



May 10, 2023

The words “health” and “holy” are related. They may even come from the same root word. Each has to do with “wholeness”, the kind of full and perfected life that God created us to enjoy. Physical and mental health, not surprisingly, are tied up with spiritual health, with living in a relationship of love and obedience to God. Our sexual lives are places where “holy health”, in its furthering or ruining, is starkly visible. When HIV became a scourge around the world over 30 years ago, it was clear from the start that the connection of health and holiness was at the center of the tragic challenge so many were facing. Faithfulness in marriage, and the offering of our sexual lives exclusively to such faithful marriage, was clearly both a pathway to health, and something whose weakening was leading to destructive disease. Universal Chastity Education (UCE) was one clear and compassionate response to this reality.

In the last twenty years since its founding, UCE has remained a pillar of steadfast witness to the truth of human dignity, and to the integrity of the human body and person that God has created. UCE’s mission has been among young people, mostly in Africa, whose calling to serve God with the fullness of their created gifts has been buffeted by all kinds of challenges, including sexually transmitted disease, like HIV, and the habits of sexual relationship that have permitted such disease. During these years, UCE has worked consistently, tirelessly, and lovingly on the ground, helping educate young people about the divine purposes of their bodies and loves, of healthy and faithful friendships and patterns of life, all flowing from God’s love for them in Christ Jesus.

The fruit of this work, carried out by teams of local leaders and youth, has been conspicuous in its light. Gatherings, information-sharing, testimonies, discussions, educational material, retreats, carried out in schools and churches, in rural and urban areas, have provided precious resources and encouragements to a life of sexual abstinence outside of marriage. The work of UCE’s teams have also strengthened commitments to prayer, study, and faith. Young people have learned new habits and hope, have pledged themselves to faithful ways of living and have supported one another in a grateful receipt of God’s gifts for their young lives. The result has been the flourishing of health, in its deepest and most holy character.

HIV, along with other sexually transmitted diseases, remains a threatening force of ill-health around the world, despite the fact that we are hearing less about it these days. This is why UCE dare not slacken its witness. But UCE’s steadfastness of service has also come in the face of new challenges and changes within the lives of those we have sought to support. In the past twenty years, for instance, internet usage has exploded in East Africa, and elsewhere on the continent. Over one-third of African high-school and university students are now, like many of their Western counterparts, viewed as “internet addicted”. Along with this, habitual pornography viewing has also sky-rocketed. Despite local efforts to rein in pornographic websites, in many African nations, like Uganda, young people visit pornography sites more than they watch the national news. The effects of pornography viewing in Africa are no different than they are in



America: increased hostility and aggression by young men towards women, earlier sexual activity, sexual confusion and marital dissatisfaction and conflict. The casualty is health in its fullest sense.

Christians too should be concerned. In the era of the internet, the youth of America and Africa are no different in these respects. UCE knows that. Our steadfastness is a response to that. Holy health, and the health of holiness, are a promise and vocation that does not wither and that we dare not lose interest in. I know that my support of UCE needs to be unwavering. I pray that others will join in helping strengthen the constancy of this witness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ephraim Radner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ephraim Radner
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