

Diocese of Bristol

Parish Development Pack for

The Church's Ministry of Healing

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Gifts of Prayer

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1 Purpose

The purposes of this Gifts of Prayer Section are:

First, to provide an introduction to a few of the options open to us in our prayer for one another.

Second, to provide a practical set of suggestions on how to begin (and/or develop further) the ways in which we pray our own needs and the needs of others.

Very few of us are satisfied with our prayer life even though prayer is the most basic expression of our faith. If we want to express our concern for others in prayer, how can we best do that? When we do pray does it do any good? What can we expect of God when we pray for the sick and the sorrowing?

Henri Nouwen wrote: *"When we say to people, 'I will pray for you,' we make a very important commitment. The sad thing is that this remark often remains nothing but a well-meant expression of concern. But when we learn to descend with our mind into our heart, then all those who have become part of our lives are led into the healing presence of God and touched by him in the centre of our being."* (*The Way of the Heart*, DLT 1999 edition, page 79) It is from that spiritual perspective that this Section is written.

Some Christians are unaware of the rich traditions of prayer in our Christian heritage (Benedictine, Ignatian, Contemplative) and from the twentieth century Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton. A brief introduction to three ways of prayer is offered, in the hope that it might whet a few appetites and point readers further and deeper into their own walk with God

and their prayer for others.

Few of us feel we know how to get the best out of the opportunities we have to **pray WITH** other Christians in the context of pastoral ministry. Many pastoral situations offer an opportunity for informal prayer, and a collect or the Lord's Prayer will not always meet the need. There are suggestions here for ways to pray with others.

We perhaps have a little more confidence that we know how to **pray FOR** others. There are a number of tried and tested ways of prayer for others described here.

2 Principles

The authors of the 2000 Report 'A Time to Heal' have this to say about faith and healing: *'Christian faith is not problem-solving but mystery encountering, so that any particular sickness is part of a much wider and deeper picture. A common mistake is to suppose that the Christian approach to healing is problem-solving - the illness or disability being the problem. This puts something called Christian healing in the marketplace along with all the other competing therapies which seem largely unaware of, or intolerant of, one another's claims. ... It is important to beware of any picture of healing as merely the restoration of function. A problem-centred approach assumes there is a solution, but Christian faith invites us further and further into the mystery ... and calls forth a deeper trust, often dearly bought, that the gift is in the ordeal.'* (Page 128)

The following principles are assumed in this section of the Development Pack:

It is the experience of many of us that God is to be found in the endurance and faith of those who do not recover when we pray for them as well as in the thankfulness of those who do.

God's love for each of us is everlasting and unwavering. God always wills the highest good that is possible for each of us, the greatest degree of wholeness that we are able to receive.

Prayer for healing is inextricably bound into our journey toward the wholeness that God wills for each of us. Jesus Christ is our way, our truth and our life, and will be our light and companion on this journey.

What we want when we pray may not be what we need for our next step toward wholeness.

The healing power of the Holy Spirit can be at work in our mind and/or spirit, drawing us toward wholeness, when there is no apparent physical benefit from prayer.

Prayer for wholeness will often be as much about listening and discerning the will of the Spirit as about speaking and asking.

In our prayer for healing (of ourselves and of others) we enter into the intercession of the Son and the Spirit for the healing of creation.

Wholeness has its deepest and most powerful meaning in the eternal life that our Lord gives to all His children, and eternal life is a relationship and continuity that transcends our consciousness, our sufferings, and our dying.

3 Prayer and Personal Spirituality

3.1 An Introduction to Prayer for Wholeness

Prayer is a spiritual activity of love that any Christian can share in. Christians of all ages and all abilities can, and do, pray. The house-bound and infirm can share fully in this vital facet of our Christian life and thus feel a part of the spiritual ministry and mission of their church. It is a way for them to be nourished spiritually, and also to feel a spiritual bond with their brothers and sisters in Christ. The spiritual life and health of many families, and indeed congregations, is supported by the quiet, faithful, yet hidden prayer of those who are too old, or incapacitated, or unwell to feel they are of much use!

Prayer is as flexible as the Holy Spirit and as varied as individual Christians. It can be entered into individually or in groups, it can be expressed liturgically or extemporarily, it can be formal or informal, it can be in church or at home. The opportunity to pray is always with us, because the Holy Spirit is always with us: present in our hearts drawing us into the dynamic movements of God's love.

Many Christians value Bishop Morris Maddocks maxim that Christian healing is God meeting us at our point of need. But what we **need** may well be very far from what we **want**. What I want will be conditioned by many things: how I feel at the time, my hopes and dreams, my fears, self interest, etc.. Wanting something badly doesn't make it the best thing I can have - certainly not from an eternal perspective! The Lord knows us intimately and loves us unconditionally so that God always wills the highest good for us all, and God meets our needs rather than our wants.

In order to make the journey from our wants to a recognition of our deepest needs we will need to learn to listen to the Spirit of God in our hearts. Jesus said: *"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Luke 11 v 9 - 13). The invitation to ask, seek, and knock is a personal one. It is a journey of understanding that each of us can make for ourselves if we want to know the will of the Father. God is very unlikely to tell someone else what YOU or I need to hear (and is equally unlikely to tell you or me what someone else needs to hear, 'though we might sometimes think that He has!).

Mark 14 v 32 - 42 tells us: *'Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."* At the simplest level, it is clear that the Gethsemane story tells us two important things:

First, when praying the burdens of our own hearts, we will need to learn how to pray as Jesus did: *" ... yet, not what I want, but what you want."*

Second, when praying with others we will need to learn how to *" ... remain (with them) here, and keep awake."* This might well have to do with patience, endurance, faithfulness and love as we seek to stay alongside people in their need.

There is an old chorus which begins: *"Expect a miracle every day, expect a miracle when you pray ..."* Expectancy in and of itself does not make our prayer any more valid. If its intention is to generate the 'power of positive thinking' it is sub-Christian. We need only to know and trust

the love of God for us.

Dramatic answers to prayer do happen, and some Christians are keen to call them miracles, but many of us, when we recognise that God really has touched us in dramatic and unexpected ways, are aware that it could not have been predicted, may not even have been sought after, and cannot be explained in conventional ways. There is often a degree of reluctance to speak about it even with other Christians. 'Miracles' can seem confusing, irrational, and unfair even to the recipients. If pressed they may say things like: "I didn't deserve it", "My need wasn't that important", "People wouldn't understand if I told them".

Those of us who have been touched by God in such 'miraculous' ways are very aware that such blessings are no substitute for knowing the on-going love of God at work in our hearts. Indeed, evidence of love and the fruit of the Spirit is the true test of the outcomes of our prayer, not 'miracles' or measurable differences. Jesus said *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'"* (Matthew 22 v 19 - 23) Christians who need to count up answers to prayer will do well to remember that love (and/or the other fruits of the Spirit) will need to validate 'miracles', and not the other way around.

It has been said that authentic love must allow us choice, and in order to be unconditional, love must give without reservation, must not exert control and must be truly involved and vulnerable (*"Love's Endeavors, Love's Expense"*, W.H. Vanstone, DLT, 1977). These are exactly the qualities we see exemplified in the Gospel accounts of Jesus. They are the marks of God's love. Dr. Martin Israel (medical doctor, author, former President of the Guild of Health) has argued that our suffering has to be understood in the context of the redeeming love of God (*The Pain that Heals, Mobrey, 1981*). Deep or prolonged suffering throws us back

onto the deepest resources we have within us, and those are spiritual. God knew suffering would be a part of the risk of creation and in Jesus has provided the way to redeem it. Nevertheless, we are free to accept or to reject the SHALOM of the Spirit whenever it is released within us.

St. Therese of Lisieux wrote: *"Suffering is the very best gift He (God) has to give us. He gives it only to his closest friends."* Most of us are likely to struggle in seeing our sufferings in that light, but in the end, our spiritual journey of prayer will lead us to a kind of spiritual 'indifference' to our own needs together with a deep passion for, and yearning to reach out to, the sufferings of others. Then our hearts will be in tune with the movements of God's Spirit and the love of God will be the motive for our prayer. *"We are speaking here about a mystery for which words are inadequate. It is the mystery that the heart, which is the centre of our being, is transformed by God into his own heart, a heart large enough to embrace the entire universe. Through prayer we can carry in our heart all human pain and sorrow, all conflicts and agonies, all torture and war, all hunger, loneliness, and misery, not because of some great psychological or emotional capacity, but because God's heart has become one with ours."* (*The Way of the Heart, page 76*)

3.2 Entering into the dynamic movements of prayer

The nature of our prayer for one another can only be understood in the love of God for each of us, and the Holy Spirit that unites us with Christ and with each other. The Bible tells us that Christ *"always lives to make intercession for them/us"* (Heb. 7 v 25), and also that, since we do not know how to pray, *"the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words"* (Rom. 8 v 26).

When we pray a prayer for wholeness we share in the movements of God's love.

There is a constant and dynamic movement of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Indeed the First Letter of John tells us: *"Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."* (1 John 4 v 8) *"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love,*

and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (1 John 4 v 16) Dynamism characterizes the love which Father, Son and Holy Spirit share because God is encountered as the one who creates and recreates in love. The dynamic of God's love is not a power of control, but is truly generous, unconditional and creative. Such was the movement of the Spirit over the waters (Gen. 1), and such are the movements of the Spirit in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit is in the heart of every Christian. In our prayer, and the inner spiritual journey that our prayer will lead us into, we can begin to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit. Part of the spiritual journey of prayer each of us can make is to begin to discern these movements deep within our hearts: beneath our rational thought processes, beneath our emotions, deep in the very centre of our heart and being.

When we enter these deep places of the heart and begin to discern the movements of God's Spirit within us we will begin to say less and listen more. Our hearts will draw us to seek to 'align' our prayer with the intercession of the Spirit and so we begin to learn what it means to pray according to God's will.

When we begin to engage with this process we will discover that our response to God must be utterly unconditional. Whatever we see or discern within our hearts is to be held with the lightest and most delicate of 'touch'. It is meaningless to say that we possess any spiritual experience or insight, since, in these moments we ourselves will have been possessed by God. Indeed any attempt to appropriate the movements of the Spirit for our own ends will cause them to be withdrawn and we will be left to find our way back to the centre again. St. John of the Cross wrote of the 'breathing of God'. He was in awe of what he encountered and would not speak of it except to say: *"This breathing of God is in the soul, in which in the awakening of the deep knowledge of the divinity, He breathes the Holy Spirit according to the measure of that knowledge which absorbs it most profoundly, which inspires it most tenderly with love according to what it saw. This breathing is full of grace and glory, and therefore the Holy Spirit fills the soul with goodness and glory, whereby He inspires it with the love of Himself, transcending all glory and all understanding. This is the reason why I say nothing more."* It is

the privilege of all who truly seek to pray wholeness for God's people and God's creation that we can seek, find, and at times even become one with these 'breathings' and movements of the Spirit in our own hearts.

Long before we touch such deep places within us we will have found our own ways of taking other people into our hearts in prayer. In spirit we hold them in our heart. We 'share' them with the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We may hold their needs, and even begin to feel the depth of their suffering.

It is obvious that the Holy Spirit, who is immanent within me, is also immanent within the person for whom I pray. Discerning the movements of God's Spirit, *at whatever level*, will have potential for releasing new possibilities within the being of the one for whom I pray. As I hold a loved one in my heart in prayer the Spirit of God can touch their heart in new ways. I cannot predict or know what those ways will be, but I can trust that they will occur.

Engagement with the Holy Spirit in prayer, holding another in our hearts and aligning our hearts with God's heart, will always release new possibilities within that other person: *'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'* (Gal. 5 v 22 & 23). The movement of the Spirit of God within them will also make available the ever present possibility of change, even dramatic change, towards wholeness.

We will need to discern the will of the Lord in these dynamic movements of the Spirit. Father, Son and Holy Spirit commune with each other constantly in love, and the Son and the Spirit intercede for us and through us. It is God's gift to us in salvation that we too can be drawn into this 'holy communion'. In prayer we can share in the movements of God's love here and now, as they hold us and touch us in our needs. The Bible tells us also (Rom. 8 v 22) that the whole creation groans in travail - these are the deep movements of God's Spirit in all things.

We all have access to this same Spirit of Christ. We can learn to be open to the Spirit within us, and respond to these movements in the way the Spirit leads.

Sometimes, however, stillness and waiting on the Lord, on their own, do not meet our need. The Psalms remind us that God is willing to hear the raw agony of our needs. Walter Brueggemann has written *"most of the Psalms can only be appropriately prayed by people who are living at the edges of their life, sensitive to the raw hurts, the primitive passions, and the naïve elations that are at the bottom of life. For most of us, liturgical or devotional entry into the Psalms requires a real change of pace. It asks us to depart from the closely managed world of public survival, to move into the open, frightening, healing world of speech with the Holy One."* (*Praying the Psalms, Brueggemann, p 17*) Again and again the Psalms give expression to the deepest human longings: joy, desperation, anger, fear, sorrow, etc.. Such language articulates the cry of the human heart in times of need and does so in the context of acknowledging the movement (and at times the apparent absence of movement) of God's Spirit. Thus we ourselves will sometimes need, as a part of our prayer and engagement with the movements of God's Spirit within us, to be able to "depart from the closely managed world of public survival" and begin to express the cry of our hearts also.

In the Gospels many people sought Jesus and spoke the cry of their heart to him believing he could meet their need: *Lk. 5 v 12, Lk. 7 v 1 - 8, Lk. 7 v 18 - 20, Lk. 8 v 24.* Others expressed the cry of their heart without words: *Lk. 5 v 17 - 25, Lk. 7 v 36 - 38, Lk. 8 v 43 - 48, etc..* Jesus own 'cry of the heart' was: *Lk. 22 v 42: "... take this from me ..."*

In times of need we all have a 'cry of the heart' we need to express to the Lord. We may need help to recognise and articulate our need (by sharing with someone we trust: a friend, a Christian Listener, a trained counsellor), but at times we each need to begin to pray the cry of our heart, and go to the place of Jesus in Gethsemane, and pray as he prayed: *" Father, if you are willing, please take this from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."* (*Lk. 22 v 42*)

The Gethsemane of our hearts is a place of spiritual encounter for many Christians. But once again, if I am able to find my way into my own Gethsemane in times of need I will need to be willing to accept the Father's will, as Jesus was willing, even if it is to be the way of suffering, or rejection, and/or our own particular 'crucifixion'.

3.3 Some Traditions of Christian prayer

Christian literature offers us rich and varied traditions of prayer. The great saints of prayer, those who have gone furthest in their journey into God, are often called Christian mystics. Many of their writings are now available, often there are commentaries on their writings also. A look along the Spirituality shelves in your nearest SPCK will tell you more. Their writings and the insights of others who have followed in their footsteps are a rich and beautiful resource for anyone wanting to know more about prayer.

A very brief introduction to just three of the major sources may help:

- **Benedictine spirituality**

This is rooted in what is called 'Lectio Divina'. St. Benedict (480 - 550AD) was Abbot and founder of the monastery at Monte Casino in Italy, and of course, founder of the Benedictine Order and Rule. He wrote a rule of life which stills guides the spiritual discipline of Benedictine communities around the world. Benedict taught that the scriptures should be read prayerfully and in four steps:

Reading: slowly taking the words and their meaning and significance, then,

Pondering: allowing our feelings, senses, and imagination to inform our thoughts about the scripture. This is essentially a mental process that will lead on to,

Yearning: in this stage our pondering moves deeper into a spiritual movement or prayer which is quietly offered to God, until,

Acceptance: this is the last stage and is characterised by

our yearning being transformed into acceptance in the presence of God in our hearts in silence and peace. There may also be an element of decision and resolve that emerges from this stage which will require translation into specific action in our lives.

Benedictine prayer is very effective when used with the Psalms, Prophets, and Epistles.

For more information see books on Benedictine spirituality such as: PAX: The Benedictine Way, by Ambrose Tinsley OSB, Spirituality for Everyday Life, An adaption of the Rule of St. Benedict, by Brian C. Taylor, or Praying with Benedict, by Katherine Howard in the Companions for the Journey Series, St. Mary's Press.

- **Ignatian spirituality**

Ignatian spirituality is based on a more imaginative use of scripture in which we seek to 'live' the story for a few minutes in our heart.

A Gospel incident (for example) is read, and absorbed. Then in prayerful quiet and stillness the story is pictured in the imagination. Time is taken to explore the scene, the people, the atmosphere. The story is allowed to unfold in the mind's eye, with the encounters and conversations of the characters. The person in prayer may then imagine themselves to be present alongside Jesus, or speaking with Jesus, or reacting to what is happening. They allow their imagination to be guided by the Holy Spirit (and their own heart) to see, hear, encounter, or receive whatever 'picture'

unfolds. Through this spiritual use of imagination the Holy Spirit can speak to us and lead us to insights that help move us deeper into our hearts and into God.

Ignatian prayer can open up deep and dramatic insights, so for some of us it is wise to seek a trusted spiritual director before trying to go too far or too fast. There are a number of Ignatian Spirituality Centres in the United Kingdom and numerous individually guided Ignatian retreats available, ref. the current edition of 'Retreats', which is published annually and available from SPCK. *(For more information see books on Ignatian spirituality such as: God of Surprises by Gerard Hughes; Finding God in all Things by Margaret Hebblethwaite; Landmarks by Margaret Silf)*

- **Contemplation**

Contemplation is the purest form of Christian mysticism and is often associated with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. The essence of contemplative prayer is the letting go of thinking, and prayer, and scripture, and the opening of the heart to the presence of God. Stillness, resting, and waiting are words that have powerful associations in the scriptures. *"Be still, and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46 v 10), "those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40 v 31), "For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." (Isaiah 30 v 15)* Contemplation seeks to enter into the presence of God and be held by God, loved by

God, lost in God. Yet contemplatives accept that such encounters are God's to give and not ours to take. We may need to dwell in the 'cloud of unknowing' or pass through the 'dark night of the soul' for years as our way of 'knowing' the unknowable. But perseverance can lead to the exquisite gift of mystical encounter: *"it sometimes so absorbs the soul and plunges it in this secret abyss that the soul sees itself distinctly as far away from, and abandoned by, all created things; it looks upon itself as one that is placed in a wild and vast solitude whither no human being can come, as in an immense wilderness without limits; a wilderness, the more delicious, sweet, and lovely, the more wide, vast, and lonely, where the soul is the more hidden, the more it is raised above all created things."* (*The Dark Night of the Soul*)

Again it would be unwise for an individual to attempt to go far into contemplative exercises without regular spiritual direction. (*A book to start with: Door Through Darkness, Sister Eileen Lyddon, New City*)

Entering into the dynamic movements of the Holy Spirit, discerning the will of God, and walking in God's will may in the end demand all our resources of love, patience, imagination, stillness, and self-abandonment. Our prayer will take us into the margins of life and eternity as we seek to know the movements of God's Spirit and share the sorrows of others. But there, in the margins of life and eternity, we will find the risen Christ waiting to accompany us:

*I heard the call of love so deep and clear: Be still and know that I am ever near.
I heard the Spirit gently call my name and lead me to the paths of life again.
Absorbing into love's simplicity: the margins of His own eternity.*

*He called me to love's ocean depth within, to walk again that shore where all begins:
No limits to the solitude, no fear, where night is darkest ere the dawn appear.
And there, and there, and there I dimly see Him in the shadows of eternity.*

*My journey now? To love and seek my Lord: to listen for His voice and speak His word
To recognise His will in what is new, His loving actions ever to renew,
And thus He bids me still: "Come walk with me. We'll walk the margins of Eternity."
(Ian Wills, 1996)*

So this way of prayer for wholeness is NOT just me 'saying prayers' for people. It is me taking people into my heart, allowing myself to share in God's love for them, and allowing myself to be drawn into God's heart with them, and journeying with them in the way of the cross.

4 Prayer for Wholeness: Spiritual Dynamics

4.1 Praying WITH others

In this context, praying WITH others will be the times we pray in the company of others for their needs. It does not include praying with other people for a third party, that will be considered below in praying FOR others.

When praying with others and for their own needs we will need to learn how to "... *keep awake and pray ...*" (ref. *Mark 14 v 38*). The disciples could not stay awake, but we should try to do better! Initially, at least, our job is not to pray aloud, but to hold the person and their need in our hearts in the movements of the Spirit within us. The Lord can (and will) do the rest.

We may also need to help the person to find their way to the place of Jesus in Gethsemane in their own heart. Everyone Jesus helped in the gospels went and asked for themselves (if they were able to). If the person we pray with is able to, (s)he should begin to express the cry of his/her heart in prayer for him/herself. There cannot be a full engagement with the Spirit if the person refuses to pray their own need.

If they are not able to do so that is different. Care will need to be taken in seeking to understand why they are unable to pray for themselves. It may be appropriate to spend time talking and praying through the nature and origins of whatever inhibits them. In some cases it may even be appropriate to consider seeking additional help in the form of more specific Prayer Ministry (2000 Report, page 120), or Christian counselling (2000 Report, page 117). But such help should only be offered if there are trained and qualified people. Where they are not

available locally, an alternative would be to seek help at a residential centre such as the Harnhill Centre of Christian Healing near Cirencester.

On many occasions, however, we will be able gently to encourage those we pray with to begin making their own prayer and so express the cry of their heart for themselves. (We might help them do so by suggesting they first tell us what they would like to say to the Lord, and then they can say it to Him.) We should not set ourselves up as 'those who pray', thus implicitly leaving others to be 'those who are prayed for'. The Lord's will is that we should all come to know and love Him. We can only begin to do that when we begin to pray for ourselves. You and I had to begin to seek the Lord for ourselves, and others will surely need to begin for themselves too.

At such times of sharing it may be appropriate to hold a hand, place a hand on a shoulder, or use the laying on of hands as a sign of our sharing together and 'journeying with' those we pray with, but this should not be assumed. Care must be taken to treat people with courtesy and respect and not make assumptions about their personal space.

This emphasis on people praying their own needs may require a change of approach for some 'ministers' since we are used to saying prayers FOR people when we pray WITH them, and indeed we will still do that as a part of our ministry, nevertheless it is vital that we begin to move to a different model which gives space and encouragement to others to make their own prayer to the Lord in the midst of their need, knowing, as they do so that we are with them, loving them and praying with them in Jesus name.

4.2 Praying FOR others

In this context, praying FOR others will be the times we pray alone or with others for people we are not with. It does not include praying WITH people whose company we share at that

moment, that is considered above in praying WITH others.

Praying FOR others, in this context, is likely to include praying through lists of names at a prayer group, and/or praying for people who are on our heart in our times of private prayer.

When praying for others we will need to allow God to be God. Our job is to discern the movements of the Spirit within us and pray 'in tune with Jesus' and the Spirit's prayer for the person. The work in this kind of prayer is the work of discernment and response to what we discern the Spirit praying through us. We will do a lot of listening before any asking.

Genesis 18 v 16 - 33 provides one example of the dynamic ebb and flow of intercession in encounter with God. In this vivid account Abram does not make a specific demand such as "Lord, you must do this/that for us." Rather he seeks understanding for himself and response from the Lord: "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ... Far be it from you! Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18 v 23, 25). He listens and responds, listens and responds, in a genuine encounter and dialogue.

Similarly, in Genesis 32, the account of Jacob wrestling with 'the Lord' has often been seen as an analogy of intercessory prayer. Jacob, like Abram, does not make a demand. Jacob however does state an intention: "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (32 v 26). It contains an implicit request for a blessing, but even that is unspecific. He does not state how he is to be blessed, and leaves the content of the blessing to his 'protagonist'. Again there is genuine encounter and dialogue. Jacob does indeed receive the blessing he seeks but his encounter also leaves him with the unwanted outcome of a dislocated hip.

These pictures of encounter and dialogue with God illustrate a dynamic process. We can take our prayer for others into such a process. We can seek an awareness of the Lord in our hearts, we can make our requests in our prayer and hearts, and we can listen for the Spirit to respond. When we discern the movements of the Spirit for that person (perhaps in a word, image, picture, longing, or feeling) we can then translate that into our prayer as best we can and offer

it to the Lord silently or aloud. If we are able to discern His will the Lord will respond. We will then begin to discern that response, and will respond to it in a dynamic cycle of love and prayer which becomes an on-going process. This is the true nature of intercession: a spiritual process the Lord is gracious to allow us to share in. At no point however will we be able to control this process, nor will we be able to specify or predict the outcomes.

5 Prayer for Wholeness: Practical Options

5.1 Open Lists

- **Prayer Board**

A simple notice board in church, properly labelled and displayed, with small cards, biro, and drawing pins, so that anyone can add a name to the board (with that person's permission). All names and requests can be prayed through regularly at daily (but not usually Sunday) services. Church members can pray through the names whenever they are in church and have time. The board can be placed by or even on the altar during a Healing Service or other times of prayer. In this way church members and visitors can have loved ones prayed for easily. If cards are dated they can be left on the board (say for one month) before being removed and kept. There should be one person who is responsible for updating the board. When names are removed they can be kept (beneath the altar?) and occasionally, they can be prayerfully offered to God and incinerated (with incense?) during a Service of Prayer shared by the ministry team and others involved in the healing ministry of that church.
- **Prayer Basket**

A simple basket, properly labelled and displayed, where written prayer requests on cards (provided), or longer

prayer requests can be brought and placed. Prayer can be made as above.

- **Prayer Book or List** An open book, clip board or other provision to write a name or prayer request (if it is for a third party they need to be asked, and need to agree). Prayer can be made as above.
- **Prayer Tree in Church** A (small) potted shrub, an artificial tree with branches, or a notice board representation of a tree, to which prayer requests can be fixed. This gives a reminder that prayer for each other is a seeking of the life and renewal of the Spirit, a growing into wholeness.
- **Votive Candle Stand** Some churches will be able to provide a stand and sand tray as a place to light and leave a candle. This can be displayed as a sign of our prayer, and a sign of the light of Christ in a time of need. (Supervision of such a facility is vital and the potential fire hazard obvious.)

5.2 Open Prayer Groups

- **Prayer Support Group** A group of church members who pray for protection and blessing for the healing ministry of their church. Some Common Worship prayers for Protection and Peace (see Pastoral Services, page 96 - 99) can be adapted for use in this way by using *us/we/our* where appropriate.
- **Intercessory Prayer Group** A group of church members who meet regularly to pray for all those who have asked for prayer, people who are known to be in need, and people who have received healing ministry

recently through the local church. The group needs to be responsible about how it gathers names. It is important to have people's agreement before naming them regularly in a meeting of this kind. God doesn't need detail, a Christian name is enough.

- **Prayer Group List of Names**

There are generally two sorts of list. The simplest is a straightforward list of names, Christian names, or full names which come from prayer boards, books, etc. in church, plus other names that group members add week by week. A step on from this is to have a shorter 'Visits List' of people with whom the group seeks to maintain a direct pastoral and prayer link, visiting regularly to pray with those people, and reporting back to the prayer group on how they are. This type of prayer ministry can be rewarding for all involved.

- **Candles, Icons, Symbols**

Prayer groups may wish to devote their time entirely to intercession for the sick. However there is much to be said for the use of lighted candles, icons, a cross, or other visual aids especially if combined with some verses of scripture, a (short) meditation, and a time of silent waiting on God. Such a period at the start of a prayer meeting can draw people into a deep awareness of God's presence and love.

- **Informal Ministry in Groups**

A group might use some unconsecrated olive oil (sometimes referred to as 'Oil of Gladness') in a small dispenser, it can be passed around from one to another, each in turn makes the sign of the cross lightly with the oil on their neighbour's hand and prays God blessing for them "May the Lord bless and heal you." This continues until all who wish to participate

have had their turn.

A group might use a 'Prayer Stone' (this is merely a small stone or pebble which has no special significance in itself!) which is passed from one person to another in silence. The group prays silently for the person holding the stone until that person is ready to pass it on. Then the group prays for the next one who is holding the stone until they pass it on. This continues until all have had their turn.

5.3 Fixed Membership Prayer Groups

- **Prayer Circles**

A group where any member contacts the next in the circle by phone with a prayer request when it is received, and it is then passed on around the circle until all are informed. Such requests can start from anyone in the circle and reach all others.
- **Prayer Pyramid**

A group where each person contacted passes the prayer request on to two or three others so that the number of people asked to pray multiplies rapidly as the request spreads. This method can contact a lot of people in a short time, but needs careful co-ordination as the request has to start its journey outwards from the right starting point.
- **Quads**

Church members are placed in groups of four each year. They meet occasionally to keep in touch, but their commitment is to pray for each other's needs every day. Each year they agree to be shuffled into new quads!

5.4 Prayer for Wholeness during Services

- **Leading Intercessions** Ministry team members and other lay people can share in the leading of intercessions at Services of Healing. Such intercession may include the reading of lists of names, or a general reference to " ... all those whose names are on our prayer lists ..." Confidentiality needs to be respected where necessary.
- **Sunday Services** Ministry team members and other lay people can share in the leading of intercessions at the Sunday Eucharist or other main service. It may be appropriate to pray for some people by name at such times, but sensitivity to people's perceptions of what this means will be needed. (In some churches if you are prayed for on Sunday you must be dying!)
- **Open Prayer** In some congregations church members are used to speaking names and prayer requests aloud in a short time of open prayer. This can be offered when appropriate, provided the congregation understands what is happening and why. It does give people a chance to express a deeply felt longing for those on their heart at that moment.
- **Use of Silence** The simple invocation "Come, Holy Spirit ..." followed by silence can be profound when used discerningly and with people who understand its purpose.

5.5 'Directed' Prayer

- **Services of Prayer**

Times of prayer directed/led by a member or members of the ministry team. There can be light and darkness, singing, 'live' and/or recorded music (Gregorian Chant, Taize, or other sacred music, or modern worship songs), icons, symbols, (in the Roman Catholic tradition there might be Exposition of the Host), a guided meditation, substantial periods of silence, and a time of intercession (led or 'open'). Such times offer ways to reach out to God in more ways than words, and are able to set people free to encounter the Spirit through a variety of visual images and music.
- **'Quiet Communions'**

A simple Eucharist, perhaps in candlelight, at which the congregation would be asked not to use service books, booklets, or cards, but instead share in the liturgy from memory - they can then be much more freely drawn into the atmosphere of worship and prayer. There can be periods of recorded music (Gregorian Chant, Taize, or other sacred music, or modern worship songs), there can be substantial periods of silence. Intercessions can be led in the usual way. The congregation can be free to remain in the quiet and 'half-light' for as long as they wish at the end of the eucharist. These times of prayer and communion can offer people moments of deep encounter with God because of their additional sacramental content.

- **Quiet Evenings, Quiet Days**

The ministry team may organize extended times of prayer lasting a whole evening, or even a whole day. There can be guided meditations and substantial periods of silence. Such times, when prayerfully planned and presented can be a rich blessing to all who share in them and a welcome break from the rush of daily life.

6 For Further Consideration

The Development Pack Sections: *Gifts of the Sacraments, Gifts of Healing Services, and Gifts of Ministry Teams* should be considered as directions for development of the ministry offered at healing services, and also in the wider healing ministry of the local church.

The 2000 Report should be read and relevant sections considered in order to give a broad understanding of the Church's ministry of healing in the Church of England today.

The Handbook that accompanies the 2000 Report should be read and its guidelines adopted.

The 2000 Report encourages all levels of the Church of England to be open to ecumenical co-operation and initiatives in healing ministry. Local Christians may already be working co-operatively, but if they are not this is a clear area of consideration for future discussion, prayer and development.

Spiritual Direction - People who begin to seek the Lord in their suffering may well need a degree of spiritual direction. A few people trained and authorised to offer spiritual direction will be useful.