Incorporating the Million Hearts® initiative in church health ministries
One of the main goals of Bless Your Heart is to encourage church members to live a heart-healthy lifestyle. In order to do this, we need to identify the goals for your church. This will help you design a program that reaches your members and shows if the program is really helping your members. Some examples of these church-wide goals include:

- Finding members who want to participate in the program
- Learning what those members need and want from a heart health program
- Teaching members about the Million Hearts program and how it can help them
- Creating programs to best reach church members, such as an exercise class or a community garden
- Providing classes that teach members about heart health and ways they can start living a heart-healthy lifestyle
- Evaluating your health ministry programs and recommending changes to improve the success of the program
Program design

If you are interested in starting or improving your health ministry, you might find program design useful. Program design includes four main areas: planning, assessing needs, carrying out the program and measuring its effectiveness.

PLANNING
Planning for your goals is the first step in building a successful program. This is not a quick step. It will take time to develop the action plan behind your program. However, taking time with church members to lay out your ideas and strategies is the first step in making your program a success.

ASSESSING NEEDS
What health concerns affect your church members? What programs would your members like to see at your church? Which programs would they attend? Who are your church members (demographics)? How does the makeup of your church body affect your program? Questions like these are important to your planning process. Health programs are most effective when they target a specific group of people. Knowing details about your church body will be important to developing your health program.

TAKING ACTION
After planning and assessing your needs, it’s time to start your program. Here, it’s important to keep communication clear and keep a close eye on how your program is doing. There will almost certainly be some issues that arise that you didn’t see coming. By focusing on clear communication and monitoring your program closely, you will be able to identify problems quickly and make adjustments. Clear communication will also let you celebrate some early successes of your program, which in turn can motivate other church members to participate.

MEASUREMENT
This final step helps you see how well your programs are reaching your congregation. Are church members attending? Where have you seen the best results? How can you improve your program? Evaluation can include surveys or focus groups, but it can also include informal conversations with church members to see what is working or what might need to change.

Sending a health message to your congregation

Health education uses programs that research has shown to work. Here, we will provide some of those methods for encouraging good heart health and promoting the Million Hearts program in your congregation:

- Starting a health ministry led by church members. This is the first step in building a foundation for your congrega-

Prevention

Preventing health problems from happening in the first place is a much better strategy than treating health problems after the fact. Prevention is quickly becoming an important focus in our health care system today.

Preventing heart disease and stroke is the goal of the Million Hearts program. Heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death in the United States. Problems that lead to heart disease and stroke include inactivity, obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking. Most of these factors can be prevented or controlled.

The Million Hearts campaign is focusing on several steps that your church members can take that help prevent heart disease and stroke:

- **Remember your ABCS**
  - **A**: Aspirin therapy for those who need it
  - **B**: Blood pressure control
  - **C**: Cholesterol control
  - **S**: Quitting Smoking
- **Talk with your doctor** about your risks for heart disease and stroke
- **Eat a healthy diet**
- **Get moving!** Exercise is important to keeping your heart healthy.