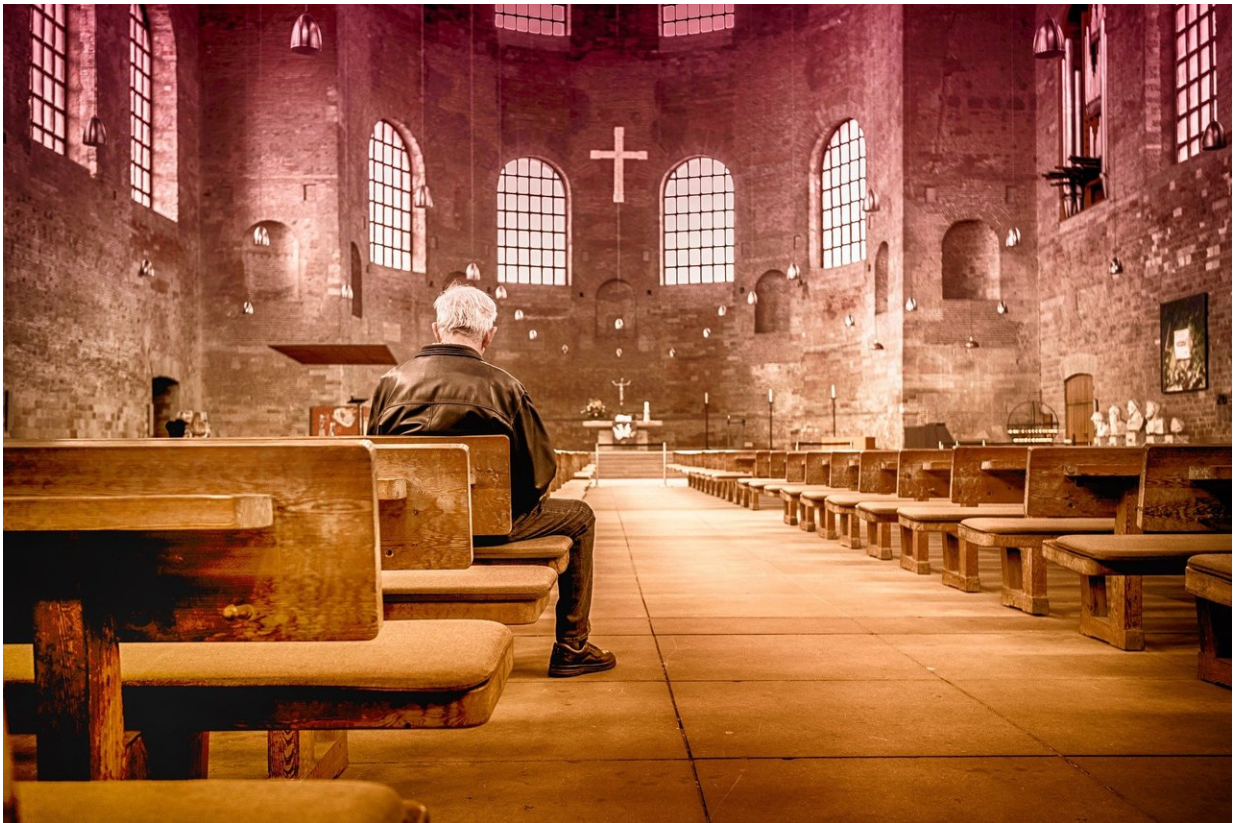


Study shows link between regular attendance at religious services and health and longevity

January 9 2018, by Melva Robertson



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Researchers from the Emory Rollins School of Public Health have published a paper in *PLOS ONE* that links regular attendance at religious services with improved health and lowered mortality.

The researchers conducted an [empirical study](#) on data collected 2004-2014 through the University of Michigan's Health and Retirement Study (HRS), which surveyed social and economic determinants of mortality in middle-aged and older adults, including religious factors.

"We wanted to link the research on religion—especially religious attendance—into the [social determinants](#) of health framework," says Idler.

This was an idea the paper's authors also examined in their book, *Religion as a Social Determinant of Public Health* (Oxford University Press, 2014), edited by Idler and featuring chapters by Blevins, Kiser, and Hogue, in addition to numerous additional Emory faculty.

"With this paper, we were able to take a theory and a conceptual framework to real data and came back with some dramatic findings. "

They found that there is a substantial amount of protection against mortality from all causes for people who attend [religious services](#) once a week or more often. Even those who attended less frequently had a greater protection against [mortality](#) than those who didn't attend at all. There were no differences by religious affiliation.

Part of this may be due to the positive health behaviors shown among those who attend religious services more often. For instance, those who attended services more often were less likely to smoke or drink alcohol than those who never attended, and they were more likely to exercise and get health screenings. Those frequenting religious services also experienced social benefits linked to health, like being part of a socially supportive community or volunteering to help others.

The findings showed that the protective effect of frequent attendance at services was very comparable to the effects of higher levels of income

and wealth, economic factors that were especially well measured in the HRS.

More information: Ellen Idler et al. Religion, a social determinant of mortality? A 10-year follow-up of the Health and Retirement Study, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0189134](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189134)

Provided by Emory University

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