

The Ghanaian (Akan) View of Health - part 3

Dear Friends,

Helllo! I'm so excited to be writing my 75th letter to all of you! This is the continued story of health in Ghana. If you missed the first two parts, please look for them on the First Lutheran website. The mission in Akrampa Ghana that First Lutheran has built, with me, has over the years allowed me to bring the Gospel of Jesus to the people. Their belief in Jesus has changed how they approach health not just on the spiritual side, but also the medical and scientific side also.

Let me tell you a true story. In 1999, there was an outbreak of tuberculosis in Akrampa. Two of the women were so severely affected that they were almost confined, because anyone who came close to them began to exhibit the symptoms. When I inquired where they had been taken, I was told that a fetish healer was keeping them to ensure that the chicken and goats that had been asked for to appease the 'gods' had been given. I almost had to bring in the police to have the women released! But I decided that the best tactic was to win the confidence and cooperation of the traditional healers. This was intended to make them realize that even though their experiences and proficiency had worked in certain cases of the past, modern science has much better tools to manage and treat disease. An understanding was reached, and I drove the two women, in my Jeep, to the government hospital in Winneba (about 31 miles away, toward Saltpond). Needless to say, at the hospital, they were completely cured and rehabilitated, and then accepted back into the village. One of the two women had become so impoverished trying to get treatment at the hands of the traditional healers that she became indebted to neighbors as she solicited funds for the sacrifices and herbs, which in the end, did not help at all.

Over the years, things have changed, as many have begun to trust Jesus with their life. As I explained last month, the Ghanaian Christian believer's understanding is that GOD is the ULTIMATE Healer. In that understanding he/she views health and wellbeing as holistic: spiritual and physical, and that which strengthens the cultural beliefs of the individual.

Most sick people will attend a clinic/hospital, but if told that their issue has something to do with the spiritual, they would go for other healing. All such inclinations are culturally impressed. The Ghanaian Christian would seek to be prayed for, or attend a 'deliverance service'. Some who feel they are "enlightened" or high up in the social strata would not go. But many Ghanaian Christians seek healing and deliverance at 'Prayer Camps' and specially organized 'all-night prayer meetings'. They will go for consultations and to be anointed with oils, and have water blessed for healing. A Christian will no longer visit any deity or shrine or fetish healer, but will attend the prayer meetings and camps if they believe that science will not heal them fully.

The good news is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has made such an impact that the frequency of consulting fetish healers when anyone in Akrampa becomes sick is gradually becoming very low. They are encouraged to visit the medical clinic the moment they feel sick. I'm particularly impressed by the adherence to discipline that pregnant women have inculcated in themselves in making prenatal health care facilities their first point of call before delivering their babies. This has brought down the high rate of infant mortality. The local medical health care professionals actually come to the village every two weeks to provide care for the newborn babies and their mothers, while also encouraging the expectant mother to make her regular scheduled visit to the clinic. Not too long ago, mothers would consult the fetish healers and have all kinds of concoctions and treatments applied. Most of these led to serious consequences; loss of baby, and or the mother herself, even sometimes permanent damage to the birthing process.

I pray every day for your loving and continued support of the First Lutheran Mission in Akrampa Ghana. My ability to physically drive to the village and deliver the message of Jesus Christ is changing the lives of this generation and those to come, and winning souls to Christ!

Blessings,
Pastor Ben