

HealthWorks

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WHAT IS Health Evangelism?

By Elvin Adams, M.D., MPH

Health evangelism

Health evangelism is a ministry that changes people. Health evangelism improves health, prevents disease and lengthens life. Health evangelism results in a knowledge of and a deeper experience with God. Health evangelism results in baptisms and church growth. Health evangelism is the right arm of the gospel.

Unfortunately, health evangelism is misunderstood and poorly practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist church. From time to time, in various places a few health professionals, a few pastors and a few church members have developed and conducted health evangelism programs. Some health evangelism activities enjoyed a few months or years of success but most of these activities were local in their effect and never achieved national or international success. The 5-Day Plan to Stop Smoking is an exception. It achieved international status. Most of these programs and efforts have faded and have died out.

It is my assessment that health evangelism, to this point, has largely been a failure for the Seventh-day Adventist church. It wasn't supposed to be this way. I still think health evangelism will eventually be done right. I have a vision of how health evangelism should be done.

In my practice of health evangelism, I have been inspired most by the healing ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who spent more time healing than in preaching. I have been inspired by the picture of health evangelism outlined in Isaiah 58 and certain key passages in the Spirit of Prophecy.

The quotation that most intrigues me is: "I wish to tell you that soon there will be no work done in ministerial lines but medical missionary work...." [*Counsels on Health*, p. 553] This brief passage tells me that medical missionary work will eclipse everything that ministers are now doing in the church.

This could mean that the obvious spiritual part of the church's work will become so prohibited that at some point

in time a more subtle secondary way of doing pastoral work in the guise of health evangelism will be the only course open for evangelization. A sort of "it's second-best but it will have to do" type of development.

I believe the church will eventually find that medical missionary work is a *superior* form of evangelism not just a "second best effort." Evangelistic efforts characterized by traditional doctrinal presentations appear to work well in some parts of the world but traditional evangelistic efforts are much less effective in the United States, Australia, Western Europe and Japan.

If it is true that soon there will be no work done in ministerial lines but medical missionary work shouldn't we be exploring ways of maximizing the effectiveness of health evangelism now? We should work at it until health evangelism is a tool that we find surpasses the effectiveness of traditional evangelistic approaches.

When the superior effectiveness of health evangelism is demonstrated, we will switch over to the better way of doing things. I hope this happens soon so the work can be done and we can go home to Heaven.

The quote from Spirit of Prophecy which most clearly points out where health evangelism should be done, and who should be doing it is:

"We have come to a time when *every member of the church* should take hold of medical missionary work. The world is a lazar house filled with victims of both physical and spiritual disease. Everywhere people are perishing for lack of a knowledge of the truths that have been committed to us. *The members of the church* are in need of an awakening, that they may realize their responsibility to impart these truths." [*Welfare Ministry*, p. 138]

Here the root of our current problem is outlined. We haven't been doing health evangelism in the right place. The institution in which health evangelism is to occur is the *local church*.

Continued on page 2

The home of health evangelism is not to be hospitals, schools, public auditoriums, outpost centers or better living centers, but the church.

This also indicates *who* is to do health evangelism. *Every member* of the church should take hold of medical missionary work. There is a role for pastors, doctors, dentists, nurses, therapists, counselors and others but every church member needs to be involved with health evangelism.

Part of the problem is that health professionals have tried to organize and conduct health evangelism programs independent of the church and church members. Most of the time this limits church member support to contributing some money, sitting in the pew or praying for the program's success. Health evangelism conducted in this way fails to create an interface between the church member and the public. This is a serious mistake.

As a church we have tried to become more popular by relaxing standards and adopting many of the ways of the world, we hope to make the Seventh-day Adventist Church more palatable to our friends in the community. There is a better way to correct misconceptions and attract people in the community. Our neighbors will value our church more if we learn to do health evangelism in the right way. Health evangelism removes prejudice that exists against the church.

I hope you will be inspired to implement health evangelism in your local church and that the third angel's message will be completed in your community due to your efforts and the efforts of your fellow church members.

For the last two dozen years I have had a burden for health evangelism. That's why I am so very happy to see the new book by Dr. Elvin Adams entitled *Handbook of Health Evangelism*. Dr. Adams used to work here in the General Conference as an Associate Director of the Health and Temperance department many years ago, and I have always enjoyed hearing him lecture on this topic.

His new book trains members to provide friendship and support to those who are struggling to change bad health habits. Dr. Adams has tested these concepts and methods in many churches across North America, and they work.

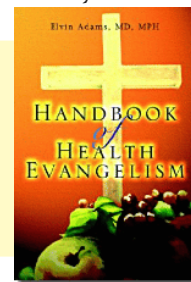
The book shows that a deeper relationship with God is the key to both spiritual and physical health. It postulates that God not only saves souls, He helps people lose weight, stop smoking, eat a more sensible diet and exercise regularly. God is the most potent force for lasting behavior change.

I have often wondered about the statement from the pen of inspiration that says "I wish to tell you that soon there will be no work done in ministerial lines but medical missionary work..." [*Counsels on Health*, p. 553] I don't even know what this means completely but whatever it means I think it is telling us that we need to be more effective and more deliberate in our outreach to our communities through health evangelism.

We need to learn that health evangelism is a process, sometimes a slow process, and we won't always see baptisms immediately after a cooking school. It may take years and many contacts in different programs before we have a potential convert. And we may never get the attendee into a baptismal pool but we will always have the joy of knowing that we have helped someone change a destructive habit or make a favorable lifestyle commitment. Health evangelism is changing lives.

We are featuring excerpts from the first chapter of the *Handbook of Health Evangelism* so you can get the gist of the book. We encourage you to buy a copy today!

One of the reasons we sponsor the Health Summits year after year is to train a core of workers who can change lives through health evangelism. Dr. Adams will be a presenter at our Health Summit West being held October 5-10, 2005. Come and be blessed! For more information on Health Summit West, visit www.plusline.org/events.php



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I hope some of you will be able to make it to the Seeds Plus Conference in Berrien Springs, Michigan just before the General Conference session. The section on HIV/AIDS should be outstanding for all health workers. I'll be there and I hope to see you there also. Let's do all we can to change lives.

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SEEDS PLUS!

3-in-1 International Conference on Ministry

Knowing

Biblical and
Theological Topics
Addressing Current
Issues

To celebrate its 70th anniversary, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary joins the North American Division Evangelism Institute and the General Conference Health Ministries in a massive, joint educational venture, coined SEEDS Plus!

Staff and buildings have changed much over the last 70 years, but the purpose remains the same: ministry preparation for a lifetime of service.

We invite you to attend SEEDS Plus! June 22-27, 2005, for your own professional and spiritual renewal.

Preceding the General Conference Session of 2005, the Seminary will offer numerous seminars and workshops on Biblical and Ministry topics relevant to current ministry needs.

For more information,
call, write or fax:

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Westlake Village, CA
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fax: 805-497-7099

Caring

HIV/AIDS' Call to Compassion

AIDS is as incarcerating as a high security prison. Iron bars of indifference and brick walls of misunderstanding often isolate the victim from friends and family. The barbed wire of pain, both physical and emotional, and an electric fence of fear, deprive them of human contact and warmth.

When Jesus described the end time accounting of the way we treat our fellow travelers, both those on the right and on the left respond the same way to His words "As you did it unto them."

"When saw we Thee?" they ask.

The aim of this conference is to improve our sight. Compassion is the prescription lens that brings into focus, and enables us to see with the purpose of taking action, the hurts God desires to heal, through us, with His love. In identifying the challenges of HIV/AIDS, not only will we be better prepared to respond to all sin-caused disasters, we may receive a saving insight into our own miserable, poor, blind and naked condition.

The *Call to Compassion* brings together health professionals, church leaders, members and specialists to look in detail at a situation that epitomizes a need the church is best designed to satisfy. It will outline the roles of pastors, doctors, nurses, chaplains, educators, and will invite members as well to take up the challenge of a compassionate response to this modern day leprosy.

- Examine the nature of effective ministry with those who suffer; their families and communities.
- Consider how the church can counteract the apathy of our self-centered and inwardly focused generation of individuals, communities, and even whole nations.
- Explore burning issues related to marriage, sex and AIDS.
- Learn to walk with those who are in the shadow of the valley of death.
- Meet people living with HIV/AIDS. Allow your heart to be softened as they share their expectations and disappointments.

Sharing

Enabling God's
People to Reach
the World

"The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but also upon physicians, nurses, colporteurs, Bible workers, and other consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace, to consider the needs of the unwarned cities. Time is rapidly passing, and there is much to be done. Every agency must be set in operation, that present opportunities may be wisely improved." [*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 158, 1911]

Are you wondering if church planting is for you?

Attend introductory church planting seminars that address what church planting is, why church planting is vital to church health and growth, and the many ways church can be designed.

Register online at
www.nadei.org

The registration
deadline is
June 14, 2005.

Mark your calendar for these Health Ministries-related events



- May 2005 National High Blood Pressure Education Month
Resources are available from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
Visit <http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/mission/>
- May 17-18 Spirituality and Health Conference at Loma Linda University, California
- June 22-27 Seeds Plus (HIV/AIDS Call to Compassion) at Andrews University
- October 5-10 Health Summit West in Portland, Oregon
- January 29-February 4, 2006 Health Summit V in Orlando, Florida

Can you recruit 1 more?

There is an urgent need for more Seventh-day Adventists to join the Adventist Health Study-2. Even though nearly 75,000 people have enrolled, another 30,000 are needed by September!

Seventh-day Adventists who join Adventist Health Study-2 (AHS-2) can have a major influence on the global impact of cancer. In 2000 there were an estimated 10 million new cancer cases and six million cancer deaths throughout the world. If you haven't joined yet, we strongly urge you to do it now.

Sadly, "During the next twelve months approximately 1.3 million Americans will hear the words, 'You have cancer', and more that 550,000 will die of the disease." *CA-A Cancer Journal for Clinicians* 2004; 54:41-52.

We believe that this large Adventist Study will provide important answers on how to prevent cancers, reduce suffering and improve quality of life. However, those 30,000 members are urgently needed to join the study to achieve success. Please encourage your Adventist friends and family members in the United States age 35 and older (Canadians and African Americans, age 30+) to join this endeavor.

We need you to encourage your church members to become involved in this important endeavor. Please sign up by visiting the website, www.adventisthealthstudy.org or by calling toll-free 1-877-700-7077. If you would like to receive enrollment forms to distribute, e-mail your mailing address details to: ahs2extra@sph.llu.edu or call 1-888-558-6297.

Outstanding Health Ministries Directors



Awards were presented to three Directors at the Ministries Convention in Orlando, Florida. From left to right, Dr. Gordon Botting, HM Director for Northern California Conference; Pastor Hal Gates, founder of Regeneration Ministries and HM Director for Washington Conference; Ms. Debra Carby, HM Director for the Canadian Union and Ontario Conference; and Dr. DeWitt Williams, HM Director for North America presenting the awards.

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