

Health for All Nations at Frontier Ventures

By **MIKE SODERLING** MD/MBA (International Development)

Dr. Michael Soderling was in private practice (OB/GYN) for 10 years before following God's calling to serve in Central America for 11 years. Upon returning to the US in 2012, Mike assumed the role of Director for Health for All Nations, a project of Frontier Ventures. It is his calling to connect, convene, and catalyze toward the goal of health (*shalom*) for all nations (*ethne*).

The year was 2008, the setting was Fuller Theological Seminary, and the annual West Coast Healthcare Missions conference. This was the 5th year of this gathering of what I would now call those with an interest in global health initiatives from a Christ-centered mindset. At the time, there was growing criticism about short-term, health-related mission outreaches. This author's context at the time was a full-time commitment in Guatemala which had started in 2001. It is where I witnessed first-hand the mostly downside elements of this sort of outreach. We were a group of only six individuals, but we had a big vision. Rather than continue to be simply critical of what we saw happening, we decided to do something to positively influence the Church and her efforts at helping people become healthier.

What started as the Best Practices in Global Health Missions group has since evolved into its present form as Health for All Nations. Our name was carefully chosen since the slogan "Health for All" is still often quoted in the secular world as it refers to the mantra that came out of the Alma Ata global health meeting in 1978. That slogan was "health for all by the year 2000." However, by the year 2000, the global health situation had likely gotten worse. It is still a dream for many. For us, health means something much deeper than what it means for entities such as the World Health Organization, which still defines health as "... a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Our belief is that for true health to be experienced, one must also be in a committed relationship with the God of the universe through his son Jesus, the Christ. This is an integrated life where human existence (mind/body/spirit) flourishes as much as possible in one's context.

Health for All Nations has sought to fill the gaps in the Church's understanding of health, and once she has that full biblical understanding to then begin to apply that understanding where human needs are the greatest, especially in contexts where the name of Jesus is not yet known. To that end, we have a website dedicated to best practices in global health missions.

Next, we recognized the fact that there was no global health-focused journal published from a Christian worldview. Interested parties were convened at the Global Missions Health Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2012 and the pieces were put in place with the first edition published in June of 2014. For the past 10 years, *Christian Journal for Global Health* has been publishing articles from a Christian worldview that may have otherwise garnered no interest from secular global-health publishers. The journal's exposure, credibility, and viewership are steadily growing.


In 2013, we identified the fact that the Lausanne Movement had little to say about the essential contribution that healthcare ministries have played and are playing in the name of Jesus in the most difficult parts of the world. Very little existed in the movement's documents in her previous three congresses regarding health and whole-person care. After petitioning the LM leadership we were granted what has become the newest issue network within this global

organization. We have contributed extensively to the Lausanne Movement including several documents, a Global Classroom, an issue of the *Lausanne Global Analysis* completely focused on health, a “Difficult Terms” video on health, contribution to the State of the Great Commission report, attendance at the Global Workplace Forum, and Younger Leaders’ Gathering. This author serves as co-Catalyst for the HFAN Network and contributed significantly to the Lausanne 4 Congress in Seoul in September 2024, mostly by assisting in addressing GAP 13, Wholistic Health. This will occur by the formation of Action Hubs during and after the congress which will carry on the work necessary to overcome this gap.

Next, we identified a significant gap in the content of the *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* course. Though the course purported to be about the world Christian movement, there was next to nothing about the essential contribution that Christian healthcare outreach had made and is making in the world. After meeting with the Perspectives leadership, it was clear there was no room in the curriculum for adding what we thought was essential for filling this gap. They did, however, bless our effort at developing a similar course, *Christian Global Health in Perspective*. This course came about after a consultation at Wheaton College in Illinois in 2018 attended by 25 highly regarded global health leaders, theologians, historians, and authors. At this gathering, the ground was laid for the development of this course based on a similar framework: Section One, the biblical basis (for health in mission in this case), Section Two, the historical perspective on healthcare missions, Section Three, the cultural uniqueness of doing healthcare in other contexts, and Section Four on Leadership, Innovation, and Strategy. We have taught this course to a global cohort twice a year since the fall of 2012 and have received rave reviews.

Similar efforts (to awaken the Church to her essential calling to care for the whole person in the way of Jesus) have been made with the World Evangelical Alliance and Micah Global. Within the WEA, there now exists the Global Strategy Forum (GSF)—which they describe as their think tank—has recently added a health sphere as part of their focus. We will be attending and contributing to the GSF gathering in Bangkok just prior to the Lausanne 4 Congress. Efforts are being made to coordinate activities between Lausanne, WEA, GSF, and Micah Global, the last of which is very committed to this cause.

Next, we identified the fact that there was no center for global health based at a Christian university, at least not one with a foundation firmly established in our understanding of health based on Scripture. To establish such an entity was the original reason this author moved to Pasadena in 2014. The original intention 10 years ago was to join forces with William Carey International University to develop this center as it was their founder’s (Ralph D. Winter) dream that WCIU would birth many such centers/institutes, to address the roots of human suffering. The goal of starting this center is on the cusp of becoming a reality. This will likely be called the Centre for Global Health at WCIU.

Health for All Nations is deeply committed and involved with the RDW Launch Lab (the innovation element within Frontier Ventures) as we all seek to facilitate innovations that overcome the complex challenges facing the Church, especially the challenges present at the frontiers of mission. See the article by Paul Dzubinski for more about the Winter Launch Lab. Within the context of the WLL, we believe we will continue to facilitate the development of solutions to address the roots of human suffering. 

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