

APHA 150th Anniversary Celebration: The Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community Explores Faith Communities as Essential Partners in Community Public Health Programs and Research

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Editors' Note: The PHRS Bulletin is pleased to spotlight goings-on in the growing world of research, practice, and education on public health, religion, and spirituality. In this article, Barbara Baylor gives a brief history of the Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community, and highlights the Caucus' two special sessions taking place during the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the American Public Health Association.

The Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community – an official caucus within the American Public Health Association (APHA) – began its work in 1996 under the growing recognition that tackling health issues is not the exclusive domain of federal, state, or local government workforce or public/private organizations. Today, the Caucus continues to espouse the historic work begun by the Faith Health Movement. Through its sessions at the annual meetings of the APHA, the Caucus provides a platform and facilitates opportunities for evidenced-based discussion and research, and promising new approaches that support the value of faith as a key to the delivery of effective community health services. The Caucus believes that promoting and enhancing collaborations between the faith community and the health community is an effective partnership for addressing physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social health challenges.^[2] One does not need to be a member of APHA to join the Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community.

This year on November 6-9, in Boston, MA, the APHA will hold its Annual Meeting & Expo, and will be celebrating its 150th Anniversary of creating the healthiest nation and leading the path toward health equity. During this celebration, the APHA Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community will honor the legacy of faith and health partnerships by hosting two special sessions, including several distinguished and influential speakers, that focus on the role of the

Faith Community in the ongoing work for health equity.

For decades, those engaged in the work we are honoring have been rising to the challenge held out by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who asked: “What if congregations, mosques, and temples cooperated with each other to improve the health of people in the communities where they are located?”^[3] In 1992, with a belief that faith communities could play a primary role in improving health, Dr. William Foege, former Executive Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with the assistance of Former President Jimmy Carter, established the Interfaith Health Program (IHP) at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. The Program fosters partnerships between communities of faith and public health to close the gaps in preventing disease and improving health.

Yet even before that time, faith communities had been creating innovative programs and established health clinics, hospitals, and facilities. Some of the earliest hospitals were founded by major faith traditions, seen today in the myriad of Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Adventist, Jewish and other religiously branded medical centers, and in 1957, the Lutheran Evangelical Reformed Church and the United Church of Christ (UCC) formed Advocate Health Care. More recently academic faith and health centers have been founded, such as the Duke University Center for Spirituality, Theology, and

Health.^[4] We have a broad and long legacy to honor!

First, on Sunday, November 6, 2022, 6-7 p.m. in the Boston Convention Center, the Caucus will host a Celebration titled: “United to Heal: An Interfaith Celebration of Holistic Healing and Peace”. The Program is a multi-faith celebration that will honor diverse worship, prayers, reflections, and music. The event is free and open to the public. Several multi-faith cultures and traditions from the Greater Boston area have been invited to participate.

Second, on Monday, November 7, 2022, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. in the Boston Convention Center, the Caucus will host a special Invited Session titled: “Faithful Dancing with the Bears of Inequity: Past, Present, Future”. The title is derived from a quote by Dr. Joycelyn Elders, former U.S. Surgeon General, who once compared the work of public health to dancing with a bear. She said, “You don’t quit when WE get tired; only when the bear gets tired.”^[5] Historically, the Faith Community, which never tires of its dance with bears, has been integral to the success of social reform movements in the U.S.

“Faithful Dancing with the Bears of Inequity: Past, Present, Future”, will offer a retrospective view on the decades of faith involvement in health care delivery, caring for the sick, health education, health promotion, disease prevention, and health equity and will focus on: 1) the value and importance of the faith community’s role in the past, 2) the current faith health movement, research, and programming, 3) the continuing journey to rebuild trust and foster a sense of hope and mutual support between public health and faith, and, 4) the recognition that faith communities are more than physical spaces but are communities of faith filled with significant culture, history, and traditions which need to be passed on to future generations.

This rousing conversation will be moderated by Dr. Caswell Evans, the primary impetus in the formation of the Caucus on Public Health and the

Faith Community and a former President of APHA, and Barbara T. Baylor, MPH, Chair of the Caucus. Our distinguished invited guests include:

- *Dr. Howard K. Koh*, Harvey V. Fineberg Professor of the Practice of Public Health Leadership at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, former Assistant Secretary Dept. of HHS
- *Dr. David Satcher*, former Surgeon General of the U.S., former Executive Director of the CDC, Founder, The Satcher Leadership Institute, Morehouse School of Medicine
- *Dr. Somava Saha*, Founder and Executive Lead of Well-Being and Equity (WE) in the World, and Well Being In the Nation (WIN)
- *Mr. Jeffrey Simms*, Assistant Professor Health Policy, Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of N.C. at Chapel Hill

For more information about the Caucus and for membership, please contact Barbara T. Baylor, MPH, Chair via Email: baylorbarbara@gmail.com

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[2]^Caucus on Public Health and the Faith Community

[3]^Quoted from former president Jimmy Carter’s remarks in a video that introduced the Interfaith Health Program: Starting Point: Empowering Communities to Improve Health

[4]^Faith-Based Partnerships for Population Health: Challenges, Initiatives, and Prospects

[5]^Dr. Joycelyn Elders on Women in Leadership Positions. Symposium sponsored by University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco campuses