BIBLE STUDIES

Healing Ministry Week
11 – 18 February 2018

CMAI Day of Prayer
14 February 2018

Healing Ministry Sunday
11 February 2018

Theme

"Hope in Distress"

Please write to: *The General Secretary,*
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To all respected Bishops, Pastors, CEOs of Institutions and all members of CMAI!

Dear Partners in the Lord's Healing Ministry,

Greetings to you all in the name of Jesus Christ!

God has been gracious to give us another opportunity to celebrate the Healing Ministry Week and Sunday 2018. We hope the theme - “Hope in Distress" - will touch those who are going through tough times. May the Spirit of God work through you to reach people in distress in your ministry.

Please mark your calendar to plan for these dates: The Week will be celebrated from 11 to 18 February 2018. To thank God for the healing ministry, 14 February will set apart as a special day of prayer. The Healing Ministry Sunday is on 11 February. In case you miss that Sunday, celebrate on the following Sunday on 18 February.

In this envelope, besides this Devotional booklet for the week, you will find the Order of Service for the Sunday. For Chaplains and Church Ministers a notice board poster is enclosed for public awareness.

It is important to know that as the Church, we can be a source of strength and hope to people in distress. As the parable of the lost sheep narrates, our Good Shepherd mandates us to join Him to search, find, and give a new hope to our distressed sheep. It is our prayer that the congregations will join hands to make our service known and to acknowledge God as the source of every healing.

Last year the Healing Ministry Sunday offerings were sent to us. I take this opportunity to thank each of you for this partnership.

CMAI is celebrating the Healing Ministry Week along with the National Council of Churches in India, Catholic Health Association of India and the Commission for Healthcare Apostolate of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India. The broader partnership has enabled many more congregations to celebrate the healing ministry week.

Our sincere thanks to Rev. Paul Pragasam, Dr. Nitin Joseph, Fr. George Varughese, Rev. Dr. T. Aruldhas, Rev. Dr. A. I. David and Rev Sharath David for their inspired thoughts for this Devotional Book.

Please let us know how we could be of help to you. We are keen to know how you celebrated the occasion. Your feedback will strengthen our partnership.

With all good wishes and prayers,

Dr Bimal Charles
General Secretary

CREATION IN DISTRESS

Romans 8:19-22

"Why are you throwing these star fish in to sea"? Queried an old man. "I wish to save them", responsibly answered the little boy. "There are thousands of them swept aside the shore" old man cynically murmured. "As many I could save" little boy echoed like a savior.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; The words of St. Paul teach us that Creation is alive and has thinking and acting ability. They earnestly expect the change in human behavior. They have hope in God that humanity soon will become children of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope. The nature has turned in to frustrating uselessness because of the disobedient, greedy and sinful intention of fallen humanity. The nature is of no fault. Because the Nature is not capable of sin but humans are. Which makes the chief difference between nature and humans. Sin of humans against nature brought it Subject to futility and Subject to despair. Because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. The hope of creation is that one day it will be saved from deformation and decay and participate in the glorious salvation of God's children. *We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now.*

Psalm 104 sings God's greatness in relation to nature. God's life is with and in nature. The whole nature is God's abode. Nature is God's home. V3-nature is God's co-worker. The nature provides all humans labour from the morning till the evening. Day life for humans and birds and night life for animals (22-23). The nature trusts in the Lord and they have faith in Him. God and nature rejoice together and in each other. The nature solely depends on God. Such blissful and bright and brilliant nature is groaning in the pains of childbirth today. If we destroy the joy of nature we tamper the joy of God. According to this psalm the one who stand against nature is wicked. Understanding God nature in nature is worship acceptable in the sight of God. Let us enable nature to praise worship God and may God prevent us from being destructive hindrance to the worship of Nature.

Action today: Minimize use of things and thereby waste. Help a dying plant. Stop any single small action against nature.

Think: **"We do not inherit earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."**

Pray: Lord help us to respond in love and care to the Nature which you created in your wisdom. Forgive our cruel and thoughtless sins against Nature. Help us to realize our commitment healing mission includes Nature which groans in pain. In hope we look for the day to see the whole creation in glory and splendor along with us. Amen

COMMUNITIES IN DISTRESS

Ex. 2: 24; 19: 1-8

"The Israelites were groaning under their bondage and the wail of their cries for help came up to God." (Ex. 2: 24)

The first passage describes the story of the Israelites under bondage who received freedom/liberation from the oppressive regime of Pharaoh. Freedom was their God given right and it was snatched away by a human power and his country (Egyptians) The Israelites groaned under several Pharaohs with no end to their misery and distress. The second passage details about their move through the wilderness in Sinai after liberation. Here again, the Israelites, a community on the move, faced multiple forms of distress, instability, doubts, fears, unknown future, and even no sign of apparent hope.

Todays' some Israelite communities live in war zones, conflict areas, refugee camps, migrants, tribes who are uprooted from their homelands, loved ones, and belongings. We have similar migrant communities (most of them manual labourers) from northern states like Bihar, Bengal and others. Even though the state government takes extra effort to safeguard the human rights, needs and concerns of the migrants are totally ignored. They are "no" people with no identity of their own.

Hospitality is at the core of the Indian culture and tradition. The Acts of the Apostles gives an account of the generosity of the early church towards suffering brothers and sisters in other lands. They sent all the available resources to the needy brothers and sisters (Acts. 11: 11: 27-30). The early church thus became partners with God in alleviating the distress and suffering of their fellow Christians.

Viktor Frankl an Austrian psychotherapist, who survived the Nazi genocide writes that there is meaning to all forms of suffering. Based on this concept, he developed Logotherapy (healing through meaning), a system which brought healing to many who lost their hopes in life. Developed by Viktor Frankl, the theory is founded on the belief that human nature is motivated by the search for a life purpose; logotherapy is the pursuit of that meaning for one's life.

The *Nirbhaya* case the young woman who was raped and brutally murdered in New Delhi some years ago. What is hope in such situations? Jesus Christ continues to engage us to find meaning in suffering in and through his cross and resurrection.

Food for thought/ points for further reflection:

1. How do we find meaning in our and community's suffering? How can the communities in distress and turmoil find meaning in their seemingly unending pain? In what ways can the communities in distress be transformed into communities of hope and peace?
2. Meditate on the significance of Jesus Christ's cross and resurrection in this regard. List a few spiritual resources at the church's disposal to comfort and care for those who are in distress.

Prayer: God of hope, enable me/us to find meaning in my/our suffering and to transform them for the good of others. Let me/us be instruments of hope creating communities of hope in hopeless situations. In Christ's name I/we pray, Amen.

PEOPLE IN DISTRESS

Matt.11:25-30

John Bunyan in his bestseller The Pilgrim's Progress allegorically writes about a man named Christian who undertakes a pilgrimage from his city called the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, the kingdom of God. He carries with him a heavy load on his shoulders, a sack filled with his sins and woes. After many obstacles and setbacks, he comes to the Cross, which stands on higher ground. At the foot of the Cross is a gentle slope which leads to an open sepulchre. When Christian stops by the Cross the burden on his back suddenly slips off his shoulders and rolls down the slope and falls into the sepulchre, to be seen no more. The Christian life indeed is a journey, a pilgrimage that we all must take to the Cross amid distress and turmoil in the world.

Distress is caused because of unpleasant stressors and these vary in various stages of life beginning in early childhood when a baby feels stress hearing arguments and seeing fights between its parents. In adolescence stress can be caused by seemingly trivial reasons like selection of clothes to wear, peer pressure, broken love affairs and facing challenges in schools and colleges. Many in this age group turn to substance abuse and alcoholism to escape from this stress but it only adds to the distress. High expectation from parents and sibling rivalry are other reasons for distress in youth. In this modern and highly competitive world the rat race, deadlines at the work place and irregular working hours take a toll on people, often leading to stress related illnesses like peptic ulcers, diabetes, hypertension and cardiac disorders.

Jesus comforted the Jews of His day who were burdened down by the heavy yoke of the Mosaic Law and Pharisaic legalism. To these people who were tied with burdens that were heavy to bear and indeed to all of us today, Jesus offers hope and comfort. 1.**"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"**. This is an open invitation to all of who are exhausted and heavily burdened. When we come to Jesus He gives us rest and peace. 2."**Take My yoke upon you".** As against the heavy yoke of distress, Jesus' yoke is light and easy because of the grace that He pours on us and the mercy that He shows towards us. His blessings fill our lives every day. 3. **"Learn from Me".** The Christian life is that of a pilgrim and a disciple and is a process of renewing our faith and learning from His word daily.

Jesus gives His children a two-fold peace. We are at peace with God (Rom.5:1) and we are assured of the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Phlpp.4:7). Finally, since we are comforted in our afflictions we can comfort others who are in turmoil and distress (2Cor.1:4) and so we become agents of hope to others.

Reflection:

1. In our journey of life when have we experienced distress? How did we overcome it?
2. How did it increase our faith and dependence on God?

Prayer: In my distress I call unto you, comfort me and deliver me O Lord. Amen.

HEALING IN DISTRESS AND HOPE

Acts 27:13-26

(Introduce with a contemporary story and a poem or hymn)

Apostle Paul was travelling as a prisoner. While sailing past Crete, Paul and the other sailors were pounded by the storm so violently. Neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, hope of being saved was at last abandoned. Having been encouraged by the angel of God, Paul stood among them as the source and the sign of hope in spite of the shipwreck. This event is one of the many troubles Paul was facing during his committed ministry.

On the one hand, there is a disillusion among the healing ministers when they are faced with challenges day after day. Pastoral Counselor Howard Clinebell wrote about the story of a life saving station in the context of shipwrecks. It started as a noble movement to save people due to ship wreck. Slowly it compromised the vision and became an institution and finally it became a monument at the end. Many noble beginnings have lost their vision due to monotonies, lack of support and perhaps distortion of their call. In this manner, there are many mission hospitals in distress, many churches in distress, many institutions in distress.

On the other hand, many in healing ministry have many troubles and challenges at different levels created by ourselves. Some of our systems and structures are oppressive. Many policies are formulated which are equal to ship wrecks in the life of a healing minister. At the national level or in a local level, there are many instances of corruption and issues of social justice. We notice many conflicts among the ministers themselves. Misuse of power is at play in many of the decision making contexts.

How do we recognise and address the distresses among us and in our healing ministry? Being open to our fellow ministers and to be in good communication with one another in ministry is one way of keeping in touch with the well being of our mission. It is required of us to constantly remember the divine call and to keep in touch with God's heart.

Food for thought/ Points for further reflection:

1. What are the distresses you can identify in our institution at the policy or structural level today?
2. As healing ministers, how do we squarely look at some issues we face and find hope is such issues?

Prayer: God, our heavenly parent, we thank you for the gracious calling you gave us in the healing ministry. Forgive us, O God, we have not been faithful in our calling to be a healing community. We have been insensitive to the corruptions where we ourselves are involved. We have closed our eyes to the injustices we commit to our fellow ministers in healing. Grant us new vision, O God, so that we will become aware and take steps to align our lives to your calling. Grant us healing from above. We pray in Christ's precious name. Amen.

PEOPLE OF GOD: CHANNELS OF HOPE

I Peter 2:9-10

The theme for today's Bible study seems to be paradoxical as the people of God of both in Biblical time (Old Testament and New Testament) and of the present time are experiencing sufferings in many aspects such as physical, emotional economical, spiritual and relational. In fact, the whole creation is groaning.

The paradox emerges from the question, 'how can a suffering community be a channel of hope'. In other words, the people of God are in a world of distress often and mostly promoted by success-oriented, individual/self-centered, gender-insensitive, demotivating, self-defeating, stress-creating, unjust and oppressive systems, policies, structures, and people. Becoming channels of hope amid these conditions seems to be impossible and unrealistic and it challenges the capacity of human power, potential and possibilities to transform the society. In fact, this truth of human limitations confirms the need of divine intervention.

In I Peter 2:9-10, we read that the People of God in the midst of distress and suffering experienced the hope personally. This hope is rooted and finds its foundation in the transformative power of God. What is the indicator of the hope which is made possible by God? I Peter 2 clarifies this question by affirming that these people were earlier, without identity. But now they have a new status of 'belonging to God'. In other words, the people of God have become the channels of hope because they themselves are the witnesses to the new status.

Our life becomes the living witnesses to the hope that has been promised by God to suffering humanity. As healing professionals, being part of healing team and playing different roles such as medical doctors, allied health professionals, nurses, chaplains, and administrators, our presence, words, deeds, and the way we relate with the sick and suffering and with our colleagues can make a difference.

Nevertheless, more than what we 'do' and 'practice', our 'being' and what 'we are 'matter to the suffering and sick. No one can preach and promote God's hope, unless this hope is lived and expressed by them personally. We need to first positively believe, hope and trust that God's transformative and redemptive power has changed us and brought us a new status.

If God can change us, why can't He change others? I believe, that Peter asserts that it is a 'Living Hope' not just a 'preaching hope'. The challenge to the healed/healing community in congregations, health care institutions and in the society, is to 'live out this hope' before men and women in our day-to-day life so that the people will see our good lives and experience hope in their lives too and praise the Father in heaven.

Reflection

1. Are we a transformed and transforming community?
2. If Yes, how do we and how can we express our new status to the suffering community?
3. If No, how obstacles can be removed to become channels of God's hope to others?

GOD IN OUR DISTRESS

To find hope in distress is a challenge and God and His presence alone can help us in difficult situations.

Familiarity to Distress: The reason Christ alone can bring about a change in our distressing life situation is because He himself has gone through it and faced life. The incarnation of Christ makes life more meaningful for people in distress as he has power to redefine and recreate life in any condition to give hope for His creation.

We are slow in recognizing that our distressing issues can find hope by depending on Him. The life of Christ, his teaching and the values he imparted are a unique way of looking at life and its issues. He proved it on the cross through His suffering death and resurrection.

The presence of Christ in the universe is real today. He went through distress understands our plight as human beings and gives us the extra grace and mercy for sinners who are grappling and struggling to come to terms with life and its impact at different difficult situations.

We have a God who thoroughly understands every context of our life to bring hope.

Faith in Christ: The resurrection of Christ is the nail on the coffin of death and gives us a new hope for life. That there is more to this life God has a plan and purpose for us to complete the race we are running. How do we realize such great hope is available in Christ? It is faith that opens the door to God.

Seek he shall find, knock it shall be opened unto you. Faith is the gateway to heaven and it opens up the treasure of God for us. Till that time people will taste healing in the context of distress. Faith and experience of God opens life to a status of hope to experience God's love irrespective of how unworthy one feels about oneself.

Love of Christ: Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah felt an unworthy feeling as they experienced God in their calling and faced almost similar feeling. All that it says is that everyone who comes to God knows the importance of the unconditional love of God with which He accepts us when we truly feel sorry for our past life and accept a new life in Christ with joy and happiness instead of distress.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

We have a God who understands, cares and wants to restore us because He himself went through distress when He incarnated himself for us. May His presence along with the Holy Spirit fill our life with faith, hope and love, remove all distress from our life and instill new hope for life.