

A MUSTARD SEED GETS INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION



International visitors join in Village HeartBEAT's chair aerobics class. On steps from left to right: Deborah Smith, Dr. Mwai Makoka (Switzerland), Mitchell Smith, Dr. Benita Yaw-Alfred (Jamaica) Middle from left to right: Brenda White, Cheryl Emanuel, Prof. Suzanne Jackson (Canada), Janet McConnell (Jamaica), Rev. Judith Johnson-Grant (Jamaica), Rev. Gary Harriott (Jamaica) Back from left to right: Eva Mafi (Tonga), Rev. Filifai'esea Lilo (Tonga), Joe Young, Rev. Jordan Boyd, Rev. Gerome Stinson, Bishop Wade Ferguson. Photo Credits: www.Zuri.Creative.com

Mecklenburg County Public Health and Village HeartBEAT (VHB) hosted a summit to discuss and develop a framework for promoting healthy living through Christian churches around the world. Representatives from VHB clergy and Community Partners, the World Council of Churches – Switzerland, Tonga, & Jamaica, and the World Health Organization convened in Charlotte for this ground-breaking strategic planning session and ended with a community reception at Dorothy D. Waddy Pavilion on Manchester Dr. in Charlotte.



Dr. Makoka leads a group discussion during Day 1 of the workshop.

Guided by Dr. Mwai Makoka, program director for the WCC's Health and Healing Program, the workshop took an in-depth look at three congregation-based health programs in Tonga, Jamaica and Charlotte, all of which are engaging communities in an effort to combat non-communicable diseases.

Though each have different histories and operate in different socio-economic environments, all three programs were examined and used as a starting point for developing a model for scaling up to other countries. Workshops included discussions regarding which components or activities can make a significant impact; identifying the necessary monitoring/evaluation tools and skills; recog-

nizing compatible governance, management and coordination structures and pinpointing effective technological solutions necessary to support the program.



Health Director, Gibbie Harris, takes an active role in group discussion during Day 2 of the workshop.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a worldwide fellowship with over a half a billion Christians around the world, supporting the work of churches globally on health issues. The legacies of WCC include establishing Christian health associations in several countries, proposing and implementing the Primary Health Care Model and creating programs to help churches address the aids epidemic in Africa, the Philippines and the Caribbean.

Under the leadership of Cheryl Emanuel, Mecklenburg County Senior Health Manager of Community Engagement, VHB is Mecklenburg County's award winning, faith-based movement, established in 2011 to help eliminate health disparities and balance health equity among African Americans and Latinos by enhancing community resources in a coordinated health care service model to address obesity and heart disease awareness. VHB works in collaboration with all members of faith-based organizations and leaders to provide a platform by which all of Mecklenburg citizens can partake of good health, regardless of socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, gender, age, or disability. Each year, area churches in Mecklenburg County with members who have self-identified with at

least one chronic disease health risk factor, enter into a 10-month wellness program, including a 16-week competition challenge, which encourages them to engage in activities such as healthy eating, exercising and health education. VHB won the National Faith & Community Health Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Region IV in 2014. In February of this year, VHB was 1 out of 10 initiatives to receive the Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge (HCCC) national SPOTLIGHT AWARD under the Aetna Foundation and was granted \$25,000 for its community-based model to improve and sustain the health and well-being of citizens in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods in Mecklenburg County. The program is also currently a contender in Aetna Foundation's Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge to win the grand prize of \$500,000 to be announced in December 2018. Village HeartBEAT's Season 7 kicks off October 2018.



Bishop Wade H. Ferguson III, Dr. Mwai Makoka, Arlandis Rush, VP Aetna Representative, Ms. Thereasea Elder, Rev. Jordan Boyd.

To learn more about this workshop or Mecklenburg County's Village HeartBEAT program, go to www.villagehb.org and www.facebook.com/VillageHeartBEAT or contact Cheryl Emanuel at Cheryl.Emanuel@MeckNC.gov.