



Contact: 512.582.2197, info@nvcnetwork.org; www.nvcnetwork.org

Faith in Action Presentation to Rotary Clubs: The Benefits of Community Service and Charitable Giving

There are probably Rotarians and Civitans in your community, as well as other dedicated civic groups providing excellent volunteers and philanthropic deeds to your local nonprofits. Is your Faith in Action program the beneficiary of some of these charitable works? Have you given formal presentations to your local group of Rotarians, Civitans, or other civic groups? If not, please consider doing so. By introducing your program to your community's civic groups, you can open your doors to additional passionate volunteers and increased charitable dollars.

*This is a **sample** Faith in Action **presentation** that has been well received by several Rotary clubs. Local Faith in Action programs have presented this speech to community civic clubs in an effort to garner support for volunteerism and charitable giving for their programs. It is easily adaptable for use by your Faith in Action program, as well as for presenting to civic groups other than Rotarians. Our hope is that this resource can save you, your board and volunteers valuable time by providing a sample of the types of information you may share while building community awareness of your program.*

I thank you so much for welcoming me here today. I am delighted to meet all of you.

Mr. Smith asked that I speak with you on how community service and charitable giving can affect your health. Of course, the main objective of Rotary is service – service in the community, service in the workplace, service throughout the world. The Rotary motto is Service Above Self. So I fear I am preaching to the choir!

(Display the Chinese proverb on the overhead)

I argue that we can replace the word “happiness” with “health,” and the words of this proverb still hold true.

So what do we really know about the physical benefits of volunteering and donating charitable dollars? One of the best resources I have found is “*Give to Live: How Giving Can Change Your Life*” by Douglas Lawson, Ph.D.

Dr. Lawson is an ordained United Methodist minister who began his ministry in Hampton, VA, went on to earn a Ph.D. from Duke University in religion and history, and eventually founded Douglas M. Lawson & Associates, Inc., a fund-raising and management consulting firm. His firm has represented such clients as diverse as the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity International, Special Olympics International, Junior Achievement, C.A.R.E., United States Committee for UNICEF, and Girl Scouts of America.

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But even without these impressive credentials, I've found his book to be incredibly helpful and moving. There are plenty of books on fundraising, but few focus on the benefits to the giver. Dr. Lawson's book is full of stories from givers—people who gave of themselves, be it time or money, and how it changed them, enriched them, and even healed them.

Scientists are starting to catch onto what givers have been saying. Studies now tell us that assisting others, through acts of charity or devotion to causes, improves our **physical well-being**. Giving is not just a minor influence on good health, but the **KEY** to bodily and mental well-being.

For example, a 10-yr. study of the physical health and social activities of 2,700 men in Tecumseh, Michigan found that those who did regular volunteer work had death rates 2 ½ times lower than those who did not volunteer.

The late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, author of "The Power of Positive Thinking," told of a study by a life insurance company. The insurance company interviewed policyholders who lived to be 100 years or older. One of the survey questions was "What is the most important thing you have learned in your long life?" (Ask audience): Do you know what the most frequently given answer was? (PAUSE)

"To love thy neighbor as thyself." Dr. Peale concluded "they live longer ...because they have freed themselves from deadly negative influences such as anger, hatred, suspicion, guilt and anxiety."

Anger, hatred, suspicion, guilt and anxiety are deadly negative influences. "Toxic emotions" - this phrase has maybe become a cliché. But study after study seems to validate this cliché. Dr. Dean Ornish, the noted heart specialist, notes these emotions lead to isolation, cynicism, and hostility—traits that doctors have identified as major components of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and probably cancer.

Even **watching a video** focusing on helping your neighbor can have physical benefits. Harvard Drs. Carol Hirshnet and David McClelland found that people who watched a documentary about Mother Teresa's work with the dying showed an increase in immunoglobulin-A, the body's first line of defense against viral infection. Other movies not focusing on compassion had no impact on the immune system. **This is a biochemical reality.**

Heart specialists and cancer experts all say that when we improve our relationships and emotional attitudes, we speed our recovery and reduce our risk of life-threatening illness. **Self-centeredness, over-involvement with oneself at the expense of the community, repeated use of the "I" pronoun—all lead to isolation and anxiety.**

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Several studies have also examined spirituality, religion, and attending a church or a synagogue and its role in healing. Dr. Redford Williams, author of “The Trusting Heart,” and “Anger Kills,” studied residents in Evans Co., Georgia, noting that blood pressure levels were lower among those who frequently attended church than those who attended less often.

Dr. Harold Koenig at Duke University School of Medicine has found that elderly patients who attended church weekly or more had fewer hospital admissions and spent fewer days in the hospital than those attending church less often.

The world’s major religions all have as one of their core teachings **to be less focused on self and more concerned with loving others and treating them well.**

(Display Golden Rule slide on overhead. Then follow with Dr. Lynch’s quote on overhead)

Given this, maybe we should think of philanthropy and volunteer work as pharmaceutical and vitamin pills—they will cure what ails you and stave off any future illness!

Our nonprofits should promote themselves as having a “product” with healing qualities! If we demonstrate that giving and volunteering improve physical and emotional health, folks should be knocking down the doors of our nonprofits.

(Display List of Benefits on overhead)

With these wonderful benefits in mind, I am excited to tell you about a recently launched national volunteer movement. I work for *Faith in Action*, a program begun by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the United States’ largest private foundation devoted to improving the health and healthcare of all Americans. In fact, the foundation has committed \$100 million to the *Faith in Action* program.

What is *Faith in Action*? *Faith in Action* fosters caring relationships between volunteers of all faiths and their neighbors with long-term health needs. *Faith in Action* is a national volunteer movement that brings together religious congregations from many faiths and other community organizations. Their common mission is to help people who are aging and chronically ill maintain their independence by providing them assistance with everyday activities. These religious coalitions train volunteers to go into the homes of the frail elderly or chronically ill and mow the lawn, make minor home repairs, help them read their mail, drive them to the doctor, or just visit with these folks for awhile. In short, a neighbor’s independence depends on you! (Talk briefly about your *Faith in Action* program.)

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As I said previously, all religions preach, “Love thy neighbor.” Why not encourage our religious congregations to come together and help our neighbors struggling with health problems? Many folks just need a little bit of help or companionship in order to stay in their homes and not move into institutions.

But I want to now share with you a short video that tells the *Faith in Action* story and the blessings of volunteering more eloquently than I can. And as the physicians at Harvard note, perhaps we will see an increase in our immunoglobulin-A just by watching! (Show the *Faith in Action* Video)

Every time I see this video, I am awestruck by the glowing faces of the volunteers, not just the care receivers. **Helping others helps us.** And my program’s mission is to help our neighbors maintain their independence, so please consider volunteering with us or donating your charitable dollars. (Pause) But if you don’t volunteer with my *Faith in Action*, volunteer SOMEWHERE! Give your money to a worthy cause! Remember what we have learned here today: Helping others has a healing effect— so take your medicine!

*If you want happiness for an hour
—take a nap.*

*If you want happiness for a day
—go fishing.*

*If you want happiness for a month
—get married.*

*If you want happiness for a year
—inherit a fortune.*

*If you want happiness for a lifetime
—help someone else.*

Chinese proverb

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Benefits of Giving and Volunteer Work

Physical Benefits

- Enhanced functioning of the immune system
- Improved cardiovascular circulation
- Healthier sleep
- Significant reduction in toxic stress chemicals in the body (and thus, less stress)
- Longevity of life
- Decreased metabolic rate

Emotional Benefits

- Increased self acceptance
- Reduced self absorption and sense of isolation
- Increased endorphin release (which provides a natural emotional “high,” also known as “helper’s high”)
- Expanded sense of control over one’s life and circumstances
- Increased ability to cope with crises
- Improved concentration and enjoyment of experiences
- Enhanced compassion, empathy, sensitivity to others

Spiritual Benefits

- More receptivity to spiritual guidance
- Greater connectedness to God
- Heightened sense of appreciation and acceptance of others
- Sustained peace of mind

“Love your neighbor as you love yourself” is not just a moral mandate. It’s a physiological mandate. Caring is biological. One thing you get from caring is that you are not lonely, and the more connected you are to life, the healthier you are.”

Dr. James Lynch, author, *The Broken Heart—The Medical Consequences of Loneliness*

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"The Golden Rule" encompasses many faiths:

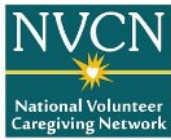
Buddhist - Hurt not others in ways you yourself would find hurtful.

Christian - Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Hindu - Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.

Jewish - What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.

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Muslim - No one of you is a believer until you desire for another that which you desire for yourself.

Zoroastrian - Do not approve for another what you do not like for yourself.

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