



STUDY

Human Bodies, Buildings and COVID-19
MIBE School of Nursing, Indore

By the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis, Knox College

When he saw their faith, he said,
"Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

Luke 5:17–26

Opening Prayer:

God of wisdom, we come to you with our hands open, waiting to receive the gifts that you have to offer us. We come with our minds open, ready to be changed. We come with our spirits open to the movement of your Holy Spirit. In this time of learning and exploration, we ask that you stretch the limits of our understanding, so that we may come to know you and others more fully. Extend before us a vision of your Kingdom, so that we may have hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymn: #631 – Jesus' hands were kind hands

Scripture: Luke 5:17–26

Reflection:

by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis

Canadians have been shocked by field hospitals rising up next to our hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have come to realize how precious space is, how precious hospital beds are, and how important our hospitals are to the well-being of our communities. As cases rose, so did our fears that there would not be enough room for all, enough care for all. Resources matter when it comes to healthcare, especially during a pandemic.

The Graduate School of Nursing in Indore has had some significant issues with its physical plant in recent years. The WMS helped raise funds to fix the roof after the rains soaked the whole building, including the classroom. These large projects are difficult to manage on their own, says the Secretary of the MIBE, Shimy Mathew. When organizations like the WMS support the school financially, they are more free to dream and take risks.

India has been especially hard-hit by Covid. By June of 2021, India has reported almost 30 million cases, with well over 200 000 deaths. We've all seen images on the news – crowded public spaces, lack of oxygen, huge numbers of cremation sites. Pauline Brown reports from Jobat that for weeks on end, the Christians were digging a grave just about every day. It is difficult to overstate the importance of hospitals – and nurses – for the Indian population. For example, the well-respected hospital in Ludhiana has been asked to prepare 1000 beds for Covid patients, up

from the 200 they normally staff. It has been an enormously trying time for patients and healthcare providers. The Graduate School of Nursing has also suffered under COVID. Many staff members contracted the virus, and required oxygen treatment. Shimy Mathew herself became ill, although it was a mild form and she has fully recovered.

There was once a man who needed help. He had to get to Jesus – he knew that is where his well-being would come from. His friends wanted to carry him to Jesus, but there was no way for him to get into the building – he ‘could not move his body to Jesus.’

Jesus was busy inside the house, talking to some important religious leaders. Next thing he knows, there is a man lowered down through the roof of the building. The man got to Jesus, and he waited to be healed. What an incredible story! Imagine being so desperate to get to Jesus that you allow yourself to be sent through the roof. This is faithfulness, helping to bring sick bodies to Jesus where they can be healed.

To bring others to be healed, this is strength of faith in the presence of death. This is what Christian nurses do – they bring the sick to be healed. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ, nurses live out their vocation to heal and save. There is a problem, however, if their hospital buildings prevent access to care. This can happen when the buildings are in disrepair. We don’t often like to talk about the importance of buildings – plumbing and carpentry are less appealing aspects of ministry. But the truth is that healthcare ministry sometimes depends on individuals having access to the actual hospital building. It doesn’t do any good to lower them through the roof! One of the things we can do to support the ministry that happens because of the faithfulness of the nurses is to make sure that they have the equipment and the space to practise medicine. This means having a building that is safe and secure. It means having equipment that will encourage training, such as practise dummies, and books for the library. It means the building needs a solid roof and walls. The WMS has already contributed to the building of the Graduate School of Nursing in significant ways.

The pandemic has caused us to think differently about human bodies and physical spaces. We have been displeased to realize the limitations of resources within the Canadian context. That limitation is much more significant in India, given the severity of the spread of the virus and the already-stretched resources in mission

hospitals. An important aspect of our mission is to equip hospitals so that individuals of many faiths can experience care and healing.

Questions:

1. How has COVID changed the way we use and view our church buildings, and their importance for ministry?
2. Jesus healed the man who was lowered through the roof of the building. How might our mission funds help people to 'get to Jesus' so that they might be healed?
3. What will be necessary for the church's mission as nations begin to recover and heal from the COVID pandemic. What do we hope our role will be?

Hymn: #652 – Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go

Closing Prayer:

Generous God – in the midst of calamity, we turn to you. You are our only hope for health and healing. We praise and thank you for the work of the Graduate School of Nursing in Indore. We thank you for the ministry of the graduate nurses. We pray for the staff and the students and graduates who seek to mirror your grace in their profession. In a time when resources are stretched, Lord, we ask that you attend to the physical spaces where healthcare ministry happens. Help us to know how and when to help, so that mission hospitals in India will be well-equipped to educate nurses and care for patients. We ask your blessing upon the roofs and the walls, the libraries and the scalpels. We ask your blessing on the leaders and the patients. May all who need care be brought to Jesus, so that he may provide blessing and healing. In Jesus' name, Amen.