What are Health Ministries?

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Sometimes putting into words the obvious can be challenging. If we are to make progress with health ministries it would be helpful to have more of a common understanding of what we mean in these words. Below is a definition of health ministries offered for your consideration. The definition applies to ministries occurring at the level of the local church which in many situations is the clearest representation of the body of Christ.

*Health ministries are those activities of the local church that bring about the health and healing of our bodies, our thoughts and feelings, and our relationships with family and other people.*

Health ministries as carried out in our churches model the healing ministry of Christ and are distinguished from his teaching and preaching ministry. Matthew 9:35 says, *Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News about the kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and sicknesses* (NCV). This verse offers a great summary of the earthly ministry of Christ.

“In teaching there is the giving of systematic instruction as in the Sermon on the Mount and in preaching there is proclamation of the Good News.” (John Wilkinson, The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary, 1998) “Jesus’ preaching confronts the individual with the approach of the kingdom and its demands, whereas his teaching makes the nature of those demands explicit.” (J. R. C. Cousland, The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew, 2002)

In healing there is “the restoration of normality of deranged physical functions but in the wider meaning which a Christian view of man requires, healing is the enabling of a man to function as a whole in accordance with God’s will for him.” ( Wilkinson, The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary, 2, as originally cited in The Church of England, The Church’s Ministry of Healing: The Report of the Archbishops’ of Commission, 1958).

Health ministry as we are using at the level of the local congregation will refer to physical, psychological, and social health and healing. Spiritual health and healing is primarily accomplished via teaching and preaching ministry.

Healing refers to repairing what is broken. Health strictly speaking refers to seeking and or maintaining wellness or fitness. The term health as used in “health ministries” is used in a more general, contemporary way. Health ministries may involve both wellness and illness topics, and the healing of Christ would be considered more illness topics. For example, we often refer to health insurance but strictly speaking (this is starting to change) this is really sickness insurance. It is estimated that 90% of our health care budget is spent attending to sickness, and only 10% on pursuing health or wellness (e.g. immunizations and exercise).

Health ministries may contain both Old Testament and New Testament principles.

Health ministries demonstrate clarity as to the specific topic being attended to.

Health ministries make known the love and glory of God.

Health ministries meet people where they are at and take them to where God wants them to be.1

Health ministries occur in a spiritual, Christ-centered context. They are carried out by people of faith and sometime in setting of a church’s physical facility. Prayer and reference to our God as creator and healer are often mentioned but the degree to which to which the spiritual context is present will likely vary.

All that heals is not necessarily a health ministry. Some theologians have expressed that ever since the fall, all of God’s work has been about healing his creation. If we were to say that all of which a church does comes under the category of health ministry that would not be helpful in terms of creating and working on a strategy to build up our health ministries. The gospel writers separated out the healing ministry of Christ from his teaching and preaching ministry. All three may have occurred in the same context but they were discussed a separate activities.

1. “Ministry is meeting people where they are at and taking them to where God wants them to be” by Seminary Professor of J.R. Briggs (Along with Eugene Peterson J.R. Briggs is co-author of The Message; http://www.jrbriggs.com/how-do-you-define-ministry/08/Published 8/23/10; accessed 11/10/12