

## Healing

Jesus healed. He sent his disciples out to heal (and to report back). He promised “power from on high” after his ascension to glory. The pages of the New Testament are filled with accounts of healing: physical, spiritual and emotional.

Healing became a characteristic of the Christian community from the beginning. Hands were layed on the sick and/or they were anointed with oil for healing. In his first letter to Christians in Corinth, St. Paul speaks of ‘gifts of healings’ indicating that this early church had this as a regular part of its ministry. It was not restricted to the clergy.

In a world without antibiotics or surgery the healing ministry was striking in its importance. Later healing would become especially associated with particular places or people. [Nearest the Diocese of Albany is the shrine of St Joseph in Montreal where one area contains 10,000 crutches left behind by people who were healed there.]

Today clinical studies trace the connections between faith and healing. One compilation of these studies is *The Faith Factor* by Dale Matthews, MD. It’s subtitled “Proof of the Healing Power of Prayer”. Especially useful for people taught that God can/does not intervene in human affairs. Just as the Christian Church was the first institution to establish hospitals, we are seeing a re-connection between the two streams of healing: medicine and faith.

In the Middle Ages healing recessed in prominence as the fear of death by plague pushed such prayer to the end of life and transformed it into ‘the last rites’. The recovery of healing in the U.S. as a general ministry of the church had its origins in the Episcopal Church. The Prayer Book contains prayer for healing and anointing. Public services of healing became common in parish churches and larger groups. {At our own Diocesan Convention the *Service of Healing* attracts hundreds of people and lasts for several hours.]

Today many churches offer Healing Prayer as a normal part of the Sunday service with clergy or laity offering prayer for the sick. Most commonly it occurs as people finish receiving Holy Communion, or at the rail before the Peace. The Book of Occasional Services provides a Litany for Healing as well as an outline for a public service.

Individual Christians can pray with one another, turning to Jesus the great healer, asking him to honor their prayer for the sick person. Parishes can offer short courses on healing prayer, how to minister, knowing the boundaries and praying together.

Historically the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ is seen as the major sacrament of healing. The sick should be encouraged to receive Communion as frequently as possible, by going to the Eucharist, or for the homebound, through home Communion with a priest, deacon, or lay eucharistic minister. Also closely connected with healing is the Reconciliation of a Penitent. In cases of serious illness the Priest should be called for healing prayer and for Communion as well as the opportunity for confession.

### Questions for reflection:

Have you received the ministry of healing prayer?  
Have you ever layed hands on someone for healing?  
Would you be willing to be part of a healing team?

### Suggested books:

*Christian Healing*, Mark Pearson; Chosen Books / Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1995  
*The Faith Factor*, Dale Mathews, Viking Press, NY, 1998  
*Healing*, Francis McNutt; Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1999.