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UEM Study on the Charismatic Movement and Healing

Preparatory Paper No 5

We are grateful to the United Evangelical Mission and to Dr Wilson B. Niwagila, the UEM evangelism secretary, for allowing us to reproduce the report from an intercontinental consultation on the charismatic movement and the healing ministry. We consider this document an important input to the preparatory process for the world mission conference of the WCC.

Jacques Matthey, Mission Studies, WCC

Introduction

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is an international mission organisation, which came into being in June 1996. This is a communion of churches in three regions (Africa, Asia and Germany). It comprises of 33 churches and one institution - *Anstalt Bethel* in Bielefeld Germany. Among the 33 churches, 12 are from Africa, 15 from Asia and 6 from Germany. Historically these churches in Africa and Asia were former "mission fields" of Rheinisch Mission, Bethel Mission and Zaire Mission - all former German mission societies. Together with the German churches linked with these mission societies, the Asian and African churches have established UEM to be an instrument for their common goal of learning from one another and sharing their faith together. One of its mandates, as stated in the constitution § 2.2 a-c, reads as follows:

The United Evangelical Mission - Communion of Churches in three continents - shall operate within a network of churches established in Africa, Asia and Europe and wherever it is called to be.

Together they shall proclaim Jesus to be the Lord and Saviour of all people and shall meet the present - day missionary challenges.

In a world torn apart, they commit themselves to remain members of the Body of Christ, and therefore:

grow together into a worshipping, learning and serving community, share gifts, insights and responsibilities call all people to repentance and new life, bear witness to the Kingdom of God in striving for justice, peace and integrity of creation

The United Evangelical Mission is quite aware of the responsibilities she faces in this world, which is torn apart. She is also aware of the many challenges facing the member churches. One of the challenges is the presence of the Charismatic

movement. Since this movement is not an established church, but a movement working within the existing churches, it has raised many theological questions from the mainline churches. In order to get a clear picture of the movement, its objectives and goals, the UEM member churches decided to make a study about the movement. This study, launched in the year 2000, took place in all three regions of UEM with the following aims and objectives:

To bring out the findings that would give a clear picture about the Pentecostal churches and the Charismatic movement. How do they relate to each other and where do they differ. To better understand and interpret the challenges, the chances, and the dangers of the charismatic movement affecting the UEM member churches. To develop a sound theological basis and criteria for the understanding of the charismatic movement, within and without UEM member churches, with critical assessment. To motivate and enable participants, in the ongoing consultations, to give a feed-back from the consultations into their churches so that the churches can be motivated to engage more closely in dialogue with the charismatic movement groups. To formulate a document that will be the basis of discussions for the next General Assembly-2004. To promote the healing ministry within the UEM member churches taking into account the challenges of HIV and Aids.

In this study, all three regions came up with the idea of learning more about Charismatic movement especially on the question of **Healing**. This resulted into the preparation of the international consultation on Healing. This study, on healing, brought new challenges. We discovered that either the churches have forgotten to use the spiritual gifts in their ministry of healing or they have taken very lightly the function of the Holy Spirit in our modern technological world. The consultation on healing, which took place in Accra-Ghana for one week (12-19 November 2003) came up with the following recommendations to the UEM member churches and all other interested churches to remind them of their task of being a learning and serving community. It is obvious that in this wounded world the healing ministry of the church is imperative.

The following recommendations are formulated to articulate more thoughts about the ministry of healing.

Rev. Dr. Wilson B. Niwagila
Desk for Evangelism- UEM, Wuppertal
1 April 2004

Report and Recommendations On Healing
Accra, Ghana, 12-19 November 2003

Introduction

We, the 44 representatives of UEM member churches in Asia, Africa and Germany met in Accra, the capital city of the Republic of Ghana on Nov 12-19 2003, to consult each other on how we respond to the challenges posed by the charismatic movements on the life and work of our churches. We have come to this consultation after consulting among ourselves in each of our regions. We have therefore come with the findings and recommendations of our regions which were then enriched by inputs we received from leading figures of charismatic movements in Ghana, a country where charismatic Christianity is becoming mainline Christianity. Indeed, our prior knowledge of the charismatic movement has also been enriched by our exposure to charismatic services in a prayer camp and churches, where the ministry of healing of thousands of suffering worshippers, especially women, is carried out in a charismatic way. All the findings discovered in our regional consultations, Bible studies, inputs given by charismatic leaders and practitioners, and knowledge gained from exposure to charismatic services have been discussed further in our group and plenary discussions, which took place every day of our consultation.

Out of the process described above, we have come to the following insights:

1. We understand that the church of Jesus Christ is one that has a variety of expressions of Christian faith according to the values of the Kingdom of God. Each expression complements another. Accordingly, we understand that together with the people of the charismatic movements we are members of the body of Christ. As such it is crucial that we are willing to learn from one another, support each other, help each other and correct each other whenever necessary about how we live as churches of Jesus Christ in our time in which the people and creation are crying for healing and salvation.

2. On our part, we are called to be open to what may be considered to be some of the strengths of the charismatic movement such as:

a) The emphasis on the full participation of all members of the body of Christ in worship by the use of each gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon each Christian for the glory of God and the edification of the church.

b) The emphasis on a dynamic, dialogical and contextual style of worship, e.g. by the use of traditional and contemporary musical instruments such as organs, guitars, drums, etc.

c) The emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian new life and in worship.

d) The importance of sufficient space given to each member of the church not only to express openly his/her needs in worship and be administered to accordingly, but also to participate fully in worship.

e) The role of team ministry including prayer for healing.

f) The importance of taking the message of the Bible at its face value in Christian life and in worship.

g) The emphasis on healing in relation to faith and mission

3. In particular, we spent a considerable amount of time and energy consulting each other in the plenary and in groups on what we can learn from the charismatic movements in order to enhance our churches' healing ministry. As a result, we have come to an understanding that since sickness is part of human life - whatever the causes may be - the ministry of healing is an integral part of the task of the Church of Jesus Christ.

4. Sickness, illness, or disease can befall anyone, anywhere and at anytime, and inflict a devastating effect on the total well being of anyone. They can cause a high degree of suffering that only the sick can rightly describe. Causes of illnesses vary. They can be social, physical, spiritual, mental, political and economical. The ministry of healing, therefore, must be adjusted to the kinds and causes of the disease.

5. Accordingly, churches throughout history have responded to Jesus' healing ministry as a true sign of liberation through offering holistic ministries. Jesus' healing ministry is understood in spiritual, physical and mental/intellectual dimensions. Within the spiritual dimension, the churches of Jesus Christ have been called to preach the Gospel, which liberates people from the slavery of sin of whatever kind. The Churches are called to deliver the people from enslaving powers, be they spiritual, ideological or political; to pray in faith for the sick in different forms, such as anointing and laying of hands on the sick, and through other forms, and to expect God to heal them and thereby liberate them from disease. Within the physical dimension, churches have been called to offer social services to people of whatever background and walks of life, and to heal and care for God's creation in which they live, and thereby liberate them from problems arising from ignorance, disease, poverty and violence. Within the mental/intellectual dimension, churches have been called to offer pastoral care and counselling to people with problems of various kinds, including those caused recently by the negative impact of globalisation.

6. However, we acknowledge that because of the existence of differences amongst UEM member churches in terms of church traditions, cultures and socio-economic environments, our recommendations must be contextualized.

Recommendations

1. The Reality and Ministry of Healing

1. Faith-healing/divine healing is not confined to Biblical times but is still happening today. Therefore, churches should provide space for people to be healed, to share their healing experiences to give glory to God and to increase the awareness of the congregation that healing does take place.

2. In our healing ministry, a declaration of the supremacy of the power of Jesus' love over all powers in the world should be made with full conviction.

3. The ultimate healing is salvation in Jesus Christ. In our healing ministry, we should encourage personal encounter with God who has the power to save in every situation, so that holistic healing can take place.

4. Christ suffered on the cross to heal the wounds of the world (war, violence, discrimination, hatred, injustice, exploitation). As the body of Christ and servant of God, the Church is called to follow Christ and carry the cross. This can be done by taking up the issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation in intercession and in daily life.

5. In response to faithful prayer, God heals freely, even apparently incurable diseases. However, faith in God also includes the ability to see God's power within incurable illnesses. We need the ability to see the presence of God even when requested healing does not take place: 'The power of God is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12,9). It is a miracle when the unhealed sick are able to accept the absence of a cure. Healing is more than curing. To avoid idolizing healing and prosperity, we encourage member churches to maintain a balance between 'the theology of the cross' and 'the theology of success' in our faith-healing ministry.

6. Because human sickness and disease are the results of the fall, healing must, therefore, be holistic. This implies the healing of the whole person, in body, soul, mind and spirit.

7. Healing must include healing of nations and creation - a global healing. Given that in many parts of the world people are still suffering from the effects of slavery, colonization, all forms of neo-colonization in today's unjust and imbalanced globalized economic and political world order, healing must also address unjust and demonic political, social, economic, structures internationally, regionally and locally.

8. As Christians we believe that the great commission to heal the present illness is not only an extension of the present life-span or a betterment of the

present well-being, but also a sign of the eschatological healing that begins now in the present age and will be fulfilled in the age to come. The churches should use all their God-given potentials and Spirit-imbued gifts to work towards the realization of that eschatological healing already enjoyed in the present age.

II. Challenge to our churches

9. The challenge posed to us by the charismatic movements and their rapid growth in most parts of the world has to be taken seriously. In UEM member churches, there is a need for dialogue with people of the charismatic movement, in order to learn from them how we can overcome some of our shortcomings in serving the needs of the people.

The sermons in the charismatic movement strongly emphasize a call for and a positive response to a new life. Therefore, our churches should encourage these aspects more effectively in our Christian life. In the charismatic movement, the emphasis on prayer as part of the effort to change oppressive structural systems, and taking the biblical message seriously are obvious and can be a good role-model for the pastoral work in UEM member churches. Intensification of Bible study and thereby Bible knowledge within our member churches should be carried out.

10. Instead of discrediting and ignoring the charismatic movements, UEM member churches are encouraged to begin a dialogue with them that leads to mutual respect, understanding, sharing, learning and cooperation.

11. In order to be effective in our healing ministry, we are encouraged to discover and learn from any sound and effective healing ministry practiced by our charismatic sisters and brothers.

12. Whenever possible UEM member churches are encouraged to introduce to, or intensify existing faith-healing ministry in, their worship and pastoral counselling services. However, every congregation is encouraged to find its own contextualized ways of effectively developing, offering, and implementing healing ministries, including that of a faith-healing ministry to the people in church and society.

13. Healing is an integral part of mission. Biblically, and based on the experience of many churches today, healing is observed as an event that leads people to faith. We encourage the churches not to hide experiences of healing within the community nor hesitate to integrate personal prayer for the sick, including prayer for those who have not expressed their faith, as part of their mission activities.

14. Traditional healing, such as the use of herbal medicine, that is open to scientific inquiry and free from charlatanism and evil influences, and practised

in the name of Jesus, may contribute to holistic healing. We encourage the churches to be open to traditional healing practices with critical eyes.

15. In some churches, some members have demonised valuable traditional cultures. We encourage member churches to enter into dialogue with the charismatic movement on the nature and value of cultures in a climate of mutual respect, understanding and sharing of different spiritualities.

16. The charismatic movement's experiences of "deliverance" should be taken seriously and challenge us to assume greater responsibility in seeking for an answer to the human longing for liberation by the power of God from personal and structural enslavement.

17. Fasting can enhance a person's spiritual life, increasing humility and concentrating all energy on prayer and Bible study. UEM member churches are encouraged to continue the practice of fasting. Fasting cannot force God's intervention, but can become a normal, continuous and enriching exercise of the church.

18. Churches should have a holistic approach to their hospitals; community based healing and diaconical institutions, and include prayer and faith healing in their pastoral care.

19. In order to equip our churches, the theological institutions of the UEM member churches are requested to motivate and enhance theological reflection on the healing ministry on various levels and develop appropriate courses for their church workers and lay members.

20. In harmony with the crucial principle of the priesthood of all believers the churches should identify and develop the gifts of laypersons and clergy, men and women, young and old, and encourage them to be part of the ministries of the church, including that of healing ministry. We encourage the churches to be open in their ecclesiology and to develop structures that support this principle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

21. There is a need to help with the initiation, encouragement and enhancement of healing ministries, especially faith-healing ministry in our member churches. The UEM should provide opportunities for these churches to develop their potential and capacity through exposure programmes, training, workshops, development of liturgies and specific studies on, and publication of, theological issues related to the charismatic ministries.

22. Further consultations on the theme should take place in sub-regions within UEM-member churches. The desk of Evangelism, in coordination with regional offices, should facilitate churches. In the run up to the General Assembly the desk for Evangelism is to inform member churches of the result of this consultation, so that they can inform the General Assembly delegates.

III. Towards a Praxis of Healing

23. We have to pay attention to the function of the worship service as an encounter, through the proclamation of the Gospel, between God and the worshippers, and between the worshippers themselves. For that, the liturgy has to be flexible and reflect the movement of the Holy Spirit. Forms of worship that would allow that encounter to take place and give more space for emotions to be expressed and healed or restored should be encouraged.

24. There should be a genuine acceptance and appreciation by the congregations for those who are sick, e.g. those suffering from HIV-AIDS or cancer etc. Efforts to provide a healing ministry and holistic pastoral counselling for them should be initiated, encouraged and constantly developed.

25. The local congregation should be the home for people within and outside the church who are in situations of distress (physical, moral, spiritual, material). As Christians we should accompany, and listen to the people, and offer signs of hope.

26. Churches are encouraged to study and/or learn to receive and help to build up healing ministries including the practice of laying on of hands and anointing (James 5:14).

27. The servants of God as instruments of healing should show humility and meekness in success and failures.

28. We acknowledge the freedom of God to respond to prayers in whatever way God wants. In the event that God does not heal as we expect, God gives us grace and capacity to live with our condition and calls the believers to accompany and care for the sick, as through the relationship between the sick and the healthy, an indescribable kind of healing takes place.

For further information on the UEM study process, contact

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