Enroll in programs and services offered by Wespeth to help you live a healthier life. Options include programs to improve your wellness such as a physical activity program, biometric screenings and health assessments, health coaching and employee assistance programs.

Read more [here](#).

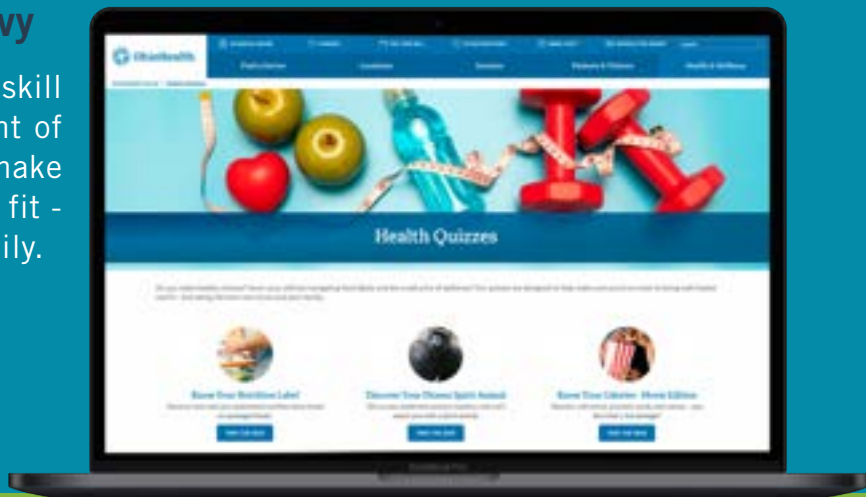
[Click here](#) to access the Wespeth Resiliency Toolkit.

// HEALTH RESOURCES

Test Your Nutrition and Fitness Savvy

Do you make healthy choices? How's your skill set navigating food labels and the small print of additives? Our quizzes are designed to help make sure you're on track to being well-fueled and fit - and taking the best care of you and your family.

Take quizzes [here](#).



Children's Books to Support Mental Wellness

The Mental Health Ministry Team at First United Methodist Church in Holland, Mich., created a children's library containing more than 70 titles with topics ranging from talking about our feelings to adoption to navigating learning difficulties. Take a look at a few of the books in the collection, with many from authors Diane Alber and Mary Nhin.

Read more [here](#).



Five Ways to Overcome Anxiety

Take a 1-minute break for self-care: Learn five ways you can overcome anxiety when you feel fearful or stressed. This video from The United Methodist Church offers a guided space to pause so that you can find the road back to peace.



CONNECT / PRAY / BREATHE / MOVE / CREATE

// SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Focus on Your Social Life

Having a social support network can help you get through the ups and downs in life, and it may be the key to happiness and good health. Research has shown that having a strong network of support can protect against several health problems. This dimension focuses on building healthy, supportive relationships with family, friends and peers.

Connect with Others

Making time for positive experiences with friends and family can build emotional reserves and strengthen social connections in times of need.

For the full Wespeth article, [click here](#).

STATE OF CLERGY SOCIAL WELL-BEING



1. CONNECT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY—SCHEDULE A COFFEE DATE OR GO FOR A WALK TOGETHER ON A REGULAR BASIS.
2. VOLUNTEER—CHECK OUT VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES WITH A LOCAL CHARITY OR YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP.
3. TRY A NEW ACTIVITY—TAKE A CLASS, JOIN A CLUB OR PLAY IN A SPORTS LEAGUE.
4. UNPLUG FROM TECHNOLOGY—TAKE A BREAK FROM ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND SPEND TIME WITH LOVED ONES FACE-TO-FACE



UNPLUG
AND
RELAX!

// PROMOTING HEALTH & WHOLENESS

Because we care about the holistic well being of all people, mental, physical and spiritual health is a major focus of the work of The United Methodist Church.

Together, we combat diseases of poverty such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis; we provide health education, advocacy and infrastructure; and we continue our more than 160-year history of being a key provider of healthcare through the hospitals, clinics and mission centers we have operated across Africa.

To read the full UMC.org article [click here](#).

DIVINE INSPIRATION MEETS WESLEYAN WISDOM



// HEALTH & WELLNESS STORIES

Health & Fitness Journey Offers Clarity, Purpose

The Rev. Peter Matthews actively shares his commitment to physical fitness on social media, posting pictures of his smartwatch data and selfies reflecting his current mood.

The journey hasn't been easy, Matthews admitted. The pastor often talked about wellness in his congregations but often neglected his health. Approaching his 52nd birthday, that neglect became evident, and Matthews set a goal to lose 52 pounds, one for each year of his life.

Matthews, lead pastor of Cincinnati's New Vision United Methodist Church, planned to achieve his goal through walking, stretching, yoga, and clean eating. This structure cultivated emotional and spiritual growth through prayer and mindfulness, leading the pastor to a deeper connection to God.

"Accountability played a crucial role," Matthews said. "Sharing my goals with family, friends and my congregation provided a support network that encouraged and motivated me." He also began to study nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle sustainability.

Matthews' commitment resulted in significant improvements. Physically, he gained energy to fulfill his pastoral duties. Mentally and spiritually, he experienced enhanced clarity, focus and a renewed sense of purpose. This overall well-being helped him to be more present and engaged in both his ministry and family life.

Informed by his personal life changes, Matthews and New Vision UMC will launch Halibration University in March 2025. This monthly holistic lifestyle program integrates faith, health, and social justice through workshops, fitness classes, and community engagement.

To anyone embarking on a journey to a healthier self, Matthews offers this advice:



START SMALL: Implement gradual changes. Small, consistent steps lead to lasting habits.

SEEK SUPPORT: Surround yourself with a community that uplifts and holds you accountable. Sharing your goals with others fosters encouragement and shared wisdom.

ALIGN WITH PURPOSE: View your health journey as an integral part of your spiritual and personal mission. Recognize that caring for your body is a form of worship and gratitude for the life you've been given.

Matthews said, "In embracing this path, I discovered that real grace manifests not only in spiritual practices but also in the tangible act of honoring the body."

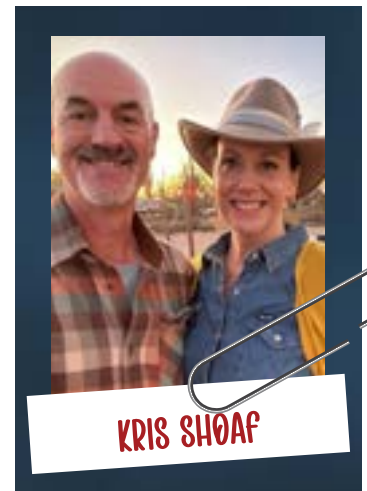
For health and well-being resources, [click here](#).

// HEALTH & WELLNESS STORIES

Deaconess Finds Her *Why* for a Better Wellness Lifestyle

In 2018, Kris Shoaf was diagnosed with prediabetes, characterized by higher-than-normal blood-sugar levels that are not yet high enough to be classified as type 2 diabetes. Her primary care physician referred her to an endocrinologist for further evaluation. During the 60-minute appointment, the endocrinologist conducted a battery of tests. In the end, Shoaf was sent home with only a prescription for medication.

“I walked out of there thinking, I don’t want to do this every six months, I’ll just wait until I have diabetes,” Shoaf said. She admits that was not a good response.



After understanding her diagnosis and current health status, the deaconess began researching pre-diabetes along with the steps she could take to reverse the condition. “I learned there were some lifestyle changes I could make, including what foods I could eat and when to eat them,” Shoaf said.

After implementing the changes, Shoaf noticed improvements in her physical and mental health. “Overall, I felt much better,” she said. “I had more energy and focus. I was less agitated, so I’m not taking things out on those I love.”

Shoaf has lived with these lifestyle changes for over five years and knows what it takes to maintain them.

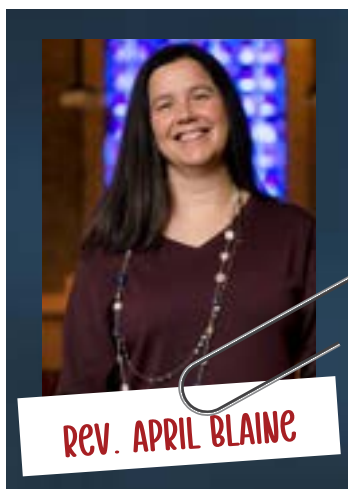
“I have some go-to podcasts I listen to for encouragement and motivation,” Shoaf said. She also extends grace to herself. “The decisions I make today will impact my life and independence when I am older,” she realizes.

Shoaf encourages individuals who are starting a health-and wellness journey to identify their “why.” “My motivation began with the goal of moving out of the prediabetic range,” she explained, “but the larger picture was considering my health at 75, 80 or even older.”

She also suggests creating a toolbox of resources in formats that are convenient each individual. Having these tools will help stay on track and offer support in time of challenges. Lastly, she underlined the importance of being kind to oneself. Shoaf stated, “Remember, slow and steady wins the race when it comes to our health.”

Renewal Leave

Renewal leave offers clergy a dedicated time away from the daily demands of pastoral leadership, creating space for God to bring renewal. Rev. April Blaine believes every eligible clergy member should take advantage of this opportunity. She shares how stepping away has made her a better pastor, partner, mother, and friend.





West Ohio Conference
The United Methodist Church

CONTACT US

**32 Wesley Boulevard
Worthington Ohio, 43085**

Web: **www.westohioumc.org**

Phone: **380-223-9229**

Email: **westohio@wocumc.org**

The Mission of the West Ohio Conference is to equip local churches to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world...A world of justice, love, and peace filled with people growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

FOLLOW WEST OHIO CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

