



Christian Connections for International Health (CCIH) conference explores relationship between Christian faith and sustainable development, and role of FBOs in global health

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The CCIH 30th Annual Conference was held June 17-19, 2016 at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA with a theme of sustainability and how it intersects with our Christian faith. The conference was the largest CCIH conference yet, with 198 attendees from 18 nations. Much of the focus of the conference was on how we can ensure our programs involve lasting change in communities.

Christians and the Sustainable Development Goals

In the opening plenary session, moderator Pauline Muchina, PhD, UMC-GBCS Healthy Families Healthy Planet, introduced the topic of Christians and sustainability. Doug Fountain, Vice President, Operations Support, [Medical Teams International](#), said sustainable development occurs when the development outlasts the partnerships we create in our work. He cautioned against practices that interfere with our work becoming sustainable, including failure to partner with other organiz-

ations, experimental approaches that cannot be tested before implementation, and relying on technologies that may work in a developed nation but will not work in the field.

Mr. Fountain also discussed the value we add to our work as Christians, including honoring the dignity of the lives of people we support, our ethics, compassion, and holistic approach, as well as the transformative nature of our work and our stewardship (responsible care for the resources we use.) “Through Christ, we offer hope and grace for a world that is hurting. That is sustainable development,” said Mr. Fountain in his concluding remarks.¹

Karen Sichinga, MSN, MPH, Executive Director of the [Churches Health Association of Zambia](#) and Chairperson of the [Africa Christian Health Associations Platform](#), explored scripture related to sustainability in her presentation, including Isaiah 51:6 and Matthew 24: 35-36.

Mrs. Sichinga addressed how the Christian faith is present in even remote areas of Zambia,



making Christian organizations critical partners in development at all levels, particularly at the community level where change needs to take place. According to Mrs. Sichinga, Christian missionaries who came to Africa decades ago used three major elements to further development: education, healthcare, and evangelism. Church-related education and health systems have worked closely with the health ministry to improve the health status of the Zambian people for more than 100 years, and Christian health organizations have shown their commitment to serving the needs of the vulnerable.

Turning to the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), released in 2015, Mrs. Sichinga outlined key steps to ensure the faith-based organization (FBO) community handles the SDGs better than the MDGs, saying the faith community must:

- embrace partnership without losing our identity,
- demonstrate our ability to manage large-scale programs that address diseases,
- be innovative (It has been done before with home-based care for HIV/AIDS in Zambia.),
- invest in human resources for health and sustain our workers. FBOs must not hire church leaders solely because they are leaders; they must also be qualified,
- document our successes,
- maintain our identity (We should be confident and defend our faith; it is what sets us apart.),
- work with governments and sustain those relationships, and
- sustain our faith.

Daniel O'Neill, MD, MA(Th), Managing Editor of [CJGH](#), explored why Christians are well positioned to bring health across the globe in a sustainable manner, commenting on Christian identity and quoting the Apostle Paul's remarks about the fundamental Christian value that love will endure.

In addressing the SDGs, Dr. O'Neill stated that many of the goals developed by the United Nations have been informed by a Christian world view. The transformational aspirations and

inclusiveness in leaving no one behind are in line with Christian values. Christians are in a unique position to serve the healthcare needs of the underserved due to a number of factors, including the faithful presence of Christians in areas of human need. Dr. O'Neill also stated that the strength of the Christian faith in troubled areas of the world is being recognized by many in the secular global health community. Furthermore, the Church is expanding in its influence and is growing in areas where it has not existed before.

According to Dr. O'Neill, the Church is a gathered community but we are also scattered across the globe in our daily lives, increasing the places of influences around the world. Faith groups are also capable of resource mobilization, and Christians share global and universal goals, and care about people from all "tongues, tribes and nations." However, Dr. O'Neill said it is not enough to have goals. We must have "fuel for the machine" to accomplish the goals. Faith, the Spirit, and devotion to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ are fuel for the machine.²

Saving Lives of Mothers and Children: An Interactive Panel Session

A plenary session on maternal and child health featured Lisa Firth, MB, BS, MPH, Health Technical Advisor, [Salvation Army World Service Office](#); Cindy Uttley, RN, MSN, CNM, Community Health Advisor, [Samaritan's Purse](#); Lauren VanEnk, MPH, Program Officer, [Institute for Reproductive Health](#) at Georgetown University; and Victoria Graham, Senior Technical Advisor, Office of Population and Reproductive Health, Bureau of Global Health, [USAID](#).

Dr. Firth discussed the benefits of family planning to space pregnancies in order to protect the health of mothers and children, and explained how those benefits extended to strengthen entire families and communities. She shared successful strategies to introduce family planning into communities, such as starting with areas where there is common

ground and relying on scripture that supports health. Being prepared to address myths and misconceptions regarding various contraceptive methods was also stressed.

Ms. Uttley covered a variety of family planning methods, including natural family planning, and examined the barriers that keep many couples from using methods to space pregnancies, such as access to services, availability, cost, and partner cooperation.

Ms. VanEnk discussed current initiatives working with faith-based organizations to provide and promote family planning, and suggested ways of introducing services to new communities. Looking forward, Ms. Graham explored opportunities that greater involvement of the faith community in helping families could have on healthy pregnancies and space births.

Ms. Graham stated that the faith community has a very important role to play in creating an ongoing dialogue to change social and gender norms, which is crucial for empowering women to be able to time and space their pregnancies. Faith leaders are influential in their communities, and the strong infrastructure of churches, including health facilities and education systems in many communities, makes their involvement providing and promoting family planning critical to its success.

Effective Partnerships with FBOs to Fight Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases and Advance Sustainable Development

How faith-based organizations are forging innovative partnerships to address both communicable and non-communicable diseases was explored in a plenary session featuring Samuel Mwenda, MD, Executive Director, [Christian Health Association of Kenya](#); Franklin Baer, DrPH, Senior Advisor, [IMA World Health](#); and Jean Duff, MPH, MA, [Faith for International Assistance](#) and the [Joint](#)

[Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.](#)

Dr. Mwenda shared how faith-based organizations have been working in Kenya to address the country's growing epidemic of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and cancer. FBOs, he said, have been involved in raising awareness, screening for, referring, diagnosing and treating diseases.

Dr. Baer shared the history of faith-based involvement in health, including the significant expansion of FBO-managed health care in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the evolution of partnerships among faith entities and governments. Ms. Duff explored opportunities for even greater involvement of faith-based actors through partnerships with existing faith networks, academic institutions, donors, and local and international organizations.

Faith Journeys

Following worship on Sunday morning, three high-level leaders in global health and development shared stories of their personal faith journeys, and how their careers and faith have intersected. We heard from Ambassador and Former Congressman, Tony Hall, Executive Director Emeritus for the [Alliance to End Hunger](#); Dick Day, Regional Director for Africa, [U.S. Peace Corps](#), and Phyllis Joy Mukaire, PhD, MA, Development Consultant and former Executive Director of the Christian Health Association of Sudan. The speakers shared how their faith had anchored and strengthened them through the difficult decisions and personal challenges that led them to where they were that day and also gave advice to young professionals beginning their careers on how to integrate faith and work.

Living Our Faith through Pandemic Prevention and Strong Public Health Systems

In the closing plenary, Jonathan Quick, MD, MPH, CEO of [Management Sciences for Health](#), explored the history of disease outbreaks from the Spanish Flu to HIV/AIDS and Ebola. Dr. Quick shared the early warning signs that an outbreak could become an epidemic and assessed how international agencies had responded to threats throughout history. He also spoke of the importance of involving communities and faith actors in detecting and responding to outbreaks.

Research and Publishing

Among other breakout sessions, Elliott Larson, MD, Editor in Chief of CJGH moderated a session on research, communication and publishing. This included a presentation from Dr. Nathan Grills, Associate Editor of CJGH, on tips for publishing.³ Jean Sack, MLS, of Jhpiego and the Johns Hopkins public health library discussed accessing global health research.⁴

Dr. Samuel Mwenda of the Christian Health Association of Kenya Named Christian International Health Champion

Dr. Samuel Mwenda was selected by the CCIH Board of Directors to receive the 2016 CCIH Christian International Health Champion Award at the conference. Dr. Mwenda serves as the General Secretary of the [Christian Health Association of Kenya](#) (CHAK). He was nominated by Rick Santos of [IMA World Health](#) and Dr. Henry Mosley of [Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health](#).

According to Rick Santos, “Dr. Mwenda has been a transformational leader for faith-based organizations in Kenya and the African region. He has used his skills and passion to build capacity of emerging health leaders and to advocate for the

significant role of FBOs in delivering quality health services to the most vulnerable populations in Africa.”

On receiving the award, Dr. Mwenda said, “I believe that this award is not just a recognition of my passion, commitment, and contribution to Church health work but my conviction that there is hope and a great future for the contribution of Church health services to the global health agenda and the under-served communities of the world from the Christian perspective.” Dr. Mwenda rose to become the head of CHAK and certain events in his career sparked his passion for developing high-quality health systems.⁵

All PowerPoint presentations and videos from the conference can be accessed here: <http://www.ccih.org/2016-annual-conference-presentations>.

2017 CCIH Annual Conference to Explore Integration of Faith and Health

The CCIH 2017 Conference will be held July 13-15 at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. Our theme is ‘Strengthening Global Health: Faith at the Center’, a concept closely linked to CCIH’s core focus area of integrating faith and health. At the conference, we hope to explore how our Christian faith guides our work and address such questions as:

- what is our role as Christians in ensuring all people have access to community-based care and preventive services, especially marginalized communities?
- what programs have we launched that protect and empower women and children, and strengthen families?
- how do we sustain and strengthen evidence-based and people-centered health systems to ensure high-quality care for all?

Learn more about the conference at www.ccih.org.



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