

Healing Forum – Diocese of Bath and Wells

Healing Gathering – Saturday 18 January 2025, 10.00am – 1.00pm

Spectrum of what Christian healing can look like - approaches to healing in different churches

What does the term Christian Healing bring to mind? For some it can mean prayer in the side Chapel after church, for others going to a Christian Healing Retreat, or for some a lively anointed speaker laying hands on people, giving words of knowledge, and performing miracles in a large auditorium. I have experienced all of these and more.

Christian healing – there are other forms of healing – medical, alternative, etc. but we are referring here specifically to Christian healing – healing from a distinctively Christian perspective which can be offered by Christians, be Christian in content, offered in churches.

Christian healing concerns bringing people into an experience, encounter or into the presence of God. We can be His instrument, come alongside, to bring people into His presence always remembering God is at the centre of Christian healing as He is the Healer. We need to let Him do what He wants and not make promises or declarations on His behalf or limit Him.

This can be offered by Christians showing God's love through how we receive, treat and relate with people by reflecting something of him in our lives and actions, or more directly through our taking steps to bring them into a closer contact with and experience of God through a variety of means, the person and their situation being the focus of our attention.

There is no single type of Christian healing and also no one type of healing practice. It is dependent on setting, the culture of the church, the people available, and those in need. Christian healing across the church takes a variety of forms which can include:

For some, creating a quiet space where a person can come and pray and reflect. This can be based on directed thoughts or prayers or left freeform. It can also include the use of something tangible - the lighting of candles or something to hold or touch, such as a pebble. For others, the use of music of whatever type is important or listening to readings or prayers.

For others, the opportunity to have someone come alongside them, to be there with them. This can be in silence or by giving an opportunity for the person to talk, share, and experience being listened to. Just being there for them is so important for so many people. Creating a place of acceptance, safety and welcome. A place to be.

It may be that prayers for healing can be led from the front during the service or linked to the taking of the Eucharist. Alternatively, a specific service can be offered with pre-prepared prayers and/or the Eucharist. Many feel that it is important to include the Eucharist as part of the healing service. This can be in the local church, or a Cathedral, or other venue.

In addition, anointing with oil can be included within or after the service with the oils blessed either in advance or during the service. All of these liturgical and sacramental actions can be important and meaningful to the person receiving it. Peace in the turmoil of life.

If individual prayer is to be considered, then there is a need to decide how this will be offered. Do you have standard written prayers for use by everyone? This ensures that everyone offers the same – this is the policy in some teams. Or it may involve a time of listening and then extemporaneous prayers based on what is shared in line with the training that has been received. The degree of training required is different for each of these. Both require clear codes of conduct, safeguarding, rules about touch and boundaries and clarity regarding how to use the prayers. For the latter, there is a need to prepare the team to know what they are permitted

to pray and how, and in what context. This will require of a level of training. To avoid being over or under zealous and how to listen to God while honouring the person.

It is not just a question of making sure people have some training and experience. Using pre-qualified people as part of a healing team can be helpful but it is essential that everyone offers the same service and that any professional inclination is tempered to fit into the setting of the ministry. There is a need to ensure everyone undertakes the same training whatever their background. With clear boundaries to their role.

Example: I went forward for prayer for a health reason, but instead of focussing on my need for prayer, my concerns, my fears, the people began to ask detailed questions and give medical direction and advice. I already had seen a doctor and the specialists, I understood the condition, I just wanted prayer to cope with and process my diagnosis. This barrage of questions was off putting and upsetting at the time.

It is important that any healing team members are prepared for what they are taking on. The more that is being offered the more training is needed. And the training needs to be appropriate for the setting. Also, there is the need to ensure that the healing team is set up in such a way that people can work in pairs, there is adequate supervision, and that there is accountability and covering from the church for what they are doing.

Where there is a church-based healing team it is essential that the team and their supervisors have appropriate training and fulfil all safeguarding and boundary requirements. The training can be done online through organisations such as Gohealth (Guild of Health) or Acorn or Christian Healing Mission, or in person – sometimes residential, otherwise spread over a number of sessions. Training in different techniques can be very helpful, as well as engaging in ongoing training. Regular planning and fellowship team meetings are essential.

Other organisations offer training and coordination and have set up healing hubs in locations with members from across churches in that area. They offer both training and supervision together with ongoing support. Acorn Healing Hubs is an example of this.

If someone feels called to Christian healing, another option is that they can apply to join one of the many Christian healing centres – usually independent and often parachurch but usually requiring a church reference. These provide their own training and will oversee the individuals operating on their behalf either on site or in pre-arranged settings. The ministry becomes responsible for the individual who becomes accountable to them for their actions.

There are also some specialist Christian activities in the area of health and healing. These include Parish Nursing where a qualified nurse is attached to a church or group of churches to serve the community – it is overtly Christian but from a specifically nursing perspective.

Many churches or localities have individual Christian Counsellors or Counselling Teams attached to them or located in their area. These would need to be trained and accredited so that they can offer professional safe service. Some churches are associated with or have GP practices attached to them or develop links with other health/social care settings. Other churches offer specialist groups for mental health, learning disability, dementia, carers support and a range of other options.

Whatever is offered, we need to be clear and consistent in our publicity and expectations, fully prepared and trained for the purpose, coordinated, and accountable, undergirded by prayer support. always giving respect to those we serve meeting them at their point of need.

Nationally, there is support to healing ministries, whether church-based, regional or national, including Healing Advisors, through Christian Healing UK www.christianhealing.org.uk