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Call for Local Faith Communities to Come Together in National Effort to Save Lives

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention launches Your Life Matters! campaign

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (Action Alliance) launched the *Your Life Matters!* campaign, giving faith communities of every tradition, philosophy, sect or denomination, an opportunity to celebrate *life, hope, and reasons to live*. Each faith tradition is encouraged to dedicate one Sabbath each year, preferably corresponding to World Suicide Prevention Day, September 10, which this year is the weekend of September 11-14. However, the message that each congregants' life matters could be promoted anytime during the year whenever it fits the needs of the local faith community.



“Most faith communities share common core characteristics that, by their nature, help prevent suicides,” said Rev. Talitha Arnold, Executive Committee member of the Action Alliance and co-lead of the Faith Communities Task Force, which is responsible for developing the campaign. “Faith communities are most powerful when they promote hope; build healthy social connections; and provide answers to life’s challenging questions. Faith communities also recognize and celebrate the myriad reasons for living and the God-given value of each member in the community, whether young or old, weak or strong, healthy or infirmed.” Rev. Arnold also pastors a congregation in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Faith communities are in a unique position to reach a very large portion of the millions of Americans who struggle with serious thoughts of suicide each year. Many people feel hopeless, trapped, or are in such emotional pain or despair, that they struggle to face another day.

“Research shows that many people in these kinds of crises will accept help and support from faith leaders and faith community members, before they will seek care from mental health professionals,” according to Dr. Anne Mathews-Younes, Faith Communities Task Force co-lead and Division Director at Center for Mental Health Services at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Mathews-Younes suggests that “Faith communities can help their member by supporting those who face

mental health challenges and/or problems with misuse of alcohol and other drugs, as they seek effective treatment.”

The *Your Life Matters!* campaign features a continually growing website (<http://your-life-matters.org/YLM-home>) where faith leaders can find the information and resources they need for a successful local event. The Faith Communities Task Force of the Action Alliance, comprised of an interfaith group of faith leaders and clergy, theologians, authors, and suicide prevention and mental health experts, has assembled communications aids, worship and spiritual resources suitable for each of the major faith traditions in the U.S., and a compendium of other resources to assist faith communities in promoting mental and spiritual health, reducing suicide risk, and if tragedy strikes, supporting the needs of family and friends after a suicide event. The Faith Communities Task Force hopes to grow the web-based resource over the coming months. Dr. David Litts, a nationally recognized expert in suicide prevention and third co-lead of the Faith Communities Task Force, invites the public to submit other materials—prayers, meditations, and liturgies; sermons, homilies, reflections, and related resources; and scriptures and sacred texts—that may be added to the campaign website. The task force can be reached via email at your-life-matters@edc.org.

The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

(www.ActionAllianceforSuicidePrevention.org) is the public-private partnership working to advance the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* and make suicide prevention a national priority. Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) operates the Secretariat for the Action Alliance, which was launched in 2010 by former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates with the goal of saving 20,000 lives in five years.

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