



UP FRONT

WITH ELAINE C. THOMPSON, PHD, FACHE
PRESIDENT AND CEO



The new year is a great time for new beginnings. I am so inspired by the wonderful people seeking health by participating in our FitChurch Challenge.

The 12 week FitChurch Challenge is being conducted by talented members of the Lakeland Regional Health team under Lauren Parkes-Springfield's leadership, in collaboration with the Lakeland Family YMCA, and team leaders from the 14 teams participating in the program. At last count, 246 participants are learning, exercising and fellowshiping their way to good health together. Programs enjoyed by the group so far include a special Kick-Off at the YMCA, Get Moving: Fitness Foundations, The Basics: Know Your Numbers and two walking meetups.

You may have learned about the FitChurch Challenge and met some of our participants in a recent [Ledger feature](#). We are so grateful that Dawn McDonald shared her three year personal journey as an inspiration for others. Ms. McDonald activated her faith, increased her activity, made wise eating and lifestyle choices and today no longer needs blood pressure, cholesterol and migraine medicine. As a physical therapist who understands the strain that an unhealthy lifestyle places on so many, I find my heart singing over Ms. McDonald's success!

Some of our FitChurch Challenge participants also attended our recent Living Well + Eating Better event that brought the editor of the *Mayo Clinic Diet* book, Donald D. Hensrud, MD, to our community to share simple solutions for healthy eating and encouragement to make lasting changes for good health. Our 460 guests were treated at no cost to the book and a healthy meal featured in it, along with wellness screenings, educational information and diabetes prevention assistance.

I had the privilege to share Lakeland Regional Health's good work with congregants at College Heights United Methodist Church recently. Before my presentation began, a FitChurch Challenge participant came to the podium and shared how fun and spiritually fulfilling the events are, encouraging those at the meeting to come along on the journey. I was so moved to see firsthand what a difference this program will make. I cannot wait to report back to you the final results of the program in a few months.

As a safety net provider, Lakeland Regional Health provides hospital services to all those in need of essential care, regardless of the ability to pay. We take this role very seriously and constantly assess the healthcare needs of those we serve and find ways to strengthen the health of our community through innovative programs like our [Family Health Center](#), and the FitChurch Challenge now under way as part of our [Congregational Health Partnership](#).

I wish you and those you love a healthy and happy new year.