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Cheerleading Vaccines is the Wesleyan Way

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What an honor it was to be in the last class ever taught by the Rev. Dr. John Farthing at Hendrix College, *John Wesley and Methodism*. It was in that very class I first learned of John Wesley's ministry of healthcare to the sick and the poor.

One of the books I love from that class, and still refer to, is the incredible work of Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*. Heitzenrater shares John Wesley's fascination with health, remedies, and the cure of diseases. Wesley's obsession even led him to view an

autopsy once. He would connect with physicians to gain knowledge on the subject of diseases. This is what led him to eventually aid the Methodist Societies to open health clinics. These were designed to aid the poor, who were unable to afford healthcare, or were too often taken advantage of. It is thought that Wesley was the instigator behind the first free medical clinics in England.

John Wesley even came up with his own remedies for various symptoms of illness — do yourself a favor and Google these for a good laugh. The point is, that in our Wesleyan DNA, is the concern for the sick and the poor, and helping to bring health to those who are ill.

This focus followed throughout American Methodism's rise as our ancestors in the faith opened up health clinics, hospitals, and championed the call of Christ to "heal the sick." Throughout our connection, there are numerous health clinics connected to United Methodist congregations, or at least sharing in funds to support nonprofit health clinics in their communities. How proud are we in our own Annual Conference of Methodist Family Health, championing mental healthcare for our children and youth.

Perhaps the largest health initiative of the last few decades of our United Methodist Church was Imagine No Malaria. This campaign, able to be coordinated due to United Methodist health clinics throughout Africa and our sister churches across that land, has truly made an incredible difference. Four million mosquito nets were provided, 61 facilities renovated, 2.1 million people treated, tens of millions of dollars given, and together with global partners, helped save the lives of 6.1 million people since 2001. We made an impact on global health through our united efforts.

We all know of the devastation the COVID-19 virus has had in our nation and around the world. As of this writing, there have been more than 300,000 deaths in the U.S. due to the virus. Projections are that over the next month or month-and-a-half we could add another 100,000 deaths. This is undoubtedly the biggest health crisis of our lifetimes. In harsh irony, this also comes at a time when the "Anti-Vax Movement," those opposing and refusing vaccines, is gaining traction. Those who know the horrors of Polio and many other diseases vaccines have helped to eradicate or suppress, know of how vital vaccines are and how many lives they have saved or healed.

Clergy brothers and sisters and dear, servant-hearted laity throughout our connection, let us cheerlead the COVID-19 vaccines in our churches. We must be of one voice to advocate for vaccines. We cannot allow politics or conspiracy theories to get in the way of life-saving vaccines. From our pulpits and in the pews, we must alert those in our congregations of the truth that United Methodist beliefs are not incompatible with science. Let us share that we have our Wesleyan roots in healthcare and the cure of diseases. Yes, we should certainly lift up for everyone to consult with their own doctor, and we do not want to come across as medical experts, but pastors especially have a sacred duty to usher in facts and use our authority to educate and advocate for the healing of the body, mind, and soul of those in our congregations.

Recently, the head of the National Institute of Health, Francis Collins, was interviewed in a piece advocating for churches to be vocal, transparent, and educational to encouraging folks to take the vaccine. Collins, even expresses that clergy taking video of themselves receiving the vaccine would be helpful in clearing up some doubters.

We as the People Called Methodists must raise our voices for truth, health, and cherish the mission of Mr. Wesley to give aid to those who are ill. Let us rally together, use our God-given minds, and once again take up the charge of working to eradicate disease.

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