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A faith-based plan to confront obesity

Tom Gallagher | Jun. 7, 2012 NCR Today

Regular readers of my columns and blogs (those few in addition to my parents) know that I have regularly reported and commented on the exploding obesity epidemic.

Here is the link [1] to a 2009 story I did, "Rightsizing the church: Physical Accountability."

Here's an excerpt from the Rightsizing story:

> In late February, for example, the Siena College Research Institute -- the survey and polling arm of the Albany, N.Y.-based Franciscan school -- released a report that found 44 percent of Empire State residents acknowledge that they are overweight. Less than one-third believe they are in good health and at the correct weight.
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> The Siena survey found that more than 90 percent of New Yorkers agree that obesity is a serious public health problem and three-quarters (76 percent) have all the information they need in order to eat a nutritious diet. Nearly two-thirds, meanwhile, have had a doctor talk to them about diet, exercise or nutrition.
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> "When it comes to health, nutrition and exercise, knowing and doing just don't match up," said institute director Dr. Don Levy.
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> When it comes to Christian clergy, the picture is decidedly worse. A 2004 national survey of more than 2,500 religious leaders by Pulpit and Pew, a research project on pastoral leadership based at Duke Divinity School, found that 76 percent of Christian clergy were either overweight or obese, compared with 61 percent of the general population.
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> The costs are real: Overweight or obese persons can raise group health insurance rates, are more likely to miss work for health reasons, and, when it comes to clergy and other church managers, say some, set a bad example for the work force.
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> "Influential people ought to live the example that resonates with this survey data, namely, people should take care of themselves," says Levy.

Here is [2] a recent story I did about a program by Chicago's Catholic Charities that is attempting to address childhood obesity.

My colleague, Sr. Rose Pacatte, just blogged [3] about New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's attempt to reduce the size of sugared drinks. She also provides an excellent list of movies about food and the food business.

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Does God want us to be thin?

That's the title of a new *Time* magazine story written by the innovative Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church in Southern California. Here's an excerpt:

> Two years ago, Warren, the author of the über-bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life* and the leader of the Saddleback mega-church in Lake Forest, Calif., was struck by how out of shape his 20,000-strong congregation had gotten and, he readily admitted, he was no better, tipping the scales at 295 lbs. -- or a full 90 lbs. too much for his 6-ft.-3-in. frame. He suspected he had a way to fix all that -- one that might work in the wider world as well -- and the secret, he believed, lay in Scripture, specifically in the Book of Daniel.
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> There's a lot that happens in the Book of Daniel, but the critical passage occurs when Daniel and three other Jewish boys are brought to the court of the conquering King Nebuchadnezzar, where they are to be fed and trained so that they may serve in the royal circle. But as the Biblical passage recounts, the boys resist at least in part, refusing the rich foods of the king's table and choosing a more spartan fare instead:
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> "... Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ... 'Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.' "
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> What the chief official saw, of course, was that Daniel and his friends had grown fitter and stronger than the other servants. It wasn't vegetarianism or vigorous exercise that had worked that magic -- though those were part of it. Instead, it was a belief that it was impossible to serve God fully if you were out of shape or unwell. For Daniel, getting fit was a triumph of faith -- and Warren was convinced his church members could find motivation the same way.
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> With that was born the Daniel Plan, a sweeping program of smart eating (and yes, lean meats are included), workout classes, small-group support meetings, walk and worship sessions and more, much of it made available both in person and online. Warren recruited three marquee names from the world of medicine -- Drs. Mehmet Oz, Daniel Amen and Mark Hyman (all of different faiths) -- to help spread the good-health message, and the Saddleback members fell in love with the plan. More than 15,000 of them have signed up so far and in the past 18 months alone, they have lost a collective 260,000 lbs.

Read more about the article on *Time*'s website [4].

Here's a *Time* magazine's video in which Warren explains the Daniel Plan:

To date, I have not come across a U.S. bishop talking about the obesity epidemic and ways to combat it. Perhaps someone is, but I just haven't seen it yet. If ever there was a truly pro-life issue that needs Rick Warren's Daniel Plan implemented and championed inside the Catholic church, it's obesity. Perhaps the New York archdiocese is a good place to start.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/29/2016 - 02:14*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/faith-based-plan-confront-obesity

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/rightsizing-church-physical-accountability

[2] http://ncronline.org/news/people/catholic-charities-moves-childhood-obesity
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/30728
[4] http://healthland.time.com/2012/05/31/blessed-are-the-sleek-why-god-wants-you-to-be-thin/#ixzz1x8OnVVvQ