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## Kalamazoo

### KALAMAZOO LIVING

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## Holding grudges stresses your heart and your immune system

by Linda S. Mah | Kalamazoo Gazette  
Thursday January 29, 2009, 7:00 AM

KALAMAZOO -- It's the Season of Forgiveness in southwestern Michigan, and experts want people to know that forgiveness is good for your heart. Literally.

Unforgiveness has been shown to have detrimental effects on the human cardiovascular and immune systems, said Everett Worthington, a professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University and an expert on forgiveness.

Forgiveness, on the other hand, is associated with good health. Research has shown that people who are able to practice forgiveness report fewer health problems than those who say they have difficulty forgiving, said Wayne Ramsey, a program officer with Kalamazoo's Fetzer Institute, WHAT IS IT?.

Forgiveness is the theme of a three-month emphasis, through March, being touted by eight area organizations, including the Fetzer Institute. The Season of Forgiveness, the brainchild of Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra director of marketing and public relations Thom Andrews, includes a concert, speakers and discussion groups.

"The overall goal of this ... is to immerse people in the idea of understanding and acceptance as a way to lead a healthier, happier life," Andrews has said.

Holding grudges and experiencing chronic hostility stresses the arteries, said Worthington, who co-published a paper on forgiveness and health in the Journal of Behavioral Medicine in 2007.

As with any stressful situation, chronic hostility related to unforgiveness "stretches out the arteries, which makes little tears inside the arteries and veins. These form tiny deposits of scar tissue that can snag things going through the blood and make the blood vessels less flexible," he said.

That scar tissue increases the risk of a cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack or stroke, he said.

Unforgiveness, he said, also is associated with the buildup of cortisol, a hormone that deposits around the adrenal gland. Cortisol is known to disrupt sexual desire, digestion and the immune system.

Forgiveness is being included in more clinical work with patients in alcohol treatment programs and with those suffering general anxiety and post-traumatic stress syndrome, Ramsey said.

Researchers have found that forgiveness is often an important issue for people suffering from chronic illnesses or in palliative care at the end of their lives, Ramsey said.

He said Dr. Ira Byock, a clinician who has written about wellness through the end of life, "tells his patients when they are facing the last stage of life to think about saying four things to those that you are closest to. Think

#### Forgiveness Explorations

What: 45-minute introductions to the topic of forgiveness, using video and discussion.

When: Noon Feb. 19 and 26 and March 5. Other dates to be announced.

Where: Epic Center classroom, lower level of the Epic Center, 359 S. Kalamazoo Mall.

How much: Free.


More information: Call Thom Andrews at 370-3951.

#### Kalamazoo Living headlines


- [Students Without Borders](#) 4:00 PM
- [Kalamazoo Bicycle Club's 'Bike Camp' to teach safety, bicycle care](#) 9:18 AM
- [Food Dance chef offers 'Fearless Fish' class](#) 7:04 AM
- [The Strutt's Sunday bluegrass and brunch aimed at kids once a month](#) 11:39 AM
- [Kellogg Foundation grant funds youth cooking classes at Young Chefs Academy](#) 10:29 AM
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about saying these things: I forgive you, please forgive me, I love you and thank you."

See more in [Feature](#), [HealthLife](#), [Kalamazoo - News](#), [Top Features](#)

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- [Saugatuck Brewing Co. adds banquet facility](#)
- **REMINDER:** [Raise a glass to Michigan beer and the end of Prohibition tonight at 6 p.m.](#)

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by the Kalamazoo Gazette staff

- [This week in local history: excerpts from the Sunday, May 9, 1954](#)
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- [Looking Back: Postcard of Miliham Park's log cabin](#)

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