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### *The Forum, 1.4*

#### **Faith, Medicine, and Education**

On September 13, 2022, the Religion and Global Health Forum, in partnership with the Multicultural Education initiative at Drew, hosted an event on “Faith, Medicine, and Education: Local and Global Partnerships for Wholistic Health.” The event highlighted the longstanding roles that religious communities have historically played in fostering community health, the importance of health literacy for students in training for pastoral ministry, and vital partnerships between faith leaders, healthcare professionals, and educational institutions in improving the health outcomes of historically marginalized individuals and communities. There were three sessions all throughout the day. The first session was a chapel service on “Interfaith Service on Faith and Healing” where the speakers spoke on and from their respective contexts. Janet Okang (PhD student, Bible and Cultures, Drew University) spoke on “Faith and Healing in Ghana;” Yajenlemla (PhD student, Bible and Cultures, Drew University) spoke on “Faith and Healing in Nagaland, India;” Jonathan Golden (Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Comparative Religion and Director of Center on Religion, Culture, and Conflict, Drew University) spoke on “Faith and Healing in Jewish

Tradition;” and Rebkha Atnafou (MPH, John Hopkins University) spoke on “Faith and Healing in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.” During the second session, Rebkha Atnafou gave a presentation titled “Faith and Sexuality in the Church.” Lydell Lettsome (MD, Vanbert Health) and Rebkha Atnafou presented on “Narrative Medicine and Cancer Screening” during the third and final session.

A major highlight of the event was the presentation by the RGHF interns, Janet Okang and Yajenlemla, both of whom are third-year Ph.D. students at Drew University. They are from Ghana and Nagaland, India, respectively. As part of their ongoing effort to address and engage on the importance of (w)holistic health, Jane and Yajen had the opportunity over the summer of 2022 to organize and partake in community efforts toward well-being in their respective countries. This was part of their summer research project with RGHF which was supported by Interfaith Youth Core (Interfaith America). Drawing on their initiatives and partnerships with churches and healthcare leaders in rural communities in Ghana and Nagaland, India, they reflected on what faith and healing looks like in their communities.

Physical, mental, and emotional health are inseparable from spiritual health. Sadly, several factors often contribute to the lack of wholistic health and healing. For example, there are instances where spiritual health/healing is given more importance over physical and mental health/healing. In other instances, physical health and spiritual health are often misunderstood as being in contention with each other. Because of these and other factors, there is a negligence of effort to address the connectedness of the well-being of an individual. Jane and Yajen advocated for a need to embrace the (w)holistic approach of healing (physical, social, mental, economic, and political) that includes: understanding the spiritual and cultural ideologies that inform health practices, raising questions about how to bridge the gap between spirituality and medicine for people to experience (w)holistic healing, and creating spiritual/cultural values and material infrastructures

to ensure that individuals and communities can make wholistic health life-affirming and sustaining.

Jane and Yajen acknowledged that such an endeavor requires a deeper understanding and immersion in and with the communities because it involves the cultural and religious aspects of a community. Their presentations commonly highlighted the challenges in the form of infrastructural and financial resources. To name a few: the lack of proper infrastructure in terms of hospitals, roads, banks, school buildings, transportation, and lack of short and/or long-term commitments and plans. They highlighted organizations from their respective communities that are already involved in combating some of the above-mentioned issues and challenges. They stressed the importance of partnerships with individuals and organizations to address these challenges depending on the need and the context. For Jane and Yajen, this is an ongoing work; one that requires commitment and support. Their own scholarly research work are informed by their involvement with their respective communities, and vice versa. Detailed reflections on their above-mentioned summer research projects will be provided in two of the forthcoming issues of *The Forum*. Stay tuned!