

The Anglican network that is 'Helping God's people flourish'

■ Murray Harvey

The spectacular and vibrant city of Hong Kong was the setting for a three-day meeting of the steering committee of the Anglican Communion's Health and Community Network hosted by the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui – the Anglican Province of Hong Kong, recently.

There was no active health network in the Anglican Communion when COVID-19 broke out in 2020, but in response to this global health crisis the network was quickly formed to connect, prepare and equip Anglicans to provide health care, accompany the sick, and advocate for equitable healthcare.

Early in the pandemic it facilitated World Health Organisation briefings on COVID-19 for Anglican primates and health leaders, and advocated with the WHO and the World Council of Churches Health Committee for global vaccine equity.

During that time and in the years since, the network has brought together clergy and lay leaders to explore how churches can respond to wider health issues, including mental health and clergy wellbeing.

One of the dangers for any global network is becoming overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. In our case, we are confronted by enormous global health needs, yet we have very limited resources. How can we even begin to make a difference, and on what issues? To this end, the network has, since its inception in 2020, organised numerous regional consultations in different time zones, asking Anglicans from different provinces about the health priorities in their regions. See table below.

While in Hong Kong I was heartened to hear we have many gifted and skilled representatives from different provinces

on the steering committee.

Additionally, there is a vast amount of health-related technical expertise and experience across the Anglican Communion.

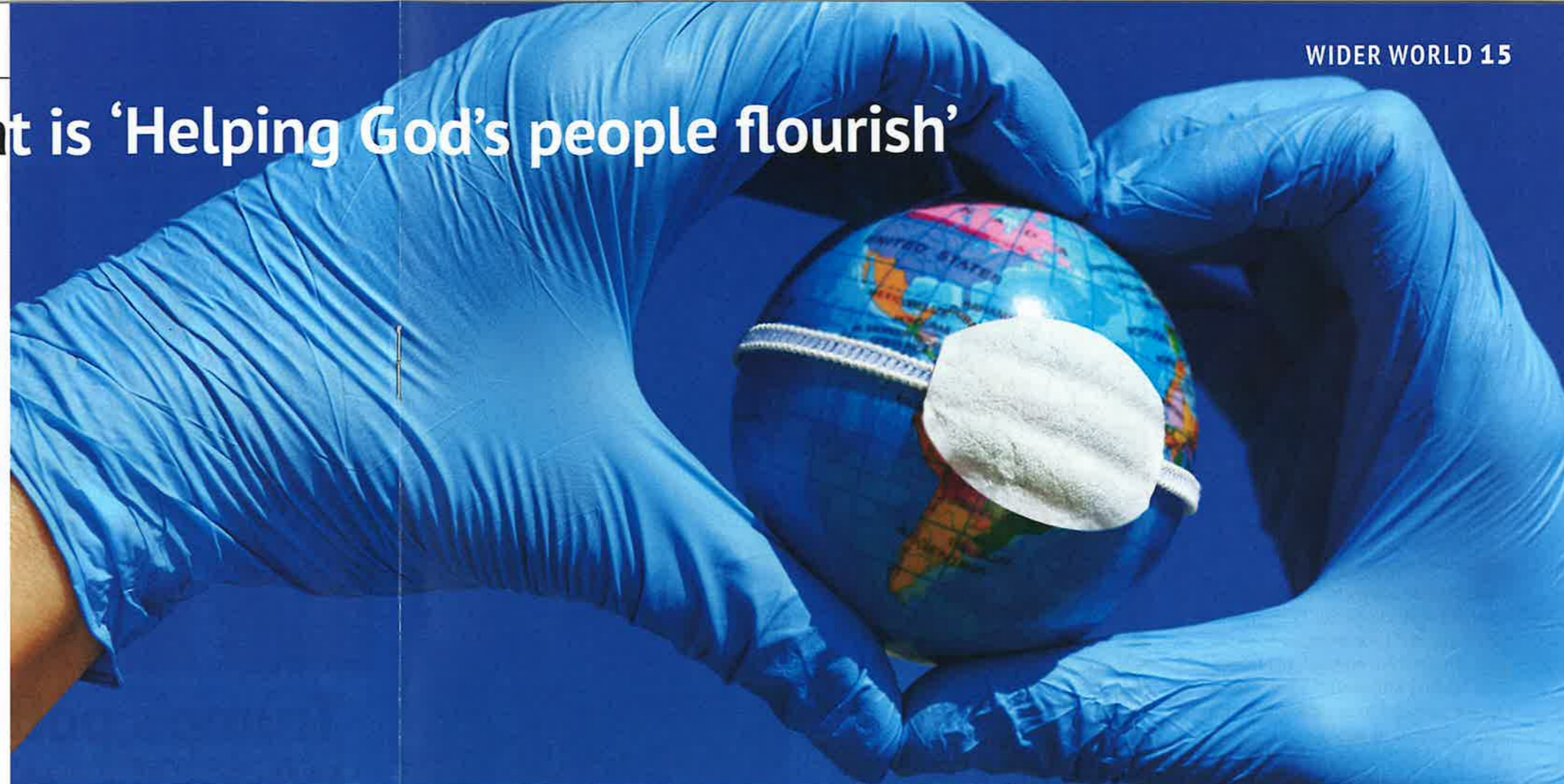
Provinces, dioceses, organisations and networks manage health facilities, and undertake health care in local communities through health projects, networks such as the Mothers' Union, Mission Agencies, local congregations, and volunteers. Churches also serve to facilitate greater access to health care provided by the state.

"Together we can improve the health and wellbeing of everyone."

This wealth of knowledge and experience is an asset of the Communion that needs to be shared, to enable mutual flourishing. And to be effective in a health crisis, technical expertise and experience needs to be well connected, easily accessible and activated quickly.

Our host, Archbishop of Hong Kong the Most Reverend Andrew Chan challenged us to reflect on Ephesians chapter 4 verses 12 to 13, *to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.* The work of the network seeks to bring glory to God through helping God's people to flourish.

Improving health is a global effort and we are proud to work with a network of collaborators in over eighty countries. We work closely with the WHO's Faith Network



Members of Anglican Communion's Health and Community Network. Picture: supplied

Picture: iStock

Listening to Anglicans from around the world led us to create six priority areas:

- To seek to provide a **coordinated Anglican voice on key health issues** globally, regionally, nationally and across districts, informed by health professionals and church leaders working together, using the best scientific evidence.
- To **advocate for health** by keeping health on the Anglican agenda world-wide.
- To **build trust and hope within local communities** about health messages, because many were led astray during the pandemic by misinformation about COVID-19 and about vaccines. Faith communities play an important role not only in offering health services in communities around the world but also in **promoting positive messages** about public health, promoting health and wellbeing, emergency response, preparedness and resilience.
- To **equip the network** by bringing together practitioners, church leaders and academics from across the Communion to inform practice and advocacy. The inclusion of both academics and active practitioners in the network brings a greater legitimacy to the work and voice of the Communion and provides a mechanism for cross Communion learning and skills building on health.
- To **support, accompany and encourage Anglican health agencies and partners** by providing technical support as well as connection with colleagues across the Communion to develop and share practical information and examples of what works.
- To **prepare for the next health emergency** by documenting lessons learned and examples of good practice across the Anglican Communion. These are realistic and achievable priorities.

and Emergency Preparedness Program, the WCC Health and Healing Program, and Christian Connections for International Health. Together we can improve the health and wellbeing of everyone.

Looking back, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that it is possible to draw on Anglican health expertise in a specific health crisis and for our interventions to have a real impact. We are exploring ways to make the health expertise that we have more accessible, available, and communicated and coordinated in other situations too, including in malaria and mental health. The C in AHCN is "community" in recognition of the fact that Anglican mission in

health takes place in communities as well as in hospitals and clinics. Anglican mission in health is therefore a complex social, community and health system, which underpins health in many different ways.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the AHCN can visit ahcn.anglicancommunion.org. If you feel you can contribute to the work of their network, the steering committee or one of the communities of practice, please contact bishop@graftondiocese.org.au.

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