



Christians and the SDGs: already and not yet

This issue of the Christian Journal for Global Health highlights a Christian response to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promulgated in September 2015 by the United Nations. Our call for papers invited authors to participate in conversations about health, human flourishing, development, community health, social justice and global health access, and to share their insights, reflections, and research. Contributions discussing these issues in a Christian context are particularly appropriate because of an increasing recognition of how religion and associated health institutions contribute positively to health in both theoretical and practical ways. Managing Editor, [Daniel O'Neill](#), provides a theological basis for the potential influence of the Christian church in global health given its goals and globally expanding reach. [Steffen Flessa](#) reviews how declarations on the healing mission of the church made at Tübingen in 1964 and in 1967 have affected healthcare in the past and how Christian influence retains its relevance. His [second article](#) also undertakes to tell us where Christians, driven by economic realities, need to evaluate their portfolio of services to retain “unconditional reliability” in the future. [Raymond Downing](#) asks whether it is right to aim at development, implying a focus on economic well-being. Some might answer that economics is often a proxy for other values like health and educational opportunity. As Downing points out, however, the ends to which Christians aim may not be evaluable in merely economic terms, nor attainable prior to the renewal of all things.

The SDGs have less to say specifically about human health than the Millennium Development Goals. But global health issues do not escape the purview of Christians, as evidenced by an international conference on global health issues that was attended by three journal editors. [Rev Morris Sing Key](#) reports on

this, highlighting Christian interest in a broad range of topics including emerging infections and disasters, the challenge of economic and resource restraints, new technologies, and dealing with incurable diseases, pain and death. [Andrew Sloane](#) expounds on a presentation at that conference, showing how experience in the recent outbreak of Ebola helps to show us that the end of medical efforts is more appropriately seen as caring rather than cure. Not everyone may agree with such a strong distinction between caring and curing as the end of medical efforts. However, Ebola teaches the lesson that compassionate caring by health workers is a unique demonstration of love even when either the caregiver's or patient's life is ultimately lost. Ebola reminds us that there is no greater love than this, “that someone lays down his life for his friends.”¹

The editors are pleased at the continuing flow of original articles coming to the journal. Original articles are fundamental to its scholarly respectability. We are nearing the number needed to apply for indexing by the National Library of Medicine (Index Medicus). In this issue, the team at Duncan Hospital in Bihar, India, reviews their extensive experience with [snake bites](#), a major cause of morbidity and mortality in India. The highlight of their paper is the recommendations – aptly presented in two tables. One is for health care workers with practical advice on the evaluation of patients with suspected bites and the other for educating the community in snake-bite prevention. A second paper from India studies the barriers limiting access to clean water in [Kolkata](#).

A word about ethical review for studies using survey data may be in order. Proposed changes in the common rule exempt “research involving collection of identifiable information through surveys, interviews, or observation of public behavior” if privacy safeguards are main-



tained.² The editors expect that this change will prove beneficial to many of the journal's constituents where requirements for Institutional Review Board approval for such low risk research have been a barrier to research.

[Mark Strand](#) and his colleagues analyze the reasons health workers prematurely terminate their service abroad and the role of cross-cultural training in preventing this. They propose that on-the-field cross-cultural training and mentoring can facilitate the development of a worker from novice to beginner, to competent, to proficient, to expert. Finally, a short report describes the experience of using [teleradiology](#) to help mission hospitals obtain expert radiographic readings. Indeed, teleradiology now accounts for most out-of-hours radiographic interpretation, even in the United States. Extension of this service to hospitals in low resource settings is not without effort as is the occasional need to deal with technical issues. However, this model provides diagnostic support to providers, as well as better care access to patients.

[Christine Tashobya](#) reviews *Improving Aid Effectiveness in Global Health* by Elvira Beracochea, an excellent compilation with practical approaches that can be applied in the SDG era. In a short communication, the [Community Health Global Network](#) describes how networking between community health programs can contribute to the SDGs. The importance of a networking approach was

recently highlighted at the CHGN Inter-national forum which is also described.

The articles in this issue indicate that Christians' faithful presence, following the call to serve, heal, care, speak, and expand will be important elements in sustainable development for the next 15 years and beyond. However, we would remind our readers of the fundamental Christian perspective on human development and the future clearly stated by John Stott: "Although it is right to campaign for social justice and to expect to improve society further, in order to make it more pleasing to God, we know that we shall never perfect it. Christians are not utopians. Although we know the transforming power of the gospel and the wholesome effects of Christian salt and light, we also know that evil is ingrained in human nature and human society. We harbor no illusions. Only Christ at His second coming will eradicate evil and enthrone righteousness forever. For that day we wait with eagerness."³

Reference

1. John 15:13 English Standard Version.
2. Hudson KL, Collins FS. Bringing the common rule into the 21st century. *New England J Med.* 2015;373(24):2293-6.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1056/nejmp1512205>
3. Stott JR. *The contemporary Christian: applying God's word to today's world.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1992. P. 390.

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