

## BIBLICAL INSIGHTS ON HEALTH CARE



**From Its beginning, the church has been concerned about health care.** In this, it has followed the example of Jesus, who healed the sick and cast out demons as he proclaimed the coming of God's rule. The first disciples continued Jesus' healing ministry. In the course of time, the church established hospices and hospitals to provide health care on a more organized basis.

Throughout its history, the church has been guided by biblical principles in its efforts to provide health care. Though specific techniques of healing and ways of providing health care are radically different from those of Bible times, biblical insights on health are still relevant for today. Following are four insights that can illumine our understanding of the church's mission in health care.

**Good health is part of God's Intentions for all people.** We are created for life, not death. To the extent that sickness impairs one's ability to function effectively and to relate constructively to others, it diminishes the fruitful interaction of persons and community for which we are created.

Sickness is not a normal state. It reflects disharmony within creation. It is not God's intention for humankind. Much illness is a result of human sin, either personal or social. When a person ignores good health practices and becomes ill, this is judgment upon the person's action. When a society ignores sound ecological practices and pollutes the environment, judgment is visited on people in the form of an increase in certain diseases. In each case, the intentions of God have been violated, and repentance - personal or social - is called for.

But what about those forms of illness not traceable to human action that result from genetic or environmental causes? These conditions challenge the human intellect to ferret out causes and to develop corrective techniques wherever possible. They also challenge us to make the most of our abilities; no matter how limited they may be by natural causes.

**Complete health involves the whole person - body, mind and spirit.** Primitive as biblical healing practices were, they did recognize the unity of the whole person. Sometimes they were able to accomplish results that would be astonishing even today.

This insight suggests the need for cooperation among physicians, educators, and clergy to promote a fruitful interaction among the disciplines. It also suggests the need for humility on the part of professional people. The patient should be recognized as an indispensable participant in both diagnosis and treatment. Finally, it suggests that health is a product of one's outlook on life, faith commitments, and understanding. No matter how advanced the healing arts may become, it is always more desirable to promote health and to prevent illness than to wait until a person is sick.

**Health is a concern for the whole community.** What affects one person affects all. A person is not only a unity of body, mind, and spirit, but is part

of a larger web of relationships that conceive, nurture, sustain, and give meaning to us as human beings. Working in and through the web of human relationships is the divine Spirit that gives life, meaning, and purpose to all.

But just as that web supports each one of us, we are a part of that web, supporting others as well. Unless we receive and give love - concern, care, appreciation, affirmation, and criticism - we do not develop into whole, healthy, human beings.

**Healing and health care are valid ways of proclaiming the gospel and ministering in the name of Jesus Christ.** With the increasing concern of both private enterprise and government for the provision of health care services to the nation, we might ask whether the church should continue to involve itself in this area. A short answer to the question must be yes! The more crucial question is: In what ways? There are several answers.

- First of all, the church can be an example of a mutually supporting community that enhances the wellbeing and health of its members. The church is living under the mandates and within the promises of a God who cares about the health of people in the whole world.
- Second, the church can provide candidates for the field of health care who are concerned about humankind - for its sake. Those who have responded to the claims of the gospel on their lives can bring a dedication to the care of the sick that reflects the spirit of their Lord. These workers can act as leaven within the public health establishment, or they can band together to provide institutions that care. They can set standards for caring that will have a positive impact on the whole health delivery system.
- Third, the church can think through its position on value questions regarding health care. Then it can work actively for legislative and administrative procedures that reflect these values.

**In summary:** Good health is part of God's Intentions for people. It involves the whole person - body, mind, and spirit. It is a concern for the whole community. Healing and health care are valid ways of proclaiming the gospel and ministering in the name of Jesus Christ.

### **Biblical References for Study:**

Matthew 4:23, 10:1; Mark 1:21-28, 6:7; Luke 4:18, 7:19-23, 9:1-2, 13:1-5; John 9:1-3; Acts 3:1-9, 9:36-42, 14:8-10, 16:16-18, 20:7-12; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30.

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