



Richard Young: ELCA Missionary, Pastor, Physician

Some pastors wear a cross. But the Rev. Richard Young wears a stethoscope. Serving as missionary pastor of six Lutheran congregations in Guyana, Young is also a physician.

"My call with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana is 50 percent medical and 50 percent pastoral work," said Young. Although the need for medical care can be great, the Guyanese have focused more on Young's call as pastor.

"I was struck that the spiritual needs of Guyanese were often placed above their physical ones. Prayer will often be asked first and medicine comes second," he said.

Work as a parish pastor in Guyana is similar to the work of an "American pastor, with some exceptions," according to Young. One difference is that Guyanese pastors are "given more responsibility for decision-making in the congregation. They are considered to know the right way and expected simply to give directions," said Young.

Young said his favorite thing is witnessing "Aha!" moments "when someone comprehends for the first time that the gospel is really for them."

Young's medical work is practiced at various places of need that he has identified over the years. "When I travel out to give medical care, I carry my little black bag," he said. In it, there is "a little black Bible and a supply of medications which are dispensed free of charge," said Young.

Young regularly treats members of his congregations and holds a monthly clinic. He also serves at various community clinics, shelters and homes "for the aged and poor."

"Teaching is also an important part of my medical work," said Young. "People leave hospital clinics with a prescription and a pat on the head but often do not know their diagnosis, what the prognosis is, what medicine they have been given, or what they can do to prevent the problem."

Young said that he was taught "in medical school that the word 'doctor' means 'teacher' not 'healer.' Since my patients all know that I am a pastor, they often request prayer as part of the encounter. I hope they leave the visit feeling validated as a valued child of God."

This article is an edited version of an April 29, 2010, ELCA News Service feature written by Melissa Ramirez Cooper (www.elca.org/news).



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