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## Portland-area YMCAs praised for emphasis on spiritual health

By **JOHN FORTMEYER**

**CNNW publisher**

BEAVERTON — A nationally known expert on developing a healthy body says true balance in life demands a focus on more than the physical, and he commended Portland-area YMCAs for recognizing that.

“If our priorities are spirit, mind and body, let’s not be afraid of the spiritual message of Jesus Christ our Lord,” Wayne Westcott told hundreds attending the annual Christian Principles in Business and Life dinner sponsored by the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette Chaplain’s office.

Westcott is fitness research director for the South Shore YMCA in Quincy, Mass. He has authored more than 20 books and serves as a consultant for a wide range of organizations.

The annual dinner highlights the energy with which the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette is, in the words of Chaplain Bob Reichen, “seeking to ‘unbind’ the ‘C’ ” in the organization’s name by re-emphasizing the Christian principles on which the worldwide agency was founded more than a century and a half ago.

The chaplain’s office strengthens, encourages and comforts YMCA staff, members and volunteers as they put Christian ethics into practice in the five-county Portland-Vancouver regional area. In March it will hold its fourth annual Christian Leadership Conference.

A number of other YMCAs nationally are pursuing a similar focus on Christ; Chuck Ferguson, a member of the local Y’s Christian Principles Committee, said about 150 people from YMCAs across the nation gathered in a Colorado meeting in October to discuss promoting such change from within.

Eugene Wallace, chair of the committee, said the YMCA owes its very existence to divine guidance, and that shouldn’t be disregarded.

“It’s a movement that has been led by God, inspired by God and sustained by God,” he said.

Westcott openly acknowledged at the dinner that his agency in Massachusetts does not yet have such a Christian focus, but said that what the Portland-area Y is doing is more than appropriate.

“If we’re going to call it a YMCA, then let’s not be ashamed to use the word ‘Christian,’ ” he said.

Westcott gave a brief presentation on how combining both cardio exercise and strength training brings optimum results for good health and effective weight loss.

“Your muscles are the engine of your body, just like Jesus Christ is the heart of Christianity,” he said.

He said all Americans — and especially Christians — need to exercise regularly.

“I believe it’s much easier to be a doer of the Word when you are physically fit,” he said.

In their comments, Ferguson, Reichen and Bob Hall, president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette, all echoed Wallace’s call for a fresh vision of God’s historic role in the worldwide movement.

“We must not ignore or forget this wonderful spiritual legacy,” said Hall. “It’s the foundation of our organization — it’s in its DNA,” Hall said.