

WORLD & NATION

Research highlights links between health and faith

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A yearlong review of research into the relationship between spirituality and medicine shows that acceptance of the link is moving from the margins of medicine to the mainstream, according to an expert on the topic.

Dr. David B. Larson, president of the National Institute for Health Care Research, spoke at a Washington press conference July 18 at the conclusion of a three-day conference on "Scientific Progress in Spiritual Research."

The conference featured reports from four working groups on the effects of religion and spirituality on physical health, mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, and neuroscience. The groups, made up of more than 70 medical and social science researchers from around the country, summarized their findings in a 22-page report.

"We have compiled enough evidence to suggest that the field of faith and medicine has matured and is now ready for growth," Larson said. "We are placing a wake-up call to the medical and scientific communities to stop, look and listen to the compelling collection of data on this forgotten factor in medicine."

Dr. Dale A. Matthews, associate professor of medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine, said his physical health working group found that existing research supports the link between reli-

gious beliefs and reductions in "illness-related risky behaviors" and mortality following cardiac surgery.

Church attendance is associated with lower rates of coronary disease, emphysema, cirrhosis and reduced mortality, he said.

"Are all effects of religion on health positive?" he asked. "No. Some studies have found no effect, and sometimes religion can have some negative effects on health." As examples, he cited those who refuse vaccinations or medical treatment for religious reasons and those who join in suicide pacts based on their spiritual beliefs.

Everett L. Worthington Jr., a psychologist who teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, said his mental health working group found a similar mixed bag.

Involvement in spirituality and religion translated into "better mental health for many and worse mental health for some," he said.

Worthington said a study of 1,900 female twins, published in March 1997 by the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, showed that those with "a high personal devotion to religion" had less stress and depression.

The study of religion's role in avoiding and treating addiction to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs is complicated by the fact that all three "have played a part in religious ceremonies," said William R. Miller, director of the research division of the University of New Mexico's Center on Alco-



CNS photo by Maria Bastone

Fostering love

Larry Spearman plays with 20-month-old Tevin at Incarnation Children's Center in New York's Washington Heights area. The bachelor, a volunteer at the center, became a foster parent to the boy, who has been exposed to HIV.

holism, Substance Abuse and Addictions.

But research shows that "involvement in religious activities is associated with lower rates of substance abuse," he said, and that spiritually rooted programs like Alcoholics Anonymous do help many people recover from alcohol and drug problems.

The fourth working group looked at the neuroscience of spirituality, despite some initial questions about "whether the two fields could be mixed without combustion or explosion," said Dr. Frank Gawin, scientific director of the UCLA VA Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Gawin said some study is already under way of how processes such as brain-map-

ping can be used to determine why use of meditation techniques can result in reduced blood pressure in certain patients.

But the goal is not to find a "religion pill" that can duplicate the beneficial effects of spirituality in patients without a religious background, said Linda George, associate director of the Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development at Duke University Medical Center.

The goal, she said, is to "acknowledge the role of religion in patients' lives and incorporate it into treatment."

Spirituality "has no horrible side-effects, it doesn't need approval from the FDA, and it doesn't cost much," George added.

CALENDAR

All Diocesan

Religious Activities

■ **AUG. 1-22** — Visitation: of the National Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima; Aug. 1, 11 a.m. Mass with Fr. Albert Shamon; St. Louis Church, Pittsford; visit will also include Pro-Life Rosary March on Sat., Aug. 9; from St. Joseph's Park to Planned Parenthood, Rochester; statue will visit other churches and sites; for information about visit locations, times and activities, call Vivian, 716/387-9662.

■ **AUG. 22-24** — Celebration: of 40 years of Cursillo in America; Hobart College, Geneva; for information call Sharon Monaco, 716/342-9641.

Workshops

■ **AUG. 22-24** — Marriage Encounter: sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter; Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua Lake; for more information or to register, call Mike and Kathy, 716/872-3180 or John and Belinda, 607/776-4870.

Livingston County

Religious Activities

■ **SAT, AUG. 2** — Visitation: of the National Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima; St. Mary's

Church, 40 Elizabeth St., Dansville; 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; for information call 716/335-2178 or 716/335-5874.

Monroe County

Fundraisers

■ **JULY 24-26** — Book sale: Gates Public Library, 1605 Buffalo Rd., Rochester; Thurs. 6-9 p.m., Fri. 1-9 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; for more information call the library at 716/247-6446.

Social Activities

■ **SUN, JULY 27** — Antique and Classic Car Show: sponsored by the Genesee Valley Antique Car Society; RIT Campus, Jefferson Rd., Henrietta; 9 a.m.-4 p.m.; for more information call 716/381-4368.

■ **THU, JULY 24** — Concert: "Time Warner Music by the Shore"; sponsored by Time Warner and the Monroe County Office for the Aging; Ontario Beach Park; 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; free; open to people age 60 and over and their families.

■ **FRI, JULY 25** — TGIF: sponsored by St. Louis Single Adult Ministry; Hedges Nine Mile Point Restaurant, 1290 Lake Rd., Webster; 5-7 p.m.; for more information call Lucretia, 716/586-8467.

■ **SAT, JULY 26** — Miniature golf: with St. Thomas More Singles Club; Rinky Dink Golf Course, 950 Panorama Tr., Rochester; 6:30 p.m.; for more information call

716/482-5656.

■ **JULY 26 & 27** — Canal Days: Union St. (Route 259), Spencerport; 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; for more information call 716/349-1331.

■ **JULY 27-AUG. 1** — Camp: sponsored by the Muscular Dystrophy Association; for children ages 6-21 with muscular dystrophy; for more information call 716/424-6560.

■ **TUE, JULY 29** — Storytime: Children's Center of the Central Library, 115 South Ave., Rochester; 10-10:30 a.m. for children 4-5 years old; 11-11:40 a.m. for 6-8 years old; registration required; call 716/428-8150.

■ **SUN, AUG. 10** — Picnic: Aquinas Class of 1937; for information call Len Austin, 716/381-5437 or Jack McDonald, 716/247-6464.

Sports Benefits

■ **MON, JULY 28** — Registration deadline: for Aug. 4 golf tournament to benefit Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church; Winged Pheasant Golf Links; for information call James Ventura, 716/288-9932.

■ **MON, JULY 28** — Deadline: to purchase tickets for Sat. Aug. 2 Easter Seals Night at Frontier Field; hosted by Rochester Raging Rhinos; game time 7:35 p.m.; for information call 716/264-9550; to order tickets call 716/454-5425.

Seneca Cayuga

Social Activities

■ **JULY 24-26** — Festival: St. Mary's Church, 35 Center St., Waterloo; dinner/music nightly at 5 p.m.; game booths/pony rides open nightly at 6:30 p.m.

Religious Activity

■ **JULY 24-26** — St. Ann's: Triduum; St. Ann's Church, 31 Erie Ave., Hornell; 7:15 p.m. Thu. and Fri., 4:30 p.m. Sat.

Steuben County

Social Activities

■ **SUN, JULY 27** — Chicken barbecue: St. Mary's Church, Church St., Rexville; 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.; for more information 607/225-4237 or 607/225-4943.

■ **AUG. 1-2** — Festival: St. Joseph's Church, 206 Freemont St., Wayland; booths open at 6 p.m. Fri., 5:30 p.m. Sat.

■ **SAT, AUG. 2** — Chicken barbecue: St. Joseph's Church, 206 Freemont St., Wayland; 5-7 p.m.; \$6 for adults, \$3 for children under 12.

Tompkins Tioga

Religious Activity

■ **SAT, AUG. 2** — Christian music: celebration; sponsored by St. Patrick's Church, Owego; the Bandshell

at Hickories Park, Owego; 10 a.m.-10 p.m.; for more information call Will Tracz, 607/687-6274.

Yates Ontario Wayne

Fundraisers

■ **AUG. 1-2, 4-6** — Yard sale: to benefit DeSales High School, DeSales Gym, High St., Geneva; 8 a.m.-2 p.m.

Religious Activity

■ **FRI, AUG. 1** — Nocturnal adoration: St. Mary's Church chapel, 95 N. Main St., Canandaigua; 7-8 p.m.

Social Activities

■ **SAT, JULY 26** — Breakfast meeting: of Divorced/Separated/Bereaved Group of Macedon; Log Cabin Restaurant, Route 31F, Macedon Center; 9 a.m.; for more information call Eleanor, 315/597-9558.

■ **WED, AUG. 6** — Reservation deadline: for Golden Alumni Luncheon of DeSales High School graduates; to be held Aug. 14; Belhurst Castle, Geneva; 12:30 p.m.; \$13 per person; for reservations call Humphrey Donahue, 315/789-5291 or John O'Malley, 315/781-2625, or send check to Golden Alumni Luncheon, 231 LaFayette Ave., Geneva, NY 14456.