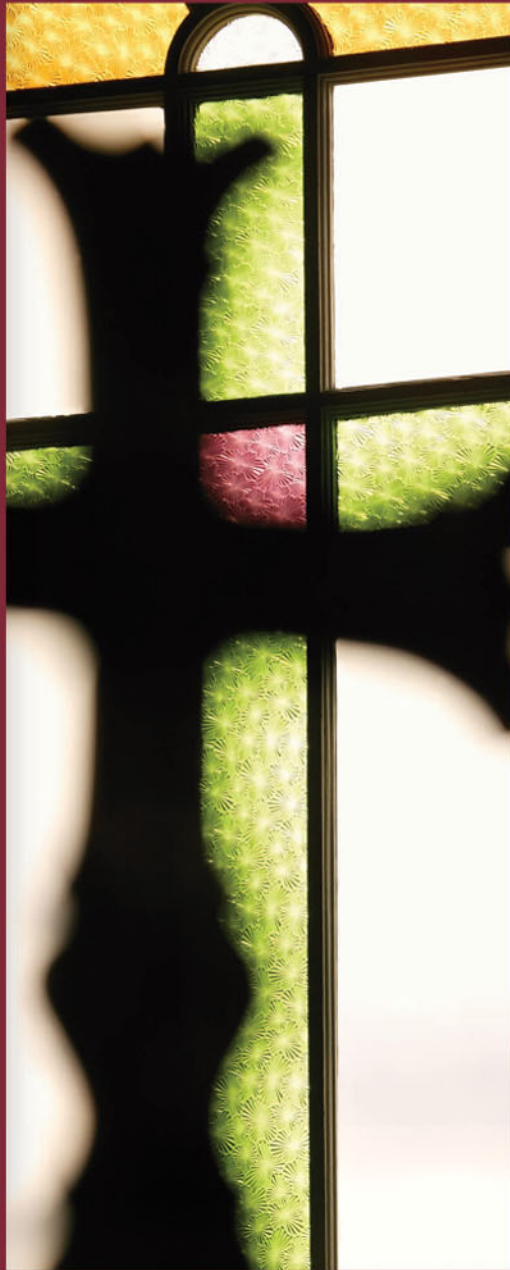


Health Through Faith and Community



A Study Resource
for Christian Faith
Communities
to Promote
Personal and Social
Well-Being



Edward R. Canda • Aaron Ketchell • Phillip Dybicz
Loretta Pyles • Holly Nelson-Becker

Pre-publication REVIEW . . .

This study guide for Christian congregations is an excellent resource to help participants connect faith, personal health, and social responsibility to benefit self and to contribute to community and society well-being. Physical health, mental health, and spiritual health are linked to justice and social action, with Jesus as the model of community service and social change. Christian faith is brought to life through prayer, scripture, guided discussions, sharing of stories, dialogue, and interactive learning activities.

The guide integrates both religious readings from the Bible and scientific evidence that allows leaders to adapt the material to the unique needs of diverse congregations and participants. Sessions balance structure and flexibility in issues of time commitment, organizational format, content, and activities. Learning may be experienced through individual study and reflection, through group participation, or take-home activities. Specific examples incorporated throughout the study guide motivate participants to reach to their faith community and beyond by taking action locally and globally in social justice issues such as poverty, hunger, war and peace, and environmental stewardship.

I highly recommended this study guide for transforming Christians to make a difference in their own lives, their faith community, and society at large. The authors' integration of personal and social well-being is outstanding. In my role as reviewer, I have reexamined my own personal integration of physical, mental, and spiritual health. I have been motivated to recommit in acting on my faith to contribute more fully to the well-being of my faith community and to be a more engaged faithful steward within my local and global community."

Dennis T. Haynes, MSW, PhD

Professor and Chair, Department of Social Work,
University of Texas at San Antonio

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to Promote Personal and Social Well-Being

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for Christian Faith Communities
to Promote Personal and Social Well-Being*

Edward R. Canda
Aaron Ketchell
Phillip Dybicz
Loretta Pyles
Holly Nelson-Becker

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This book provides educational information and opportunities for reflection about possible connections between faith and health of individuals and society. It is not intended as medical advice.

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Reverend Cheryl J. Bell
Steve Coen
Jane Cooper
Debora Cox
Virginia Elliott
Stephen B. Fawcett, PhD
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George Joehnk
Jackie John
Linda Johnson
Rick Johnson
Jeffrey A. Levin
Sandra Matthaei
Kim Moore
Reverend Doug Morphis
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Edward R. Canda, PhD, is Professor and Chair of the PhD Program, School of Social Welfare, University of Kansas, Lawrence. He is also Director of the project on Health Through Faith and Community, funded by the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund of Hutchinson, Kansas. He has written more than 100 publications and has given more than 100 presentations, most dealing with the connections between spirituality, cultural diversity, social work, and health. Dr. Canda is the co-author of *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping*, editor of *Spirituality in Social Work: New Directions* (Haworth), and co-editor of *Transpersonal Perspectives on Spirituality in Social Work* (Haworth).

Aaron Ketchell, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, American Studies Program, and Humanities and Western Civilization Program at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. He has been published on religion and American culture in the *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin*, the *Great Plains Quarterly*, and the *Journal of American Culture*.

Phillip Dybicz, LCSW, MSW, has worked for several years in social work settings and is a PhD candidate at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Loretta Pyles, MA, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Tulane University in New Orleans. Her research includes issues of domestic violence, cultural competency, spirituality, and community development in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Holly B. Nelson-Becker, PhD, is Assistant Professor and Hartford Faculty Scholar in the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. She is Chair of the interest group on Religion, Spirituality, and Aging for the Gerontological Society of America, and is a consulting editor of *Social Work*, the official journal of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

Introduction

About the Study Guide

STUDY GUIDE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Purpose

The purpose of this study guide is to encourage Christian congregations to enhance the well-being of church members as well as the wider society. This study guide flows from a Christian view of health that encompasses physical, mental, social, and spiritual aspects of well-being. The connection between personal health and social responsibility in a life of faith is given particular attention. We hope that this study guide will be useful for Christians who share an ideal of well-being for themselves and all people.

Objectives

This study guide will enable participants to

1. enhance their understanding of personal and community well-being,
2. expand their knowledge of spiritual and social factors that support health,
3. reflect on the quality of their physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being in relation to their lives of faith,
4. reflect on the interconnection between their responsibility for both personal and community well-being,
5. adopt attitudes and behaviors that promote their overall well-being in the context of their lives of faith, and
6. develop a plan of action for enhancing their contributions to the well-being of the church community, the local community, and the wider society and world.

DESIGN AND FORMAT

Audience

This study guide is designed for adult members of Christian congregations who wish to learn more about connections between faith and both personal and social well-being for the benefit of themselves and their communities.

Flow of Topics

This study guide contains eight sessions arranged in a series, each one building on the other. The sessions begin with a widely embracing view of spirituality and health. Viewing the pursuit of well-being as a spiritual journey, they then focus on well-being in various personal and social aspects of one's life. Sessions are designed to promote well-being from the individual person to the larger society. Throughout the study guide, the connections between personal health and social well-being are explored. Each session stands on its own in order to be useful for new or occasional participants. However, the deepest learning will result from participation in all sessions because each builds on the previous.

The life of faith combined with growth through learning involves the weaving together of one's inner personal life with outer social action—the union of awareness with action. Therefore, the principles that direct this study guide harmonize the inward and outward aspects of spiritual growth.

Principles Directing the Study Guide Content

Each session includes the following elements:

- **Intention:** Each session begins with a prayer to reinforce the group's intention to learn together. In this way, one's personal commitment to learning is linked with the purposes of the study guide itself. Members can commit to help each other have a good learning experience. Accomplishments of previous sessions will be summarized both for review and to include newcomers.
- **Information:** Pertinent information is presented crisply, in laypersons' terms, to increase one's knowledge and to present topics for exploration. The study guide offers working definitions, concepts, and content. Members are then invited to apply the information to their personal and social activities. This helps people to link awareness with action.
- **Inspiration:** Material comes from relevant Christian sources, scriptures, personal stories, images, literature, poetry, art, and other materials. It is hoped that these will help inspire participants spiritually, intuitively, and emotionally to connect with the information. This will help participants to relate to ideas with their whole selves and to see the potential of these ideas at work in their daily lives. The learning should be transformational.
- **Introspection:** Moments of quiet and self-reflection and of discussion will help participants gain insight into how the material is relevant to their personal lives and growth. Some of these introspective activities can be done in a group setting and some can be done privately.
- **Interaction:** Each session includes time for guided discussion, sharing of stories, spontaneous dialogue, and interactive exercises. Members can learn from one another and support one another in considering implications of the lessons. The joining of introspection and group interaction makes for a lively learning experience.
- **Integration:** A holistic Christian perspective on faith and health will infuse the study guide. All aspects of people in their life situations will be addressed: physical, mental, spiritual, and social. Throughout all sessions, we will integrate both personal and social well-being into a life of faith.

In addition, each session concludes with reflections summarized by the leader and participants. Supplemental activities are offered to promote ways to learn more about nurturing well-being in oneself, one's relationships, and the larger community. Additional suggestions and resources are available online at the following Web site: <http://www.healthfaithstudy.info/>.

Finally, the study guide concludes with a session designed to help congregations to create goals that will promote personal health and social health in the church community, local community, nation, and world. Offered online at the Web site just mentioned are guidelines that assist participants in forming an action committee to pursue these goals. The Web site also links to an online Spiritual Diversity and Social Work Resource Center. The Resource Center provides numerous bibliographical resources, essays, Internet links, and a photo gallery that address connections between spirituality, health, and social service in Christian and other religious traditions. This Resource Center is dedicated to the promotion of respect, wisdom, skill, and cooperation among professional social workers and allied advocates around the world regarding diverse religious and nonreligious spiritual approaches to health, well-being, peace, and justice.

Study Guide Venues

This study guide consists of eight sessions, each focusing on one theme to allow some depth of learning in a brief meeting time period (about fifty minutes). In this way, sessions can fit into adult Sunday school contexts or other brief time periods. Each session includes additional learning activities for use in longer meeting time periods or by individuals for personal learning outside of a group meeting.

The study guide is written in a user-friendly way so that leaders can easily apply the material in classes and individuals can use it for independent study. Leaders can adapt each session to the interests and needs of particular groups and community characteristics (such as rural or urban). Leaders can also adapt sessions of particular interest for use in briefer time periods. Various options for activities are included in each session.

There are five main ways that the study guide can be applied.

For the basics:

1. *Within eight adult Sunday school class meetings or other meetings of about fifty minutes.* In this case, one session without supplemental activities can be accomplished in one meeting period. Supplemental activities can be done individually outside of class, if participants desire. Allow a few minutes extra time at the beginning of each session to get settled.

For more intensive learning:

2. *Within sixteen adult Sunday school class meetings of about fifty minutes.* One session can be expanded to two class periods by completing the main activities in one class and completing supplemental activities in the subsequent class. Allow a few minutes extra time at the beginning of each session to get settled.
3. *Within eight longer meetings of about ninety minutes.* One expanded session, including selected supplemental activities, can be accomplished within one meeting period of one and a half hours. Allow a few minutes extra time at the beginning of each session to get settled.
4. *Within retreat formats.* In this case, the sessions can be conducted in sequence, with break times as needed, over a period of one and a half to two days (using all sessions' basic material plus some supplemental activities) or three days (using all sessions with most supplemental activities).

For independent learning:

5. The study guide is written with instructions for leaders to apply sessions in group settings. However, individuals could also go through the sessions in a self-study process by adapting the instructions to their own interests.

Study Guide Format

The study guide seeks to engage participants with a mix of approaches to learning and interaction. Therefore, each session blends various learning approaches (such as factual information; self-assessment and reflection exercises; small group discussion and interaction exercises; suggested further reading; Internet resources; and supplemental activities). The following is a brief overview of the format of each session.

I. Title Page and Quotes

On the title page of each session will be a list of various biblical quotes pertaining to the topic. These quotes will always be in *italics*.

These quotes can be used in a number of ways. The leader can offer them during the opening moments of prayer as points of departure for the session. In addition, some activities may wrap up early or extend into the next activity's time slot, leaving the leader with a few minutes before the session's end. At such a time, the leader can turn to these quotes to spur a brief discussion concerning their wisdom. These quotes are always included on their own page(s) for ease in transferring them to an overhead transparency if desired.

II. Session Setup

Introductory pages for each session contain information that will help the leader prepare and present the session. "Time" indicates the overall timeframe for the session. Approximate time allotments needed for specific activities are written in parentheses by their descriptions. "Materials" provides a brief list of the items that will be needed for that session's activities. An overhead projector and transparencies are always listed as optional in the event a leader should desire to transform any of the individual sections (e.g., title page with quotes, opening prayer, questions to consider) into this format. "Intention" gives the overall goal of the session, and "Objectives" spells out the goal more specifically. "Learning activities" provides directions for the entire session.

After these introductory pages, more detailed instructions and resources (such as overheads, handouts, and questions for discussion) are provided, as discussed in the following sections.

III. Activities

The top of each activity lists the learning objective for that particular activity. All instructions for the leader are set off by bullets.

Time is allotted at the beginning of each session for prayer as the first activity. This is to help set the group's intention for learning and as a form of welcome. Prayers are provided with each lesson that fit the theme of that lesson. Leaders may choose among these prayers or have participants offer their own. Opening prayers have been placed on their own page for easy photocopying. Leaders may transfer the prayer to a transparency for the entire group to pray or simply photocopy it and have an individual lead the prayer for the group. As with many aspects of this study guide, such flexibility allows leaders to match their own particular style and group interests.

In most sessions alternative activities are recommended. In addition, there are supplemental activities that could be used for extended sessions, private study, or as a replacement for one of the recommended activities. The leader should review all activities available prior to a session. The leader can either decide which to use within a given meeting time or allow participants to choose. Be aware that allowing choice may require a period of time to reach agreement.

Any information that the leader will need to read aloud to the group will be *enclosed within a box*. Additional information is often provided that leaders may use for their own preparation or to summarize for the group as desired.

An activity may contain additional background information. This information, while not essential to the lesson, is provided to help the leader capture the spirit and goal of the lesson. As time permits, leaders may share this information with participants when desired.

Most activities end with some type of group discussion. Thus, there is often a section ending the activity titled Questions to Consider. These questions are a useful aid for beginning a group discussion. In addition, quotes are sometimes provided at the bottom of this page to help spur reflection.

IV. Summing Up

It is important to briefly review key insights at the end of each session. Hitting these highpoints serves to reinforce their impact and help anchor the knowledge learned in the session. Introductory and closing summaries are provided, to be used if desired. Otherwise, leaders should feel free to sum up the lesson in their own words.

V. References

The references are citations for material that was consulted in creating the session. If desired, leaders can draw from the additional recommended readings and resources on spirituality, faith, and health provided on our Web site at <http://www.healthfaithstudy.info/>.

Session 1

A Holistic Christian Vision of Health Through Faith and Community



Stained-glass window, First United Methodist Church, Lawrence, Kansas. (All photos by authors.)

O Lord, by these things people live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. Oh, restore me to health and make me live!

Isaiah 38:16 (NRSV)

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 16:24 (NIV)

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 12:18 (NIV)

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

Matthew 9:12-13 (NIV)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. . . . There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Acts 4:32-35 (NIV)

Time: Fifty minutes plus optional fifty minutes for supplemental activities

Materials:

- Leader's Guide
- Pens/pencils/scratch paper
- Overhead projector
- Overhead transparencies and handouts

Intention: To provide participants with an introduction to the study guide and to a holistic Christian view of health through faith and community

Objectives: During this session, participants will

1. Learn about the overall purpose, organization, and format of the study guide
2. Agree to basic values for trust and mutual respect that are necessary for a successful and enjoyable learning experience
3. Gain a holistic view of health through faith and community
4. Identify some definitions of key terms related to faith and health used in this study guide
5. Begin exploring their own understandings of health in relation to their spiritual journeys

Learning Activities

Setting Intention Through Welcome and Prayer (five minutes)

- Introduce yourself briefly (if necessary). Briefly share your interest in the present topic.
- Welcome participants and encourage them to ask questions or contribute to discussions throughout the meetings.
- Ask for a moment of quiet and either offer a short prayer or invite a participant to offer one that sets an intention for participants to be open to learning and supporting each other. (See Activity 1 for suggested prayerful reflections.)

Introducing Themes Related to Session 1 (five minutes)

- Please read the following:

Today's session will concentrate on familiarizing ourselves with the overall topic of this study guide and some of its key concepts.

- Read the following theme descriptions to introduce the topics explored in today's lesson.
- As this is the first lesson, inform the group that these activities will be done in order. Future lessons allow for your discretion or group input in choosing activities.

Activity 2—Explaining the Purpose and Overall Plan of the Study Guide
In this activity, we briefly look at the six aspects of this study guide: Intention, Information, Inspiration, Introspection, Interaction, and Integration.

Activity 3—Commitment to Mutual Respect and Dialogue

The purpose of this activity is for us to make an outward commitment to respect each other within the learning process.

Activity 4—Participants' Views on Health and Faith

In this activity, we will discuss our own views on what various aspects of health mean to each of us.

Activity 5—Preliminary Definitions Regarding Faith and Health

In this activity, we will compare our views from Activity 4 to sample definitions provided in order to extend discussion and create our own agreed on definitions for this study guide.

Group Activities and Discussion (about thirty-five minutes)

- Complete Activity 2 (about five minutes).
- Complete Activity 3 (about five minutes) and conduct a group discussion.
- Complete Activity 4 (about ten minutes) and conduct a group discussion.
- Complete Activity 5 (about fifteen minutes) and conduct a group discussion.

Concluding Reflections (five minutes)

- Ask participants for any concluding comments.
- Provide a summary and wrapup of the meeting (see Summing Up).
- Thank participants and inquire into the group's interest in the optional supplemental activities (to work on either independently or at next meeting).

Supplemental, In-Group, or Take-Home Activities (fifty minutes)

Unexplored themes can be used as supplemental activities, allowing extended time for discussion or reflection.

You and/or participants can use Supplemental Activities A through D for resources within an extended meeting time or for independent learning. Supplemental Activity A extends Activity 5 by allowing participants to reflect on what each of the key terms means to them. Supplemental Activity B (The Healing Ministry of Jesus) is useful as a source of inspiration when examining this study guide. The story in Supplemental Activity C can be read as the basis for a discussion about the ways Christian faith can promote strength in adversity. Supplemental Activity D can be used to increase one's own interpretation of key concepts related to faith and health and how they relate to personal belief and experience.

**ACTIVITY 1:
SETTING INTENTION THROUGH WELCOME AND PRAYER**

Time: Five minutes

Objective: To welcome participants and to set an intention for learning

- Introduce yourself briefly, including your interest in the present topic.
- Welcome participants and encourage them to ask questions or contribute to discussions throughout the meetings.
- Ask for a moment of quiet and either offer a short prayer or invite a participant to offer one that sets an intention for participants to be open to learning and supporting each other. If you are interested in suggestions for an opening prayer, two such prayers are provided.

**OPENING PRAYER
(Suggestion 1)**

**Creator God, as we gather today
create in us the will to be open to new experiences
and the desire to hear deeply the words
each one shares.**

**Awaken in us a holy curiosity
that challenges our complacency
and moves us forward into new places
where we discover what it means
to develop and protect healthy bodies, spirits, relation-
ships, and communities.
Help us hold the needs of all people
gently in our hands
as together we begin to build a community
sustained by love.**

**Finally, may the light of your love guide our path
as we learn to love each other and all people
more fully in this task.**

**We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ
by the Holy Spirit.**

Amen.

**OPENING PRAYER
(Suggestion 2)**

**Almighty God, thank Thee for the job of this day.
May we find gladness in all its toil and difficulty,
its pleasure and success,
and even in its failure and sorrow.**

**We would look always away from ourselves,
and behold the glory and the need of the world
that we may have the will and the strength to bring
the gift of gladness to others;
that with them we stand to bear
the burden and heat of the day
and offer Thee the praise of work well done.**

Amen.

**Charles Lewis Slattery,
early twentieth-century
Episcopal bishop***

**Note:* All prayers in this study guide that are attributed to an individual author are taken from the Web site of The World Prayers Project. They state the following as their Web site's purpose: "The World Prayers Project (WPP) is a nonprofit, educational, public service organization whose founding objective is to gather and present historic and contemporary World Prayers in a unified, multifaith archive on the Internet." (<http://www.worldprayers.org/>)