

December 19, 2003

Dear Fellow Missions Executives:

I have been National Director (CEO) of OMF International-USA just over 2 years. So I haven't had a chance to meet many of my fellow "missions executives". I was a general surgeon at Manorom Christian Hospital in central Thailand for over 20 years. I returned to the States in August 2001 to head up the OMF-USA mobilization team.

As an ex-missionary surgeon, my interests have turned naturally to medical missions, both in reviewing the past (history of medical missions) and getting up to date in contemporary developments. Over the past year I've been to at least 4 medical missions events.

I'd like to tell you about one of these: Health and Wholeness for the 21st Century (H&W), held in Chiang Mai, Thailand in October. This was a seminal event for medical missions, not only because of its healthy emphasis on treating patients as whole persons but also because of its emphasis on a Scriptural wholistic view of man that is essential for effective missions evangelism in general.

As you well know, the concept of "Scriptural wholism" finds its basis in Genesis 1:26-27. Both concepts of the trinity and image are keys to understanding who we are as persons. This involves all of our physical nature, spirit, soul, mental and social aspects of our being. While it has been good that our western heritage has studied each of these in depth, one of the negative effects has been to compartmentalize them and miss the "forest for the trees" so to speak.

Missions in general and medical missions in particular have made great strides in emphasizing a wholistic view of mankind. I think of our ministry to leprosy patients at Manorom—including spiritual, physical using both pills and reconstructive surgery, social where society's outcasts were given a new lease on life and emotional giving our patients a new identity and dignity from learning appropriate skills.

But unfortunately that kind of holistic ministry has become more the exception than the rule. Theological emphases as well as a truncated approach to ministry to people has predominated in missions in the Third World as well as in our own society—physicians and surgeons for the body, ministers for the soul and spirit, and psychiatrists and counselors for damaged emotions. Who is left that sees the 'big picture' and the whole person?

The emphasis of Scriptural wholism is, I believe, a timely one in a fragmented world dominated by self service and "doing my own thing." It is not only of importance for medical mission initiatives but also for missions in general. Many opportunities in what we call CAN's (Creative Access Nations) come from just this wholistic sense of meeting the needs of whole people. It deserves a hearing.

Serving Him with Gladness,

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