

THE CHURCH'S HEALING MINISTRY

The Churches Healing Ministry is

Visionary - because it beckons us towards the future and a glimpse of the kingdom, and the hope of the whole of creation renewed

Prophetic - because it calls us to reconsider our relationships with God, each other and the world and to seek forgiveness and a new start in our lives.

Dynamic - because Jesus Christ is with us to the end of time: we pray for his help, he comforts, strengthens and heals us, responding to our deepest needs.

The Churches ministry is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ. We seek to fulfil it in the power of the same Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. Jesus' ministry was totally faithful and obedient to his Father. The gospel of the kingdom of God is the good news of healing which Jesus proclaimed. 'Go and preach the gospel... Go and heal the sick' summarizes the commission Christ gave to his Church. So Christians have always been called to have a special concern for sick in mind, body and spirit. The Church's ministry can be described as one of healing - the healing of ourselves, and of our relationships with God, with one another and with our environment.

What are the most common forms of healing ministry?

Public and private prayers of Intercession. Christian worship has always included prayers of intercession customarily addressed to the Father through the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Intercessory prayer, in which we pray individually and corporately, for those who are suffering, combines our love with God's love and our will with his will, so as to cooperate with him in fostering his kingdom.

The laying on of hands. Actions can often speak louder than words and touch conveys a message of love and assurance as well as being a link with Christ's apostolic command to heal the sick. Hands are usually placed gently on or side by side of a person's head, or on his or her shoulders and accompanying prayers said quietly and reverently. This form of touch can make a sick person feel less fearful or alone in their suffering.

Anointing. We pray that as we are outwardly anointed with oil, we shall be inwardly anointed with the Holy Spirit. It is customary for a priest to anoint a person with thumb or forefinger, making the sign of the cross, with a small amount of oil on the forehead and sometimes the palms of the hands. Anointing is often accompanied by the laying on of hands and sometimes Holy Communion and reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Absolution. Confession is increasingly seen as an act of reconciliation which begins with God calling us back to himself. The Anglican tradition

values the use of a general confession as a communal act in the liturgy and makes provision for private confession to a priest. Private confession may be made in a formal or less formal setting and may include spiritual advice and counsel as well as absolution.

Friendship, forgiveness, listening, acceptance and affirmation can also have a healing grace. So in different ways we are all able to take part in the Church's healing ministry, looking forward in faith to the kind of healing he wills for those for whom we are praying.

The healing ministry is available in the following ways:

- publicly as part of services;
- at healing services, including the Eucharist, in institutions such as hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, residential homes for elderly and disabled people, prisons, etc. and at healing centres and related conferences;
- privately within the home, hospitals and hospices, and discreetly in church side chapels, etc;
- ecumenically across the denominations, including local services, the hospital and prison chaplaincies;
- in cooperation with the medical and caring professions.

What can we hope for through this ministry?

We believe that God loves us and wills the very best for us. But we also know that suffering of all kinds and ultimately death are conditions from which we cannot escape. But God is not distant. In Jesus Christ he shared in this life's suffering and death on the cross, and he can draw close to us in times such as these. However, his resurrection in the power of the Holy Spirit gives us hope that we might have a foretaste of his kingdom here and now and that through the Church's ministry we shall receive his love, strength and healing touch. What form that healing will take we cannot tell:

It may be:

- help to carry us through a prolonged illness or disability;
- a recovery more rapid than expected;
- experiencing our fear of death being driven out by God's love;
- a healing which is so unexpected that we immediately want to thank God.

The Church of England has published a detailed report called *A Time to Heal* (Church House Publishing) which contains a great deal of information and guidance on the healing ministry and has also produced new services for healing and wholeness.

The healing ministry is for everyone; we all need healing in some way. Through the healing ministry, Jesus Christ meets us at our point of need.