



**Q&A with Scott Morris, author of
*Care: How People of Faith can Respond to our Broken Health System***

1. Why did you write this book?

I came to Memphis in 1986 to open a faith-based health ministry because historically it was one of the poorest cities in America. I knew I couldn't do it alone. I needed help from people who knew and loved their city, and Church Health opened in 1987. We saw 12 patients the first day. Now we have over 61,000 patient visits per year. Even more, we've seen that the faithful around the country are looking for ways to engage in their communities because they see the need for health ministries that make a difference. It seems like a daunting task. And it is. But there are so many inspiring stories to tell, not only about Church Health in Memphis but also the faith and health movement more widely. This book tells stories not only about patients who have taught me so many things but also many others who have taken up the call in their own communities. I hope that will inspire readers to consider what actions might be possible in their settings.

2. How has your experience as a person of faith shaped your experience as an advocate for providing health care for those often left in the margins?

John Wesley is most famous as a minister and the founder of Methodism, the beginnings of the Methodist Church I have belonged to all my life. What is less well known is that Wesley practiced medicine from the age of nineteen until he died. This was part and parcel of his ministry and his view of the world, particularly in the health care he offered to the poor. Factors other than the doctor affect health outcomes, such as quality of education, income, available nutritious food, safe housing, reliable transportation, and health insurance. Seeing the dignity and image of God in all people calls us to help change inequities that lead to disparities. Jesus' life was about healing the whole person. Jesus' message is our message. Jesus' ministry is our ministry. As a community, then, how do we look at the eyes of our neighbors, listen to their stories, and together seek the solutions that invite everyone into God's wellness?

3. What is the connection between faith and health care that many people do not see?

Faith-based medical care is an expression of our fundamental belief that all people are created in the image of God and loved by God. We honor God when we care for them. We want the highest level of health and the best outcomes for all people because these are people whom God loves. This means focusing our efforts on addressing inequalities we can avoid in access to care and quality of care so that outcomes do not depend on where you live, how much money you have, your race, or any other socioeconomic factor. We were created body and spirit, and faithful health care should care for the whole person in body and spirit. Rather than accepting an artificial barrier between faith and medical care, we should be tearing down that barrier to bring body and spirit together.

4. What obstacles do people with low incomes have to receiving the care they need in the way the US healthcare system works?

Many simply do without care, even for easily managed chronic conditions, until it becomes an emergency that doesn't have to happen. The vast majority of people without insurance are employed, but either their employers don't offer insurance or the premiums, deductibles, and copays are so expensive that they can't afford them on their low incomes. We also have to think about practical issues such as whether they can find childcare so they can get to the doctor, whether the doctor's location is accessible to people without cars, and whether doctors' offices have extended hours so hourly workers with no paid time off don't have to choose between keeping an appointment and making rent. If someone is in pain and needs a knee replacement, what happens because they can't afford to take six weeks off work without pay to rehab after surgery? We can't solve every problem at Church Health, but when we try to look at health care through the eyes of how our patients experience it and not just how the "system" works, we are able to make a lot of things better.

5. With all the divisions of opinion about health care, why do you think faith is the answer?

While many focus on the government's role in solving health care challenges, the truth is many gaps remain and will remain, though they may shift. For instance, the number of Americans without insurance has risen, not lowered, in the 35 years since Church Health opened, despite all the government programs. This leaves room for people of faith to step in with meaningful care for the whole person independent of government funding for our work. Christian history in particular shows us that Christians have never waited for the government to take the lead in caring for the poor who are sick. Why would we start now? Fourteen hundred charitably funded clinics care for about three million people in nearly seven million visits annually.

6. What do you want people to take away from reading *Care*?

Faith-based charitably funded clinics continue to battle health care disparities, and there is great room for growth to meet the need in communities all over the country. Over the years, Church Health has had the opportunity to offer replication workshops for others to visit our work as they begin or grow their own similar clinics. We do not pretend solutions are simple, but we know from our own experience at Church Health, in one of the poorest cities in the nation, that disparities in health care are not because resources do not exist. Where are the resources, and where do they need to be? Health is above all a human issue, and creatively making human connections in the process of solving the challenges is key.



7. What is the greatest thing you believe people of any faith can do to be part of healing our broken health system?

What does it look like to have a healing ministry in today's world? This is still the question we must be actively answering as people of faith because this question comes from both our own history and our own sacred texts. The century that we live in does not change the essential question and the call for each one of us to engage with it as a robust experience of our personal discipleship. We don't have to wait for outside forces to solve challenges in our own communities. We each are responsible to discern how God calls us to be involved and to say "yes" to that calling.