

African Journal of Contextual Theology
SIST, Attakwu – Enugu
P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria
ajct@sistenugu.com

Subscriptions

The *African Journal of Contextual Theology – AJCT* – (ISSN 2141-3037) is published annually. The subscription price is the following:

Nigeria: N500 per issue

Foreign: US\$20.00 per issue (including postage)

Payment may be made in cash or by cheque, payable to:

Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu
Enugu, Nigeria

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Typeset, by SIST Publications.

Printed and bound by

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CHRISTIAN FAITH-BASED PROJECTS AT THE SERVICE OF INTEGRAL NATION BUILDING AND GROWTH

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Introduction

Between the 22nd and 26th of May 2017, Holy Ghost Hospital MGBIDII in partnership with the American Initiative for Health and Wellness in Africa (AIHWA), a non-governmental initiative, organized a Free Medical Outreach program. The medical outreach was planned to cover the entire ORLU senatorial zone where the Hospital is located. It was envisioned as an Integrated Free Medical Outreach in line with the core therapeutic philosophy of both the Hospital and the partnering group. This therapeutic philosophy would properly be characterized as a holistic approach to health and wellness. In the pursuit of this integrated/holistic vision, the medical services planned and offered the following free medical outreach program:

- A doctor's medical assessment of each prospective beneficiary
- Screening for high blood pressure, diabetes, active infection, cancer, heart disease, hepatitis, ulcers, etc.
- Tests for and treatment of common tropical diseases – malaria, typhoid,
- Treatment of infections
- Counselors and advisors for handling medical problems
- Screening for vision problems and eye disease
- Various surgical procedures and interventions

The Outreach program was also integrated in the sphere of coverage as every member of the target communities had equal opportunity of being a beneficiary. Thus, the entire program was envisioned with a view to having the benefits extended to everyone irrespective of ethnic origin, cultural background, religious and political affiliation, gender, social status, etc.

In this write-up, I intend to present a report on the Free Medical Outreach (the partnership between Holy Ghost Hospital Mgbidii and the American Initiative for Health and Wellness in Africa – AIHWA). I hope to use this as a springboard for a reflection or commentary on the contributions of Christian faith-based healthcare initiatives and projects to the quest for national integration, cohesion, unity and growth.

Holy Ghost Hospital, Mgbidii and the American Initiative for Health and Wellness in Africa (AIHWA) are both Christian faith-based healthcare projects. It is pertinent to reflect on the commitment of these faith-based institutions to the provision of health and wellness, to see how these faith-based initiatives combine witnessing to their Christian faith with a solid commitment to contributing to the wellbeing of the human person, the good of the human society and ultimately to national cohesion and growth. The present report intends to highlight and document the instantiation of these activities in the partnership under consideration as well as articulate and underline the relevance of these initiatives in the Nigerian context – a country that appears to be in a perennial search for national identity, unity and sustainable growth.

Faith –Commitment and The Human Society

Writing about the contribution of faith-based projects and initiatives could resurrect the perennial arguments and counter arguments regarding the relevance of religion and religious beliefs to human beings and the human society. Religious faith-commitment has demonstrated to be a force for unity, human and societal enhancement as well as many other forms of good. The reverse has also been true. Religion has been employed for the most disruptive, divisive, abhorrent, destructive and retrogressive acts known in human history. In considering this ambivalence, some have leaned towards a total rejection of religion and religious faith, advocating an eradication of every trace of faith and belief in the supernatural. Some thinkers down the ages have shown serious suspicion towards religion and religious faith. Sigmund Freud, the first exponent of the psychoanalytic tradition dismissed religion as inherently infantile and irrational. His negative views on religion were first expounded in a work titled "Religion: The Future of Illusion." In this work and a subsequent one titled "Civilization and its Discontents" Freud saw religion as counterproductive to civilization. He further characterized and dismissed religious beliefs as infantile illusions.¹ Freud's impact on modern thought has been monumental. Although many of his thoughts have been modified or rejected by his successors, he is still regarded as the starting point of modern psychological reasoning. His dismissal of religion and religious faith stemmed from his consideration of this as inherently unhealthy both for the individual and the society at large. Other thinkers like Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, etc. also expressed great reservation about religion. Karl Marx saw it as an opium for

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Translated and edited by James Strachey with Bibliographical introduction by Peter Gay: New York, WW Norton, 1989

keeping people from demanding and working towards better living conditions. He saw religious belief as one of the elements of thought (superstructure) resting on the foundation of material considerations – the true base of human and societal functioning. For all these thinkers, religion should not be given a space in the society since it is destructive of the individual and the society. Religion and religious faith for these thinkers could not therefore be seen as contributing to human health and sustainable societal growth.

We have already noted the ambivalence involved in the appeal to and the perspectives on religious faith. While it is wrong to dismiss religion out-rightly as unhealthy and inherently bad for the individual and society, one must admit that religion has been employed as a tool for exploitation, division, hate and justification of even the most heinous, life-negating, and destructive acts of terrorism. Contemporary global terrorism has largely been inspired by claims to religious conviction and faith. The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York by some religiously inspired individuals under the banner of al Qaeda is a clear manifestation of the power of religious conviction and the huge damage that could follow from this. That singular event has awakened all to the threat of terrorism and challenged the assumption that religion is inherently good, that it inspires the noblest of actions. In the past few weeks, the United Kingdom has witnessed a wave of religiously- inspired acts of terrorism. These actions have often resulted in the wanton destruction of lives, properties and disruption of the serenity and sense of security of the cities and places concerned.

Nigeria has seen the devastation that religiously inspired groups - “faith-inspired ideologies, theologies and initiatives”- can bring about. The emergence of BOKO HARAM in the north eastern

part of Nigeria and the quest to spread/impose/implement the particular understanding of their Islamic faith and religion has led to untold havoc which has been felt beyond this part of the country. Many lives have been lost. Many people have been kidnaped, including school children. Many young women have been raped and forcefully kept either as wives or sex slaves. Countless properties have been destroyed. The emergence and spread of the group and the government efforts to deal with the situation have resulted in a huge crisis of massive human displacement. The number of internally displaced people (IDP) generated by this crisis is comparable to what is obtainable in every major and active war zone. The Nigerian government has been struggling to provide for the safety and wellbeing of these displaced people. A number of those who are not indigenous to these war-torn zones and could not conceive of a better future have since relocated to safer places. Under this situation, life has become like the Hobbesian state of nature – short and brutish. Scarce infrastructures and social amenities have been destroyed without any hope of rebuilding them. There is also no hope of any sustainable progress in the nearest future.

We may raise questions about a particular understanding of God and the expression of this through creedal formulations or actions. We may raise valid questions about the rationale or theological justification for acts of violence perpetrated in the name of religion and commitment to a particular creed. While some religious leaders have remained muted or even expressed support for and sympathy with divisive thoughts, rhetoric and terrorist activities, many religious leaders from across the different faiths have been known to condemn religiously-inspired divisive acts and thoughts, particularly acts of terrorism. Theologians from the various faiths would need to continue seeking and offering a reasoned, faithful, and contextually

relevant understanding and application of the faith. The fact however remains that religion can and has been employed as a potent force for division, hatred and destruction. It is therefore quite gratifying to see that Religion can play a unifying, life-affirming and developmental role in a given human society. Such is the role of the Christian faith-based health initiatives involved in this report. I am sure that there are other non-Christian faith-based groups whose activities contribute to national unity and growth. I have however chosen to present two Christian faith-inspired groups that I am closely connected with. At this juncture, I would like to give a brief presentation of the two institutions involved in the medical outreach that has formed the basis for this write-up.

The Holy Ghost Hospital, Mgbidii

Holy Ghost Hospital Mgbidii is a government approved health facility fully owned and operated by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost Fathers and Brothers, or Spiritans) Province of Nigeria South East. The Congregation is an International Catholic Religious Missionary Order of Priests and Brothers founded in 1703 in France. Its missionary endeavors span over 60 countries in the world. Many people from the South Eastern part of Nigeria can still recall vividly the Irish missionaries (Holy Ghost Fathers and brothers) who labored in many parts of the region establishing missions, schools and hospitals. Thus, the involvement of the Congregation in the healthcare delivery system dates back to the early times when these missionaries saw healthcare as complementary to evangelization. During this period, a number of clinics, nursing schools, leprosarium and other primary healthcare facilities were established. These early Holy Ghost Fathers and brothers labored not only to plant the seed of Faith but also played a big

role in fighting hunger and disease during the Nigerian/Biafra civil war as they championed relief efforts and services.

Holy Ghost Hospital was formally established in 2013. It was originally conceived as a domestic infirmary to serve the basic health needs of the retired members of the Province. This informed the siting of the hospital within the retirement complex – Holy Ghost Haven. However, true to the missionary orientation of the Congregation and in keeping with the need to identify with the people, the Province decided to apply for a conventional hospital that will not only serve the needs of the retired confreres inside the retirement complex but the local communities as well.

The location of the Hospital between Mgbidi and Oguta makes it easily accessible to both communities. The more proximity to Oguta (and perhaps its commitment to quality and affordable healthcare delivery) has made it the first Hospital of choice for the Oguta community. Over 70% (seventy percent) of the current regular patient base of the Hospital comes from OGUTA. The Hospital also draws patronage from other nearby communities like Otulu, Awo-Omamma, Omuma, Amorka, Uli, Ihiala, and even beyond. The Hospital therefore draws patients from within and beyond the senatorial zone where it is located.

The hospital opened its doors to receive patients for the first time on the 17th of April 2013. Presently the hospital has two doctors living within the hospital premises. There are other doctors who are employed to consult on certain days and for certain health needs. The hospital has a number of nurses employed fulltime to care for patients. There are laboratory scientists and technicians working fulltime. There are also other adjunct staff – receptionist, accounts clerk, cleaners, etc.

The hospital has most of the basic facilities required in a conventional hospital. It has a standard theater for surgeries. The theater has a state of the art anesthetic machine for major surgeries. There is a standard laboratory for medical tests. The hospital also has some modern medical machines like ECG, Ultra Sound, X-ray and Digital Patient Monitor Machine for pertinent diagnostic and monitoring purposes. The overall aim of the hospital is to provide a space where patients need not be referred around for simple diagnosis. Oxygen cylinders and oxygen concentrator machine are readily available for deployment when needed.

Being located in the rural area and in keeping with its current developmental status (health facilities and services currently available), the hospital provides both primary and secondary health care services to the communities. The management of the Hospital is quite aware of the need to merge quality healthcare delivery with affordability. This could be considered one of the biggest challenges to health delivery efforts in the country. Quality often translates into being out of the reach of the general populace. Given the paucity of functional governmental health institutions and the bureaucratic dysfunction associated with these institutions, the availability of quality health services that equally combines the vision of greater coverage necessarily requires a preferential leaning towards charity. Holy Ghost Hospital envisions bringing quality healthcare services to the grassroots with a commitment to Christian charity. The surrounding communities, like most of the Nigerian population, live below the poverty level. A private (non-governmental) commitment to provide quality healthcare that consciously opts against a purely mercantilist outlook could easily translate into extra pressures on the operations of a nascent health facility, particularly one without solid financial resources or support. This

is one of the challenges facing the Holy Ghost Hospital. It has necessitated looking for philanthropic and good-spirited individuals and agencies to partner with the Hospital in order to sustain her vision. True to its vision and mission, the hospital has continued to serve the neighboring communities with a view to merging quality and affordability. Within the short span of its existence, the patient base of the hospital has grown beyond 2,800 families. Referrals are done for cases requiring specialized care.

The Hospital aspires to grow into a big hospital comparable to others in the country. A new site has been acquired and a new hospital complex is already under construction. While the current hospital has limited bed space, the new hospital is planned to have six general wards, 24 private (self-contained) rooms and three operating theaters. There is enough land for further infrastructural expansion. A Cancer (cervical cancer) Center has been planned and land secured for the project. The hospital also plans to open a standard Medical Imaging Center equipped with modern scanning machines to enhance diagnosis and treatment. Though the hospital is currently located in a small facility, the dreams of the management is big. It was the search for partnership with philanthropic and good-spirited individuals and agencies that led the Hospital to the American Initiative for Health and Wellness in Africa- AIHWA.

The American Initiative for Health and Wellness in Africa (AIHWA)

The American Initiative for health and Wellness in Africa (AIHWA) is a non-governmental (non-profit) organization registered in the US. The group is committed to the provision of integrated healthcare and wellness in Africa. It is made up of a

team of Health Professionals from Nigeria and the United States of America. While some of the members are still active in their respective fields of specialization in the health profession, a good number of the members are retired people who have chosen to devote their time and talents to making a difference in the lives of others. The group envisions organizing free medical missions to chosen places in Africa. It has already established a mission control center in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. It is planning a new project in the South Eastern part of Nigeria where a "Hope Center" has been sited. While the group is non-confessional in outreach, members draw basic inspiration from their Christian Faith, particularly the Christian value of charity towards all. The less privileged in the society have a pride of place in the scheme of the group. We shall come back to these points when we reflect on the Catholic Teaching or Understanding of the human person and the community as the source of inspiration for the activities of this group.

As has been noted, "integral/integration" is part and parcel of the vision of the group. This expresses the group's conviction that health and wellness must be approached holistically – to care for the various dimensions of the human person. It also expresses the non-discriminatory and apolitical stance of the group – reaching out to the various strata of the society and the entire spectrum of the human society. In this understanding, medical mission as envisioned by the group is a conscious attempt and choice to reach out to every human person irrespective of social status, gender, religious and cultural affiliation, political leaning, etc. The group while being particularly drawn to the plight of those on the margins of the society makes no distinction in reaching out to all. While it is open to partnership with both the government and the civil society, the group guards her apolitical status jealously. Indeed, part of the vision of the group is

advocacy through practical action. The integrated *vision and* apolitical status of the group is statement about its *commitment* to working with all and for all for the realization of *good health* and wellness for all.

The Free Medical Outreach

AIHWA chose to partner with the Holy Ghost Hospital in organizing this year's free medical mission outreach. As I have already noted, the outreach ran from 22nd to the 26th of May 2017 at the Hospital Premises. The exercise was preceded by a week of pre-registration – an exercise to presort and arrange beneficiaries according to the days of the outreach. Thus, beneficiaries went through pre-diagnosis, were given appointments/assigned days ahead of time. Two thousand and five (2,005) people were pre-registered for the program. Out of this number, one thousand two hundred and seventy four (1,274) were able to see the doctors for various ailments. Thirty one (31) surgeries were done within a space of five days. Some of the surgeries were major – Myomectomies, total Abdominal Hysterectomies, etc. A number of inguinal Hernioraphies were done as well as the Excision of clitoral cysts and Lipomas. All the surgical procedures were successful. Most of the in-patients were discharged within two days of surgery. The remaining were discharged on the last day of the program. One hundred and seventy five people (175) got prescriptions for eye glasses. Considering the logistics of taking these prescriptions to the US, the group awarded the contract for the preparation of these visual aids in Nigeria. Though the program did not attend to all the people who were pre-booked for the outreach (on the account of the huge turnout for each day), the entire project could be described as successful. Holy Ghost Hospital is proud to have partnered with the AIHWA in making some difference in the

lives of some people. No one was charged a penny for all the services. AIHWA provided most of the sponsorship, including paying for the Hospital Folders of all the beneficiaries.

AIHWA was impressed by the organization on ground for the outreach. The group commended particularly the publicity that made it possible to record such a massive turnout as well as the work that went into managing each day of the outreach. The last day of the program attracted the largest crowd that necessitated an emergency meeting by the core organizing committee. The meeting, among other things decided that there was need to deliver a message of hope to all the people present. This hope is to be concretized in seeking for a way to extend the program in some form - a promise to return in the nearest future. On that last day of the program, an inventory was taken of the number of people who lined up for different forms of surgeries and those who needed consultation with an optometrist. Ninety-one people (91) still needed surgeries but were not attended to. Two hundred and thirty-six (236) people still needed to see an optometrist. The number that complained of other ailments (like malaria, various forms of infection, pain in various parts of the body, diabetes, hypertension, etc.) was indeterminate. I can say that the program attended to more than 50% of the huge turnout registered during the outreach. This is not a mean feat. The outreach was therefore a huge success in every sense of it. We could not have attended to all. It is quite unrealistic to expect this.

The enormity of the turnout speaks volumes about the enormity of health needs in the land and the level of poverty and helplessness in the country. The daily turnout was simply overwhelming. AIHWA members confessed that they did not expect such a massive turnout. Initial estimates and supplies were simply shattered and depleted by the massive turnout.

Backup arrangements had to be made in order to reach the level of coverage and impact that was eventually recorded.

Catholic Teaching on the Human Person and the Human Community – The Source of Our Inspiration

We are familiar with the saying that “no one speaks from nowhere.” Put in another way, we can say that no one acts from nowhere. The Christian/Catholic faith-based groups necessarily draw inspiration for their initiatives from their understating and appreciation of the Christian/Catholic Teaching and the commitment to living out this teaching. This now leads us to a consideration of the Catholic understanding of the human person and the human community.

It is a basic Catholic Teaching that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. The book of Genesis presents this fundamental faith in two narratives of creation. The idea of creation has various implications for the entire understanding of the human person by the church. Creation in the first place underlines the fact that humans have an origin in God. Thus, in answer to the questions concerning the origin of the universe and all it contains, the church affirms that God is the source of all. God created the universe and all “out of nothing”- *creatio ex nihilo*. With creation comes a purpose or teleology. God created humans for union with him. Human beings therefore occupy a pride of place among all God’s creative work. In both creation narratives, human beings are presented as masters of the earth, co-creators with God and are called to share more closely with God. It is on the basis of this understanding regarding creation and the special place accorded humans among all creation (the call for union with God) that the church affirms the necessity of turning towards God through good and upright living.

Being created in the image and likeness of God gives the human person a dignity that is inalienable. Thus, the human person in this earthly realm becomes an end in himself and not a means to an end. This forms the basis of the Catholic Teaching on respect for all forms of human life and condemnation of all direct attacks on human life. The dignity of the human person however does not make the human person the measure of all. The human person occupies an exalted position and has an inestimable value. However, God remains the only absolute reality.

As already noted, it is on the basis of been created by God in His image that the human person is called to tend towards God the creator. The human person finds ultimate fulfilment not in himself, not in any other created reality or in constructing earthly cities – the unbridled hope in and pursuit of science and technology – but in rising above the natural order in pursuit of the supernatural order. As St. Augustine noted, God has made us for himself and our hearts will remain restless until they rest in God. This quest for God, this search for ultimate fulfillment is to be sought in union with other humans. The human person finds true freedom and contentment in giving and receiving, in cooperation with others. Given that the human person is born as an individual and into a community, the pursuit of fulfillment demands a recognition of this dual reality.

In the encyclical, *Centesimus annus*, Pope John Paul II notes that the self –fulfillment of the human person demands self-giving in which a bond of true communion between human beings is formed.² The Second Vatican Council proclaims: “Man, who is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself

² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), no. 41. See also Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catechism* (Collegeville, Minn. : Liturgical Press, 1996), P. 26

(for its own sake), nevertheless can fully discover his true self only in sincere giving of himself”³ Self- fulfillment demands self- giving and here we see what distinguishes Catholic anthropology from individualism and collectivism. Thus, Self- Actualization is not an individualist aspiration. For the Catholic Church, Self- Actualization should not be detached from Self- Transcendence. The human person has both a duty to develop to his full potential – as the parable of the talents indicates – and a call to go beyond himself.

The human person therefore is a fundamental polarity of self-possession and self-donation.⁴ This makeup of the human person is expressive of the image of God. As the Second Vatican Council notes - “vistas closed to human reason were opened by the lord Jesus when he prayed to the father, ‘that all may be one... as we are one’ (John 17.21-22). He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons and the union of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man ... cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself”⁵ This is the truth concerning man’s likeness to God. It expresses the truth that God himself as trinity, as a communion of persons who totally share one single being, life, knowledge and love is the model for this interpretation of the human person.

It has been rightly noted that the social teaching of the Church rests on two fundamental principles. In the first place, the human person cannot find fulfillment unless in establishing some community with others, community in which we serve and are served, love and are loved. Secondly, we cannot find personal

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24 (henceforth quoted as GS)

⁴ John F Crosby, “John Paul II’s Vision of Sexuality and Marriage” *The legacy of Pope John Paul II: His Contribution to Catholic Thought*, ed. Geoffrey Gneuchs (New York: Crossroad, 2000, 52 -70

⁵ GS 24

fulfillment without making our own deep personal commitment to God. That is, we are indeed social beings, but we are much more than that. We are social beings who are also persons with transcendent dignity, persons called to an immediate personal relationship with God.⁶ We see here another point of difference between Catholic anthropology and secular perspectives on the human person. The emphasis here on “the destiny of the human person” is very significant since it counters the tendency of seeing the human person as an end in himself, of seeing the earthly terrain as explainable without reference to any transcendent reality.

The Second Vatican Council underlined this point when the Council Fathers noted, “the beginning, the subject, and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person, who for his part and by his very nature stands completely in need of social life. This social life is not something added on to man. Hence, through his dealings with others, through reciprocal responsibilities and through conversation with his brothers, he develops all his gifts, and is able to rise to his destiny”⁷ This destiny of the person is not limited to the goods a temporal society can provide. “While living in history he fully maintains his eternal vocation”⁸. Even in relation to the fullest temporal community, the political community, the human person has “transcendence.”⁹

Since the destiny of the human person goes beyond this earthly terrain, the church insists that the human person cannot simply

⁶ Cf. Paul VI, *Encyclical, Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967) no. 15, 16 (EV 2. 1060- 1061), *Enchiridion Vaticanum*: Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1990

⁷ GS 25

⁸ GS 76

⁹ GS 76

be subordinated to the good of any society and that all persons are basically equal. As the Council Fathers noted:

True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources, nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every form of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. Why? Because all men, having a rational soul and being created in God's image, have the same nature and origin, and because all men, having been redeemed by Christ, enjoyed the same divine calling and destiny¹⁰

Some of the social ties that bind people together spring immediately from the demands of our human nature. To live well, humans clearly need such ties as the family and the wider human family – the society. In summary, the Catholic perspective on the human person places humans in communion with others. The term communion implies deep relationship – going beyond mere collectivism. The relationship draws from the nature of God himself who is one and triune. The relationship between humans cannot be reduced to cooperation in this earthly domain. The human person has an ultimate destiny – a call beyond this earthly terrain.

Conclusion

Holy Ghost Hospital is a Catholic Health Institution that has a vision to be at the service of all. While the Hospital is Catholic, the administration does not discriminate in offering employment

¹⁰ GS, 29, DH, 6

to workers. Thus, every qualified doctor, nurse, laboratory personnel, cleaner, etc. has equal chance of landing employment in the Hospital. In line with Catholic teaching, the Hospital recognizes the inalienable right of everyone to be treated with dignity and respect. This teaching, as we have seen above, is founded on the belief that humans are made in the Image of God. Workers, patients and anyone who has anything to do with the Hospital is treated with respect and dignity. The Hospital also recognizes the religious freedom of all and the right of everyone to worship God according to the dictates of his/her conscience. Apart from adopting a religious-neutral policy of employment, the hospital is sensitive to the religious affiliations of patients or visitors to patients on admission. The management sees the Hospital as a public space that should accommodate all. Over the years, the Hospital has employed doctors from Bayelsa, Akwa – Ibom, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States. The religious affiliation of these doctors has never been an issue of consideration along the line. The same goes with nurses and other staff at various levels.

In leaning towards charity, the Hospital is contributing to wider access to quality healthcare by as many people as possible. This is part and parcel of the Catholic Social Teaching of valuing every human person, showing solidarity with the less privileged, being a brother's/sister's keeper and being the voice of the voiceless. In veering off from a purely mercantilist approach to life and business, the Hospital recognizes the need to build up the earthly city (to work for the reign of God here on earth) while ultimately building up treasures for the heavenly city – the true home of all humans. The hospital recognizes the beauty of creation while looking towards union with God, the maker of all things, the giver of all gifts and the Ultimate Treasure. Every sphere of the hospital project could therefore be considered a

huge contribution to national unity. It is also a huge contribution to the health and growth of the entire human person and the nation. A healthy nation is a prosperous nation. It is above all, a faithful living out of Catholic Teaching.

AIHWA is a group whose members are majorly Catholic - the founder is a Holy Ghost Father. The group however makes no distinction in reaching out to all. The objective of the group is to serve all irrespective of tribe, religious affiliation or status. Like the Hospital, AIHWA takes seriously the Catholic Church's understanding of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God. The group allows itself to be guided by the wider implications of this faith as it places itself at the service of the entire humanity. The non-profit status of the group is a statement about solidarity with others – sensitivity to societal structures that tend to take away from the dignity of others. Like Holy Ghost Hospital, AIHWA believes in working towards the establishment of the reign of God beginning from the earth – the reign of justice, peace, integration of all creation, fraternity, equality, etc. It is therefore not surprising that governmental departments – like the ambassadors of a number of countries and the Federal Ministry of Health – have taken note of the activities of the group. Their commitment and *modus operandi* could serve as a model for governmental programs and actions.

I would therefore conclude by affirming that Christian faith-based healthcare groups have been contributing and continue to contribute to national integration and growth through their projects and initiatives. It may serve the government and indeed the nation to pay close attention to the visions/intuitions of these groups and learn something about the pursuit of unity and growth while remaining respectful of and sensitive to other people's faiths and socio-cultural backgrounds.