

The Christian Healing Ministry

Introduction – The Bible and Healing

The Church's involvement in the ministry of healing has a theological framework. It springs from what we believe about God and His will and purposes for humankind. Christians believe that God's will for His human creation is wholeness in body, mind, and spirit. It follows that healing, however generated, is a positive experience that frees us from anything that interferes with wholeness. The human body has marvellous self-healing properties, resistance, resilience, and immunity. When these fail, intervention is necessary. Human pain and suffering are a reality of the world in which we live – a result of man's sin, and not the will of the God who declared His creation to be good. ¹

Healing was central to the ministry of Jesus when He was on earth:

- A large percentage of His miracles involved healing.
- He commissioned His disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and to heal.²

Jesus' commission was for succeeding generations of Christians:

- Paul writes of "gifts of healing".³
- James writes that the sick should call for the elders of the church to pray over them for healing.⁴

Healing and the Church

During the first three centuries of the Christian era physical healings by miraculous means were not uncommon. They were acknowledged by contemporary church leaders:

- Seen as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.
- The Church was young.
- Personal and corporate faith were strong – stimulated by the ever-present threat of persecution and martyrdom.

Towards the end of this period the expectation of divine intervention in healing diminished:

- Christian belief and practice became established and respectable.
- Faith weakened
- Emerging medical science was seen as God's new way of healing and the Church became involved in this. However, reports of miraculous healings continued:
- Where individual and corporate faith were strong.
- Where there was an expectation that God could and did heal.
- Where there was a conviction that Christ's call to His followers to heal the sick was still in force.

Throughout much of the twentieth century up to the present day, there has been a resurgence of interest in the spiritual dimension of healing. Many denominations and

congregations now exercise a healing ministry. We believe that the healing of diseases and the pursuit of wholeness is God's will for humankind.

In the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Psychological and Spiritual Healing Committee was established in 1938 – which evolved into the Ministry of Healing Committee in 1977.

The Churches' Council for Health and Healing in Ireland is an inter-church group that provides encouragement, support, and guidance. The Methodist Church in Ireland is represented on the Council by some members of the Ministry of Healing Committee.

The Healing Ministry and Medical Knowledge Today

The majority of Christians who are rediscovering this spiritual dimension of healing see it as complementary to, rather than an alternative to the work of the medical professionals. We encourage those with health concerns to seek the guidance of medical professionals. At times there seems to have been an uneasy relationship between the church and the emerging scientific developments in medicine, though the church has had a major input into the establishing of hospitals and other caring institutions.

We acknowledge that all healing is of God – a conviction we share with many in the medical world. What we have been discovering as the twentieth century progressed is that Christians and Christian communities have a spiritual resource, largely unused for centuries, with which to combat disease and promote wholeness of body and mind as well as of spirit. We have come to recognise that Christ's call to His followers to preach, teach and heal has never been withdrawn. Therefore, we can make a contribution, where appropriate, alongside the work of the medical practitioners.

Involvement in the ministry of healing requires that we be aware of, and avoid two extremes:

1. Whilst we acknowledge that most illnesses are cured by medical intervention we need to avoid saying, or believing, that it alone can bring about healing. That would place limits on God – and there is much credible evidence to suggest that people have been cured miraculously.
2. We must avoid encouraging total reliance on the ministry of healing when medical treatment can be of help.

The Basis for a Healing Ministry Today

We must acknowledge that there are many unanswered questions in respect of illness and recovery from it, or not, as the case may be. One reservation often expressed is the fear of disappointment for those to whom they minister. Mental stress and spiritual questioning may result if a cure does not happen. **A proper understanding of the healing ministry is important:**

- Its purpose is not to cure but bring healing – although, by God’s grace, a cure may sometimes happen.
- Its purpose is to bring wholeness through restoration and healing of our relationship with God, with others and within ourselves.
- Many testify that although God did not cure them, He did heal by blessing them with composure, peace, and resilience in the face of continuing illness.
- Bearing illness with dignity, by God’s grace and through the ministry of healing, can be a witness to others in society.
- The fruit of the Spirit often grows when facing the testing winds of difficulty, including illness.
- The fruit of the Spirit may also grow in persons exercising a healing ministry.

It is important to stress the fact that **it is Christ who is the healer.**

- The healing ministry is best exercised by a congregation in Christ’s name.
- The prayers of God’s people create an environment in which they can be answered.
- Those who minister are instruments in the hands of Christ.
- They are not professionals but should feel a calling to the ministry of healing and receive training.
- They should be commissioned by the local church.
- As with all gifts, those with the gift of healing should exercise it with wisdom, love, and humility.

Practical suggestions about the Ministry in the Local Church

Ideally, the healing ministry should be offered within the context of the normal worship and pastoral life of each congregation according to what best suits the local situation:

- In Sunday Worship services.
- By Prayer Teams before or after a service.
- Mid-week meetings.
- Designated Healing Services.
- In hospitals, nursing, residential and private homes.
- The Church Council or Circuit Executive should oversee the ministry.
- Clear information and explanation should be given on each occasion to avoid uncertainty or embarrassment to the congregation and those seeking ministry.

In public worship, the ministry of healing may be exercised in a number of ways; they are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- Names may be placed in a prayer book or box and then used in prayer - that these persons may know God's blessing and healing in their lives.
- Use of names in a public setting should always be at the person's request or with their permission. This should also apply where members of the congregation may request prayer for someone by name.
- Invitation for individuals to receive ministry at the communion rail or prayer stations which should be set up to be visible.
- Individuals should have the opportunity to share their prayer need to the team member(s) and be encouraged to do so.
- Prayer may be received on behalf of someone else as well as personally.
- Prayer ministry is not intended to offer counselling. If this is needed, then other arrangements should be made.
- Ministry may include the laying on of hands, e.g., on the head or shoulders, or anointing with oil on the forehead – both scriptural means of grace. Individuals seeking ministry should be asked for permission before proceeding.

Where

- Permission to conduct prayer ministry should be obtained from the relevant authorities.
- Should be conducted sensitively where it cannot be done in private.
- Two persons, at least, should be involved.
- Should be ministering with the knowledge of, and prayerful support of the local church.

Safeguards

Appropriate measures should be in place to protect both those seeking ministry and those exercising it.

- Ideally, two persons should minister to each person. An appropriate gender balance should be observed.
- Information shared is confidential, except where it relates to the abuse of children, or a vulnerable adult, which must be reported to the relevant person or authorities. If the ministry team are concerned about an individual's immediate safety, advice should be sought from the relevant authorities over an appropriate course of action. The utmost discretion should always be exercised.
- Prayer teams should meet for prayer before and after ministry.

Becoming Involved

If you would like to become involved in prayer ministry or organise a healing service and would like help or advice, please contact the Ministry of Healing Committee.

Jesus said:

I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10) ministry is exercised **outside of the church** context:

Some Resources

There are no hard and fast rules as how to conduct a healing service, but the Ministry of Healing Committee recommends:

1. "An Order of Service for Healing and Wholeness" (2011)
2. "An Order of Service for Healing and Wholeness" (Methodist Worship 1999)
3. "Healing the Hurts" (2005)

[1 – Genesis 1:31](#)

[2 – Luke 9:2](#)

[3 – 1 Corinthians 12:28](#) [4 – James 5:14](#)