

Spiritual health

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Abstract: The group rotates the type of exercise - besides yoga, exercises have included walking and using exercise balls - and work through Bible study books with topics that are relevant to women. "Women work, and they're really busy," Schwerin says. "Besides their jobs, they're holding responsibilities as wife and mother and in their careers.

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Full text: very Monday night, Gretchen Borgum leads a small group of women in a yoga class at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church.

It's not a typical yoga studio. But this is no typical yoga class. This group combines yoga with Bible study, in a class called Exercising Your Faith.

While the women hold a lunge position, kneeling on one leg and holding up their arms, Borgum says, "I lift my heart onto God, and anything that has been heavy on your heart, give it to God."

When the class moves into standing balancing poses, some women hesitate to try the poses. But Borgum gives encouragement. "Poses are like life. When poses get hard, we find things to say like, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' " she says, reciting Philipians 4:13.

Borgum, who also teaches yoga at First Lutheran Church, gives cues for poses, followed by inspirational words. "Tell yourself, 'I am centered, I am balanced, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' " she says, as the women extend their arms in a T-shape and lift one leg in the air.

The practice has a peaceful quality, but there's also some laughter, a telltale sign that these women are comfortable being around each other. Some women begin giggling as they try to find their balance in another standing balance pose. "Remember, we're here to breathe. The posture's just secondary," Borgum says. Exercising Your Faith offers women like Laurel VanDenBerg a chance to breathe and to renew their physical and spiritual health.

"It's a great way to get fellowship and Bible study in. It's how we multitask," says VanDenBerg, who began attending Exercising Your Faith about a year ago.

The group members meet for an hour every Monday night and divide their time between exercise and Bible study. The group rotates the type of exercise - besides yoga, exercises have included walking and using exercise balls - and work through Bible study books with topics that are relevant to women.

Exercising Your Faith gives women the opportunity to pencil in a restorative time. "It unites two key needs that many woman have but often don't take the time for: their own spiritual growth and exercising their bodies," says Judi Schwerin, parish nurse at Gloria Dei and facilitator of Exercising Your Faith.

"Women work, and they're really busy," Schwerin says. "Besides their jobs, they're holding responsibilities as wife and mother and in their careers. They need that time to connect with other women."

The group started about five years ago with a small group of about four to five women after Schwerin noticed that women in the congregation mentioned they didn't have time to exercise. Now as many as 14 to 15 women attend each week.

A recent meeting included new group member Sonja Sletto. "I've been wanting to go for awhile. When I saw the book that they would be studying, I knew it had to work," she says.

The group is currently studying "Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy With God in the Busyness of Life," by Joanna Weaver. This particular study, the women in the group say, speaks to the

challenge of making time to grow in one's faith while being pulled in many directions, including service to others.

"It [the book] does speak to what this group is about. Most of us work and take care of children and parents," says Missy Radigan.

The same reflective quality of the yoga practice continues during the Bible study. A handful of Bibles and study books are scattered around the table in a fellowship room. Schwerin asks questions about the Bible study, and the other women join in and discuss various points of the reading for that week.

"I circled this passage on page 56," one woman says.

"And on page 57, I circled: 'We can't do everything. We can't even try,'" another woman adds. Other women nod their heads in agreement.

Fellowship with others, including sharing challenges, learning together and praying together, is important to grow one's faith, Schwerin says. "It's hard to be religious and spiritual without connecting to other people. Fellowship is important. We have a lot of fun giggling as we exercise. We get those endorphins going, and then we settle down to do Bible study."

The structure of the group makes it easier to fit in time for faith and exercise, group members say. "It's a priority to do both, a way to combine them," Radigan says.

"You come here and do it as a group. You're held accountable," Sletto says.

Exercising Your Faith also allows the women to form friendships in a small group setting that, because of the large church body at Gloria Dei, are sometimes difficult to develop, VanDenBerg and other group members say. The women share prayer concerns at the end of the Bible study, and members who miss a meeting will often email their prayer requests to the group throughout the week.

The structure of the group itself is a reminder about the importance for women to make time for themselves and for wellness, Schwerin says. "It's important to be well, both h-o-l-y and w-h-o-l-l-y well. We need to be healthy: physically, emotionally and spiritually."

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