

The Ministry of Healing: An Effective Way of Communicating God's Love to All People

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I am delighted to be with you in this important annual conference in which you reflect upon new thinking in Anglican Global Mission. I also rejoiced when I was asked to speak on the subject of health and healing because, as some of you know, I have practiced as a medical doctor for 26 years. This is why the ministry of healing is close to my heart.

The ministry of healing was an integral part of Jesus' ministry. That is why Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, read these verses from the book of Isaiah 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18-19). He then said to the people who gathered in the temple, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21).

Jesus started his healing ministry immediately after calling his disciples and He linked healing with the kingdom of God. St Matthew wrote: 'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people' (Matthew 4:23). We also see this link between the healing and the Kingdom of God when Jesus sent his disciples and said to them: 'As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give' (Matthew 10:7-8).

The questions that emerge now are: 1) why was Jesus involved in healing ministry and 2) what is the link between healing and the Kingdom of God? Obviously, we need many hours in order to respond to these two questions, but I will try to make a very brief response that will help us as we reflect on our mission today.

As we know, Jesus Christ came to reconcile us to God and to redeem us from the sinful nature which we inherited as a consequence of the human fall. St Paul wrote to the church in Rome saying: 'For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men' (Romans 5:17-18).

In other words, Jesus through his death on the cross was able to restore in us the original image on which God created Adam and Eve; the image that was distorted as a result of our sin. So in Christ we are renewed, reconciled and became citizens of the Kingdom of God.

On the other hand, healing is also the process of restoration of the normal functions of the human body. It is the reversing of the consequences of the disease into a state of health and wholeness on which we were created. So, we can say that healing, as a process of restoration, gives a glimpse of the restoration of the Image of God in us. Jesus' healing ministry helped the people at his time to believe that he had

the power to forgive. Jesus said: 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men' (Matthew 9: 6-8).

Jesus here not only forgave the paralytic man, but also healed him. In other words, the paralytic man was reconciled to God and was healed from his sickness in the same time. The outcome of this healing is that the people gave glory to God. This is a glimpse of what the believers will do in the Kingdom of God. I hope you can see the correlation between ministry of healing and the Kingdom of God.

We can also see this correlation in the spiritual healing as Jesus released people from the bondages of evil spirits and satanic powers which destroyed their lives spiritually and physically.

From all this we can conclude that when the church gets involved in health care and holistic healing, it walks in the steps of Christ and fulfils his mission on earth. In addition to this, healing ministry is a practical response to God's commandment to love our neighbour. That is why, over the centuries many churches and missions established hospitals and organized health care programs.

The Start of Medical Ministry in Egypt

This leads me to tell you the story of Dr Frank Harpur who started the medical ministry of the Anglican Church in Egypt and Sudan. Dr Harpur, a CMS Missionary from Ireland, was invited to start medical work in Egypt because when the first Anglican missionaries came they found that many Egyptians, especially those who live in villages, were pale and suffered from various tropical diseases. When Harpur came, he decided to build a small hospital close to a Nile port where boats came from the north and the south. This is because he was committed to provide healthcare to all Egyptians hence he chose this strategic place in order to be accessible to people from all parts of Egypt. After establishing the CMS hospital in Cairo he soon realized that the need for medical care increases the further one travels away from Cairo. He asked himself: 'How can I reach out to these deprived areas?' After thinking, he decided to buy a sailboat (dahabia) to be the first floating hospital on the Nile, the great river of Egypt.

With his dahabia (floating hospital), he was able to sail to many villages where he used to set up a tent hospital on the bank of the Nile. In the tent hospital he examined the patients and treated them for endemic diseases, eye diseases and various injuries.

In one of his trips, Frank Harpur reached a village called el Hamoul in the Province of Menoufyia in the Delta of the Nile. One of the elders of the village, Sheikh Bassiouny el Saidi welcomed him to set up the tents in his field. A few days later, at the time of the departure of Harpur, Sheikh Bassiouny appealed to him to establish a permanent hospital in the area. Menouf, the then capital of Menoufyia, was chosen to be the location for its first hospital. In this way, the welcome and hospitality of an Egyptian Muslim citizen joined with the love and expertise of Frank Harpur to form this unique hospital: Harpur Memorial Hospital, which has served the people of Menoufyia since it was established in 1910, until today.

When I went to work at Harpur Memorial Hospital in 1979, people were still talking about Dr. Harpur. They talked about his commitment to provide health care for the poor and how he used a donkey as a way of transportation to reach out to patients who were not able to come to the hospital. He used the available resources in order to improve the health status of the people. His vision, humility and perseverance were an inspiration to me and to many doctors who served in the hospital before me.

Why does the Church need to continue to be involved in the Healing Ministry today?

There are several reasons for the church to be involved in healthcare today. I would like to mention here some of them.

A) The need for healthcare is overwhelming: 22,000 children die every day around the world. That is equivalent to 1 child dying every 4 seconds. It is as if the 2004 Asian Tsunami or the 2010 Haiti earthquake is repeated almost every 10 days. Most of these children are in the underdeveloped countries. That is why these news do not attract the international media.

From UNICEF's 2010 statistics we learn that:

- 2.5 billion people lack access to improved sanitation
- 1 billion children are deprived of one or more services essential to survival and development
- 148 million under 5's children in developing regions are underweight for their age
- 101 million children are not attending primary school, with more girls than boys missing out
- 22 million infants are not protected from diseases by routine immunization
- 8 million children worldwide died before their 5th birthday in 2009
- 4 million newborns worldwide are dying in the first month of life
- 2 million children under 15 are living with HIV
- More than 500,000 women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth

Looking at all these sad figures, the church cannot be silent, paralytic, and just watching the situation. We should be moved by the compassion of Christ to help as much as we can in this drastic situation. Jesus does not only have the power to heal, but has the compassion to heal. We may think that it is very difficult to get involved in providing healthcare because of the overwhelming needs and what the church can do is like a drop of water in an ocean. However, we should not be discouraged by the magnitude of needs, but we should do our best to relieve the suffering of the people. In this way, we would be partakers of Christ's mission.

B) There is a need to translate the Good News into action. There is abundance in preaching the gospel in churches and through many satellite television channels and radio stations which broadcast sermons, Bible commentaries, etc... But the world wants to see the gospel in action not just to hear about it. St. Francis of Assisi said, 'preach the gospel by all means, and if necessary, use words'. Healthcare is very important because it communicates God's love in action. This is particularly important where Christians are a minority living in the midst of a non-Christian majority.

I was asked frequently by Muslim friends, when I worked at Harpur Memorial Hospital, why do we [Christians] care in such a way? My answer was always 'because Jesus taught us to love everyone because he loved everyone and went around doing good'. I also used to tell the story of the Good Samaritan to explain how Jesus wants us to love our neighbors, even if this neighbor is different in religion or belief. So, the church that experiences the love of God should love its neighbors—and love is not an empty word, but involves actions and even sacrifice! If we are to complete Christ's mission, which he started, we have to adopt his mission which is 'to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'.

Having said that, some churches may focus on the action part of Christian mission and leave behind the heart of the mission, which is the Good News of Jesus Christ. If we who are involved in health care and healing did that, what would be the difference between what we offer in a Christian hospital and in a public one? What is the point of having a faith based health care?

Last year I was visiting the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva and I was surprised to know that WHO is now recognizing the importance of faith-based healthcare. When I asked why, the answer was because healing and health is not only physical but holistic.

When I was serving at Harpur Memorial Hospital in Menouf, we used to have morning prayer meetings. It was surprising to see non-Christian patients coming to some of these meetings asking for prayers. When I asked, Why do you seek Christian prayers, the answer was, because we believe that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead and you pray in his name. I remember also two patients with conditions difficult to diagnose who came to the hospital because they had a dream or a vision telling them to go to the English hospital (Harpur Memorial). These patients, by God's help, were diagnosed, treated successfully and were healed.

One lady came to the outpatient clinic, paid the examination fees, and waited to be seen by the doctor. When she came to the doctor's clinic, the doctor asked her 'What do you complain of?' She said, 'From nothing!' 'Why did you come, then?' the doctor asked. 'I came to be prayed for.' The doctor returned the fees and prayed for her. She went away happy. The healing process is a complex one. It has the physical, the spiritual, and the psychological dimension to it. We need to be open to provide the needs in every dimension. This does not mean that we as healthcare providers should impose our faith on those who come to us. In fact, we should not in any way take advantage of the weakness and the need of our patients.

C) We Christians need to be involved in providing healthcare because health is important in combating poverty. A sick child cannot go to school, his/her brain cannot grow in a normal way and this may interrupt his/her education. This leads to ignorance. A sick parent cannot work. This reduces the income of the family. Low income families cannot afford the cost of healthcare. It is a vicious circle! It starts by ill-health that leads to ignorance which leads to poverty. In this regard we must give a special priority to Primary Health Care (PHC) because of its wider impact on the population.

Challenges that are facing global Anglican mission in the area of health

1) The first and the most important challenge is the training and equipping healthcare workers (doctors, nurses, paramedics) to see healing ministry as a vocation, not just a job. My care for the patients changed to the better when I started to realize that practising medicine is my calling not a job. I used only to think of the overseas mission doctors and nurses as the ones who are called to serve until a medical CMS missionary doctor, Revd Dr John Coleman, came to Egypt and discipled me and helped me to realise that I am also a local missionary because I have a mission to fulfil.

Technical training is also important because church hospitals and health programs should provide the best possible care. Obviously our hospitals will not be able to compete with other hospitals especially in the area of advanced medical technology but we are capable to compete in the quality of care we provide. Training will definitely help in improving the quality of care. To conclude this point of training I would say if we want to provide a good holistic health care , we should provide a holistic training .

2) The rising cost of healthcare is a big challenge. Medicine, medical equipment, and diagnostic kits are getting more expensive all the time. This is reflected on the cost of healthcare. Low income people who cannot afford healthcare will not go to hospitals and primary healthcare units simply because they cannot afford the cost. WHO statistics show that more low income people die from

preventable diseases. We need to develop health micro-insurance which helps to subsidize the cost of healthcare, especially for the poor and disadvantaged members of society. Such micro-insurance systems guarantee providing the basic health needs to the poorest people.

- 3) Capital funding to establish healthcare units and hospitals. This is an extremely difficult challenge as many funding organizations do not want to fund capital expenditures like buildings and major equipments. In countries like Egypt, if churches want to be involved in healthcare, they must have a place that can be registered according to specific requirements. Without such places, churches cannot provide healthcare in any way. There is a need for a registered base, i.e. hospital or health unit, to do such activities. This is not always the case in some African countries where churches can be involved in health programmes without having a hospital building. I hope mission organizations, like USPG, would consider this point as they encourage the churches to be involved in health and healing.

I would like to end this paper by saying that if there is a pressing need in this 21st Century it is the need for healthcare. Three of the eight Millennium Development Goals are directly related to health. The other five are related indirectly. We Anglicans need to be actively involved in relieving the suffering of people, in combating poverty, and in restoring wholeness. We need to follow in the steps of Jesus who sent his disciples to heal the sick and preach the Kingdom of God.