



STUDY

Nursing as Missional Vocation
MIBE School of Nursing, Indore

By the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis, Knox College

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you,
just as you did it to one of the least of these who are
members of my family, you did it to me.'

Matthew 25:40

Opening Prayer:

God of Life, we come to you eager to learn. You have invited us into relationship with others – to love, to serve and to care. As we come together to read your word and reflect upon its life in the world, may we be ready to absorb truths that transcend what is familiar and comfortable. May we reach out across the world with our minds and our hearts so that we will understand the vocation of our friends, and be ready to support them. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Hymn: #350 – To God be the glory

Scripture: Matthew 25:31–40

Reflection:

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“Hungry for love, he looks at you. Thirsty for kindness, he begs from you. Naked for loyalty, he hopes in you. Sick and imprisoned for friendship, he wants from you. Homeless for shelter in your heart, he asks of you. Will you be that one to him?” Mother Teresa, 1985.

I visited the Nursing School in autumn of 2009. The students performed an entire evening of regional dances from across India – oh the colours of the costumes, and the joy of watching young bodies enjoying the music and the dance. The students come from many different communities and many areas of the country. At the Graduate School of Nursing, Indore, Christian women and men come to study medicine, but also to enact their faith. For these students, their vocation as healthcare professionals is a concrete way of living out their faith.

The Graduate School of Nursing has been preparing students for medical ministry since 1945. They are currently preparing to offer a four-year programme, and have put admissions on hold for this year. They are in the midst of building a permanent plan of sustainability. As Shimy Mathew, the Secretary of the Mid-India Board of Education said, “it’s a struggle planning for the future, but God will help us. When God calls us, God equips us and gives us what we need...when different people

pray for us, it gives us strength.” She says that they encourage students to see nursing as a vocation, shaped by Christian values and principles.

In the context of India, faith and healthcare intersect in profound ways. Christians enter the profession as a calling, and healthcare is their ministry and their mission. Once they have been trained in their profession, these nurses go out to serve in a variety of settings throughout the country. Many of them will serve in mission hospitals which have a unique relationship with the surrounding culture. Certainly, in my visits to Jobat in Madhya Pradesh, for instance, I have seen these nurses working efficiently and faithfully to serve a diverse population.

In Canada, we are less likely to see our profession as a vocation. While individual health care providers may indeed have a deep faith, it is rarely a focus of their work. In India, however, for Christian nurses, their work is a direct and living sign of Jesus’ work among the people. This healing ministry cares for people from all walks of life, those living in poverty, and those of different faiths. In a land where Christians are a very small minority, it is a shining witness to the love and faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

When we support healthcare missions in India, we are doing a great deal more than ensuring that people have access to care for disease and injury. It is about ensuring that these women and men who have chosen nursing as a Christian vocation will be able to practise their ministry. We are helping to send them out to the corners of India, where they will witness not with words, but with actions. They witness by bringing cool water, by assisting with surgery, by caring for wounds, and by feeding the hungry. They witness by the light in their eyes and by the confidence with which they approach their task, confident that they have been called by Jesus Christ himself. Jesus makes it clear that our witness is not only words, but also actions. As we care for others, we are also caring for him. So these nurses, through their training and their professional activity minister to Jesus as they minister to the sick and the weak.

Questions:

1. In your own professional life, did you see your work as a missional vocation? Why or why not?

2. How does our support of nursing in India help us to participate in God's healing mission?
3. Can you imagine some of the challenges of being a Christian nurse in a country in which Christians are a very small minority?
4. If you have travelled to India, share your experiences of healthcare in India.

Hymn: #649 – How clear is our vocation, Lord

Closing Prayer:

God who feeds us and heals us, we give thanks for nurses, for the ways that they care for us, even when it costs them much. We are thankful for healthcare as a vocation – as a means of fulfilling your mission. We pray for the safety of nurses in a time of Covid, and we give thanks for their sacrifices throughout the pandemic. We pray for nurses in India, as they face the unique challenges of their context. May they feel confident in their call from Jesus, so that they may spread the light of the gospel through their caring for others. May we find ways to support these important ministries. In Jesus' name, Amen.