

Thanarbaid Health Care Centre

1992, 1993, 1994

The Thanarbaid Health Care Program seeks to be a religious and humanitarian motivated health movement, or the stimulus to such a movement among the rural poor. It strives for the health of the poor of 3 communities: Bengali Muslim, Tribal Hindu, Tribal Christian--rendering services of teaching, disease prevention and disease treatment. The Program desires to promote and be a part of a health movement of the poor, and as an essential requirement for this seeks to be involved with the poor in their health problems and to involve the poor as directly as possible in the health activities. It is always necessary to remember that the most needy are the poor, and they are the poor of the 3 communities, and that the most needy among them are the women and small children.

Thanarbaid Health Care Program is not a hospital, nor does it desire to be a clinic-focussed or career-oriented Health Program. The Program is not aimed at promoting an institution or a particular community, but is inspired by faith toward promoting true community in the community at large. Thanarbaid Health Care Program does not desire to be a cover for conversional activities. On the other hand it is strongly committed to being by virtue of its nature and actions the proclamation of a religious message of enormous power--and it would not be at all distressed if any of its staff of whatever religious group were to explain that in terms of their own religious conviction to people of their own or any other group. The program is inspired and energised by the Jesus-religion. The staff need not be Christian, however they would need to accept that the concept of Jesus' immersion and self-giving is a valid motivational concept.

Qualifications for working in the Thanarbaid Health Care Program:

Staff must display a strong motivation to serve the poor community. This motivation must not be allowed to be stifled by one's own personal or economic problems, or distorted by preoccupation with one's own economic improvement. Anyone not having a love for the poor, would not be qualified to work in the Program.

Salary Rationale

The aim of the Program is to be part of a health movement bringing about changes in the 3 communities for the improvement of health. The aim of the staff is to be a stimulant and a part of the health movement and a part of the people, working with them to bring about changes.

Thus, the salaries must make it possible for the staff to give their minds and their time to the work, but not be such as to separate them from the poor. Salaries must not be such as would create class distinctions amongst the staff, thus eroding the motivation of the lowest paid who are in fact the most critical to behavior change. The highest salaries must never be more than 3 times the pay of the lowest paid worker.

The Thanarbaid Approach to Health Care

An Interview with Dr. Edric Baker by the Musgraves

Thanarbaid's basic concept is health care *by* the people, *for* the people. Because the majority of the people here are very poor, they suffer more illnesses, and are less able to cope with the illnesses they get. There is no need to do community health with the rich.

Q: What is the philosophy and practice of your approach to health care?

The vast majority are poor. 60% are landless. It is known that malnutrition predisposes to infection. There is an enormous population and a small number of illnesses easily treated and easily prevented. The government will never have enough money for sophisticated health care for all the population, therefore the obvious answer is that health care actions must be simple and that the people must do them.

Poverty is a state of Emergency:

When I was in Vietnam I came to this conclusion. Just as in time of war a state of emergency is declared, and in effect there is a dictator government, so extreme poverty is also a state of emergency. For example--people get washed away by the sea in Bangladesh because they are forced to live in low lying unsafe areas, they die of starvation, cholera, malnutrition and easily preventable and treatable diseases. This is a state of emergency. Little children, people, families and communities grow up warped and distorted. This is a state of emergency.

Thanarbaid Health Program's Message to the Church

We who are Christian have found salvation and faith in Christ's coming to us and especially in his Cross. But this salvation and faith is for *all*. Christ's compassion and love reach to all. Within that compassion and love we have to move to the suffering poor. In the World and in Bangladesh the numbers of the poor and suffering are vast and are increasing. In life we find that the greatness, power and diversity of creation manifest to us the greatness and beauty of God. We find that the love of mother, the caring of parents, friends, church reveal to us the love and care of God. Pain, crises, rebukes and punishments reveal to us the severity of God. The sufferings of the poor reveal to us the grief of God and the suffering of Christ for the human situation--but this we cannot understand if we do not go to the poor in their suffering.

The numbers of the poor are vast and increasing. Lenin said their condition will never change until persons from the elite class declass themselves and identify with, motivate and lead the poor. Then will come the "People's Movement" with revolution and change. Lenin could not identify sufficiently with human weakness--his revolution has failed. Jesus identified perfectly and established the People's Movement, the Church and the Kingdom. We must go to the poor and ensure that the people's movement and the Kingdom continue in the new generation. The Thanarbaid Health Program is in the stream of the People's Movement. It is a program of the poor with special features. It is revolutionary and it is important. The staff must be of the people--motivated, oriented, low paid. We must keep it a program of the poor.

Q: What are the unique features of the Thanarbaid approach?

People of low educational level give awareness to others about the reality of their health problems. They know the problems of the poor community because they are a part of that community. They learn to analyze the health problems and are able to persuade others of actions about which they themselves are convinced.

Q: How do the poorest help in the program?

Momiron, one of our cooks is illiterate, but has become a superb manager of diarrhea. *Momiron* is a woman of the earth, and a woman of the people, like Mary. She doesn't build barriers between herself and other people. People of the earth bleed for the sufferings of others, they feel the pain, and when they see what to do they do it.

Reiza is one of our best village workers. She is only class 4. She came from a low middle class family in the village community. They have no land. Her husband fishes. Some of their children are being educated at the mission school. Not only does she do teaching, but she also monitors children's growth rate, diagnoses nutrition problems and takes appropriate action. She also treats simple diseases, pneumonia, diarrhea, dysentery, skin infections, scabies, eye infections . . . She grew up in Purdah until she and her husband moved to our area. Now she confidently goes on her own around Muslim villages.

Another of our workers is *Chengu*. About 5 years ago he almost died. Coming from a traumatic family situation he was repeatedly sick and couldn't work. He belonged to the almost despised Bormon Tribal community. He was admitted to the clinic for treatment. He recovered and stole my cycle. I sent 2 "sleuths" and got it back. He lived on the premises and worked--we taught him a bit. He learned to read and write. He ran away with a Mandi girl and they became Catholics! He is a very good village worker, monitoring children's growth rate. He is now father of 3 children, 2 girls and a new baby boy.

A Diabetic Program for the Poor

We admitted 3 diabetics. We said: "help each other." They did. Unless diabetics help each other and take control of their problems and program they have no future. Diabetes is a life-long disease, but it is not top priority for the community. We have gradually attracted more and more

patients who have no other alternative for treatment. We now have 36 patients in the program.

Q: Do you think the Thanarbaid Approach could be duplicated, and if so what advice would you give?

Because of the unrelenting poverty in Bangladesh, health action must be extremely simple and must engage the participation of the people. A doctor or other health professional supporting or directing a program by and for the poor must be willing to be extremely adaptable both in health problem solving and in life style, and able to accept that ordinary people of low educational level can be trained up as health workers to handle common problems. It would be necessary for such a doctor to recognize and accept that the professional staff work in a close friendly brotherly / sisterly relationship with local staff (who are of low educational level), patients and village people. From a practical point of view this involves adopting a simple life style, and eating and praying together with patients and staff.

Daily Communal Prayer

Daily prayer is essential because it places both individuals and group in relationship to each other and to God, reinforcing relationships which are the basic reality and essence of the Program. It brings them face to face with each other's problems--the problems of the sick and the poor. This relationship reality motivates to heartfelt concern, haunts with anxiety and stirs to actions of determination and love.

Closing Comments

The only way to make medical care available to the poor is to keep the services extremely simple, avoiding all non-essential investigations and medicines, and to employ non-certified and voluntary staff to do almost all the work, trained and supervised by a very small number of committed and suitably oriented professionals.

Diversity of Staff

As Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, although we are unable to unite our theologies, yet we feel moved to reach out together to the One who shows compassion in a health program for the poor. We believe that the Church of Bangladesh's Thanarbaid Health Care Program is a sensitive response to the needs of the very large population of the poor in the wider community of our area, serving essential needs otherwise unmet.

Poems from Bengal

I am thankful
that my lot lies with
the humble who suffer
and bear the burden
of power
and hide their faces
and stifle their sobs
in the dark . . .
For every throb of their pain
has pulsed in the
secret depth
of Thy night,
and every insult has
been gathered into
Thy great silence . . .
The morrow is theirs . . .

R. Tagore

He who can open the bud
does it so simply.
He gives it a glance
and the life sap
stirs through its veins
At His Breath
the flower stirs its wings
and flutters in the wind.
Colors flush out
like heart longings,
the perfume betrays
a sweet secret.
He who can open the bud
does it so simply . . .

Rabindranath Tagore

I have dipped
the vessel of my heart
into this silent hour;
It has filled with love.

Rabindranath Tagore

Nok Shanti

Let your dwellings
house your bodies
but not your spirits.
For that which is boundless
in you abides in the
mansion of the sky
whose door is the
morning mist
and whose windows
are the songs and
the silences
of the night . . .

Kahill Gibran

For that which is *you*
dwells above the mountains
and roves with the wind--
A spirit that envelops
the earth and moves
in the ether.

K. Gibran

Thanarbaid's Shantibanam
(Reflections from the Guha window)

A deep look into
the deep forest
through the homey
mud and wooded window--
Ten thousand shapes and
shades of green
meet the eye.
Hildegarde was right--
the Spirit's color is *green*,
And she flushes out
so gracefully in the
fauna of this forest--
From the fanning of the
large teak leaves
to the slender pointed
leaves of the bamboo--
It is the Spirit's greening life-force
that shoots through
these ordinary and
familiar forms.

Shantibanam's multitude of trees--
or so it seems to me,
constant companions
of my solitude hours,
speak in differing tongues,
in rain, wind and stillness,
playfully waving their hands
in the day,
yet grave and mysterious
guardians in the night.

Shantibanam--
Thanarbaid's forest of peace
and sanctuary of
birds and reptiles
animals and insects
and perhaps,
of people too!
In your sanctuary is
not only peace

but power--
healing
unifying
soothing.

From your sacred boughs
I once heard the song
of the golden-throated bird--
once, twice and
once again.
Secrets of Shantibanam--
natural,
refreshing
ordinary Beauty
ever ancient
ever new.

22/9/94

Through open sky-windows
the grass house
whispers its secrets
to the wind.

Anonymous

A Visit to Thanarbaid's Lotus Pond

A pilgrim searching for signs
along the way
visits the Lotus Pond
in the cool of the morning
before Nature could
dry her tears of the night.

Out on the road
the sound of a wailing child
merges with the
groaning of the ox-cart--

Now, hushed into silence
by the touch of the dawn.

There they stand in the
waters of life--
Snowy blossoms of delight,
tinged with the rose of
the eastern sky,
refreshing the summer's
withered spirit.

Drinking in these cups of dew
the pilgrim's heart
finds an oasis
in this desert-time
and is renewed.

30/8/94

Your daily life is your Temple
and your religion.
Whenever you enter into it
take with you your all,
And take with you all people:
For in adoration
you cannot fly higher
than their hopes,
nor
humble yourself lower
than their despair.

Gibran

The Guha: At Home in the Heart

Near Thanarbaid's forest of peace
is this home of the heart,
a temenos of the true self
where hidden secrets
are laid bare
before the lotus shrine
of Him who is
LORD of this Guha.

Within these earthen walls
a tiny flame burns
casting a pool of light
around this sacred enclosure.

The fragility of this flame
reveals its sensitivity
to the touch of the wind--
flickering and wavering
yet forging the way to clarity.

Outside this abode of
ascetic leisure
the earth hums her canticle
of praise
in the familiar sounds of nature.

Down in baid the paddy grows
ever so silently,
while the moon softly arrives
peering through the leaves
of the forest.

As the tapers of the night are lit
the labor of the heart begins,
as the Spirit once again
takes up the never-ending task
of spiritual house-cleaning:
purifying the recesses of the mind,
airing out old grievances,
and sifting through
the debris of the day,
preserving those precious

moments of grace.

Sitting in the posture of ease
empty and barren of thought,
the mind quietly keeps vigil
with the secret flame,
following the flow of breath
down into the
cave of devine darkness
where the mystic spring resides.

Here at the Source,
silent, solitary and hidden,
an inner window opens onto
the landscape of every
human heart,
making this wayside
hermitage of the heart
a crossroads of a thousand
private lives.

15/10/94
St. Teresa of Avila
feast day

But if you would really
know GOD,
Look about you
and you will see Him
playing
with your children.

Gibran

A friend is one who
sifts out the
grain of your life
and blows the chaff away.

Gibran