

## Spiritual Communities as Places of Healing

Psychological research shows conclusively that members of a spiritual community of any denomination are significantly healthier emotionally and physically than people without such connections.

Several reasons have been identified.

1. Positive belief systems: Positive beliefs enhance optimism and self esteem, strengthen the immune system, hasten recovery from illness and depression, and promote longevity.
2. Connecting and belonging: People in positive relationships live longer, recover from serious illnesses more quickly and completely, and resist viral infections better than those who remain isolated.
3. Prayer: Studies have shown that prayer induces emotional and physical healing.
4. Worship that is Uplifting: Uplifting, practical spiritual experiences make a positive difference in people's lives.
5. Empowerment: A safe, empowering faith community empowers people to take life-changing steps.
6. Meaningful small groups: By building a circle of friends through shared activities, people gain a sense of belonging, which reduces anxiety and enhances healing at all levels.
7. Positive experience in being of service: Studies show that people who regularly volunteer need less surgery and suffer fewer serious illnesses. Often people who serve others also feel an increase in energy and optimism.

There is no other investment of time, resources, and talent that comes even close to this amazing breadth of deep benefits from committing to and participating in an active, compatible faith community. If you calculate the costs of anxiety and other emotional stressors, or the down time and long term effects of serious illness, your decision to commit actively to a faith community that you love, and to support its positive effectiveness in several ways, is a huge bargain and a decisive blessing.

(Source: "Churches as Healing Communities," Robert Ellsworth, Ph.D., in *New Thought*" by Mary Manin Morrissey, 2002, Jeremy Tarcher/ Putnam Books).