

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

A Prescription from the Pew

If you're reading this in church, congratulations. You just might be prolonging your life.

According to the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine* (I read it all the time, don't you?), attending church every week can add two to three years to your life.

Regular exercise—which does not include all the standing, sitting and kneeling we do during Mass, sorry—can add up to five years. Using cholesterol-lowering drugs can add two and a half to three and a half years.

All things considered, church is cheaper, and—though others may disagree—a lot easier to handle.

No one is quite sure why weekly churchgoing seems to help you live longer. It may be that church attendance makes you happier and more at peace. (And that's in spite of all those cell phones ringing during the homily—and the gentle but insistent nudging of the usher waving the collection basket under your nose.) It may be that church gives the faithful a sense of community and belonging; people who have a support network tend to fare better than those who try to muddle through life on their own.

And then again, it may just be good for you.

By attending church every week, the parishioner lets the heart and the head spend at least one hour a week in quiet conversation with God. The worries of the world are lifted up. Petitions are offered. Old truths are retaught.

Prayer and meditation help center the soul. The spirit is, at least for a brief moment, refreshed and renewed. Sometimes, that makes all the difference. Cynics, of course, are already sneering. They argue that other factors are really at play here. Religious people are less likely to smoke, divorce, contract sexually transmitted diseases or engage in high-risk behavior. They're more likely to see a doctor regularly, and more apt to follow his advice.

(What are the Ten Commandments, after all, if not the Ultimate Doctor's Orders? Following those is probably good training for other things in life, too.)

The author of this study, Daniel Hall, is an Episcopal priest, so he may be just a wee bit biased. He admits as much—but still contends that there is something to his study, and something that merits more attention.

I think he's right. And I speak not only as someone who attends church every week, but also as someone who has an aversion to taking any kind of drugs, and who is not wild about exercise, either. (Me, I need to sit down and rest after brushing my teeth.) I'd like to prolong my life—who wouldn't?—and if being in church regularly will help, I'm all for it.

Who knows? Maybe the best prescription for longer life is much simpler than we realize.

Just take two Masses and call me in the morning.

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