



From the editor • Van die redakteur

Goodwill and all that

December is the month in which the year gets wound down. Some do this by excesses in partying. Eating, drinking, shopping and sun worshipping all increase. Some also take stock of the year that is spent, *en wat het ons nou daaruit gekry?* Violence also increases at this time, and together with all the excesses, increase considerably the load that doctors and nurses carry. *Vasbyt!*

Christmas is considered as a time of goodwill, giving of presents and sending good wishes to friends. With the vast potential this gives to the business world, together with the end of the year syndrome, we now have greetings and presents moving in the name of profit rather than Christ.

Having received a news item and an appeal from the Health For All Library Service (see elsewhere in this issue) I started wondering about the appropriateness of our efforts at goodwill and helping others. Social Anthropologists and Sociologists have written extensively about the failure of aid programmes. Most of these programmes have been without ulterior motive and brimful of goodwill as well as an immense waste of money and energy. Often doing considerable damage in a local community. Even the goodwill of Christ that the apostle John describes as being "full of grace and truth"¹ which can be paraphrased

perhaps as love and genuineness, has been misapplied with disastrous effects.

So what has this got to do with the library service and ourselves? I was just wondering about all these out of date and highly specialised books that could be landing up in primary health care facilities across Southern Africa. The same can be said of many journals that will be received as donations. One thing we are learning more clearly today is that the truth as seen by the narrow field expert and recorded by him may be quite inappropriate for generalists in primary health care. It might not only be unusable at our level but can actually be disastrous if applied as our standard. You know the kind of advice that "every headache needs a routine cat scan" is neither practical nor desirable, though it could be very good practice in a specialised unit that sees a highly selected patient population. My end of the year guess is that if our goodwill for this month and the coming year is, characterised by grace, by an understanding, forgiving attitude in which the other person's interests come first; and by truth, the kind that makes one free instead of causing entrapment, we may do far better next year than this one.

Oh! Please remember to send the right kind of literature to the Health For All Library Service.

Reference

1. John Chapt I, verse 14. Bible.

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5th GENERAL PRACTITIONERS CONGRESS

Cape Town 14-17 March

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