The Church as a Healing Community (HEALING)

In the VIIth IAMS Conference meeting at Harare, Zimbabwe, in January 1985, one of the workshops studied the topic "The Church as a Healing Community", and the participants found it important to carry on with these studies in the framework of IAMS also in the period between our conferences. An unopposed motion was passed by the members of the workshop to request the IAMS Executive Committee to establish this continuation in the form of an IAMS study project, similar to the already existing BISAM and DAB.

A core group was founded consisting of the following members:
Dr. Hans-Jürgen Becken (Convener) of Stuttgart, Germany
Sr. Denise RSHM of Harare, Zimbabwe
Rev. Christoffer Grundmann of Tübingen, Germany,
Drs. Jaap Hamel of Nijmegen, Netherlands,
Prof. Gerrit Huizer of Nijmegen, Netherlands and
Prof. Elda Rizzo de Oliveira of Araraquara, Brasil.

On behalf of this group, the Convener applied to the IAMS Executive Committee to recognize this study project. The application was received favourably, and the core group was requested to work out a 'plan de campagne' and to outline the envisaged structure as well as the activities that could be undertaken by this task force. The core group worked out their vision by correspondence in a paper which included the following suggestions:

I. Objectives:

1. The study group should serve as a tool for exchange of relevant studies in the field of healing and healing ministries for recording, discussion and missiological evaluation.

1.1. Authentic field studies at grass roots level as well as those focusing on the broader socio-economic aspects of interhuman relations should be encouraged and stimulated to get the local churches involved in these healing processes.

1.2. Special emphasis should be given to the wholistic experiences in "Third World" countries of people using Christian healing in its broader meaning. These insights could have liberating consequences, also to countries where western medicine is dominant.

1.3. We are interested in and want to learn from the forms of healing practices in different forms of societies (e.g. capitalist, socialist, traditional, etc.) and in various religions (e.g. Buddhist, African Traditional, Spiritual Healers, Scientology, etc.). We want to study these concepts concerning health and disease (misfortune) in these settings and their consequences both for Christian healing and western medicine.

II. Rationale:

2. The study group does not intend to duplicate or to repeat the valuable work done at other places and in other institutions.
2.1. Being IAMS sponsored, the scope of this study project is not restricted to WCC member institutions (which are supposed to participate in the CMC study programme as well) but embraces the experiences and reflections of churches and communities beyond.

2.2. Close cooperation should be sought with the CMC and with other institutions (e.g. ethnological, ethnomedical, medical, etc.) working in this field to avoid overlapping. This aim could be achieved by exchange of the valuable material already at hand and by mutual invitation of representatives to important meetings.

2.3. The academic work includes also the collection and screening of the numerous writings in different disciplines concerning our topic which surpasses the possibilities and scope of any individual or institution, and in which a fruitful cooperation with DAB could be envisaged.

III. Aim

3. The project aims to incorporate its findings effectively into the academic life and studies at universities and theological schools as well as on the level of congregations and churches.

IV. Implementation

4. The study group whose members ought to be called by the Executive Committee envisages its work to be done in different steps, viz.:

4.1. Researchers should make a profound study on specific aspects of the questions which have to be identified first in their respective context, also including theoretical and practical alternatives to the missiological approach they experienced.

4.2. Within a fixed period, this paper should be sent to the convener of the study group who in turn will distribute copies to all members for criticism, new questions, alternative proposals and reference to bibliography.

4.3. Meanwhile, other members of the team could be requested to tap the literature (in cooperation with DAB) and work out papers concerning their missiological relevance. Also these papers should be processed according to the procedure described in 4.2.

4.4. Thereupon, a consultation could be assembled in which the group could work out a common approach and consider practical ways and means to multiply the results and the proposals for a strategy towards a relevant application towards change in different situations and contexts.

4.5. The Executive Committee should approve this project for a period of five years. Thereafter, an evaluation of its work should decide whether or not a continuation will be desirable.

V. Finances

5. The financial input of IAMS will be very limited in the course of the initial steps of the project, e.g. some expenses for