

Diocese of Bristol

Parish Development Pack for

The Church's Ministry of Healing

(written and produced by the Bishop's Advisory Group on
the Church's Ministry of Healing, March 2001)

Gifts of the Sacraments

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1 Purpose

The purposes of this Section are:

First, to outline the relevance of our anglican sacramental tradition to healing ministry in the light of the 2000 Report 'A Time to Heal', and,

Second, to assess the practical considerations that will need to be weighed in beginning and/or extending the use of the sacraments in local healing ministry.

The sacraments are, in themselves, services of healing and wholeness for us all. Together these spiritual gifts are powerful expressions of the love of God to those in need. Furthermore, they are gifts given by our Lord to His Church that can be readily available in most parishes.

The 2000 Report makes repeated reference to the use of the sacraments of the Church in healing ministry, beginning with the general observation:

'... anointing and the laying on of hands, the ministry of reconciliation (as confession in the presence of a priest is now called) and Holy Communion are the means through which the sick may encounter Christ the sacrament and ... (seek) his mercy and healing.' (Page 31 & 32)

Baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, anointing, and reconciliation are referred to at

various stages of the report, but they are not dealt with in a discrete section. It is hoped that this section of the Development Pack will draw some of the threads together in a way that will open up new possibilities for clergy and congregations seeking further to develop the healing ministry in their own context.

2 Principles

The sacraments are outward and visible signs of God's loving, healing presence expressed through the liturgy and worship of the Church.

Sacramental worship is not merely a form of words to be repeated, but an enactment of faith and an invocation of the Living God. Such worship has at its heart encounter with Christ and His Spirit.

The sacraments can be seen as 'rites of passage' in our spiritual journey into God. They are moments of encounter which Christians in every generation have found can hold a deep significance. Baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist especially are way-marks on our journey into the wholeness that God wills for all of us.

The sacraments of the Church speak the language of eternity. Their use of symbolism, their language of faith, their rich connections with Scripture, and the grace they impart all provide us with opportunities to touch the eternal. They draw us into the margins of life and eternity and into encounter with the Living God. Water, as it is poured, becomes a sign of our present and eternal life in Christ; oil, as it is used, becomes a sign of the Spirit and blessing of God; bread and wine, as they are received, become signs of the life, death and resurrection in Christ, of spiritual nourishment, of identification with Christ, of giving to God and receiving from God, and of sharing with one another.

The sacraments make some of the fundamental elements of our faith tangible, yet they

are not superficial. Each time we share in them there are new opportunities to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in us and around us.

Each Sacrament is an encounter with God that is far more dependent on the graciousness of God in giving than on our worthiness in receiving. We cannot expect to deserve the grace of God, or be in control of it.

The pastoral care and prayer we share with people in the Church's ministry of healing will sometimes be greatly enriched by the inclusion of appropriate sacramental ministry, properly exercised.

3 Practical Options

From earliest times the sacraments have been 'enactments' of our faith. They have drawn the people of God together in our shared journey of salvation and wholeness in Christ.

Each sacrament has a particular relevance to those who receive it. It is part of the work of priestly ministry to make the sacraments available to people at appropriate moments in their spiritual journey. As people struggle with acute illness, chronic suffering, bereavement, depression, disability, loss of quality of life and many other circumstances they are sometimes drawn back to the love and mercy of God and His Church. We are well aware of the value of general prayer and loving pastoral care at such times, yet the Church can also offer sacramental ministry to those who are ready and able to receive it.

Many church members would normally associate the sacraments with the fixed weekly services that take place in their parish church. However it is possible and desirable to be flexible in the ways we apply sacramental ministry to the variety of needs we encounter. The Sacraments, like the Sabbath, are made for humankind, they can be used flexibly and in response to need. They can and do go out to where people are just as our pastoral care and prayer do. Each sacrament can be offered in church or at home, occasionally or regularly, to many people or just a few. They can be made available to all for whom we care pastorally, through those authorised to administer them. It is important, therefore, to look at some of the practical alternatives.

3.1 Notes on the Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands is not in itself a sacrament of the Church, although it is often associated with the sacraments and incorporated in them.

The 2000 Report has this to say:

'The laying on of hands is a sign of the Church's solidarity with a person in praying for the healing power of Christ. But for those unfamiliar with it some explanation is helpful. The practice has biblical roots, though its function there is mostly the 'ordination' of a successor or the consecration of an animal for sacrifice. It functions as a form of blessing, and this can be appropriate in understanding a prayer for healing. But it needs to be clearly distinguished from so-called 'therapeutic touch' as exercised in some forms of complementary medicine and alternative therapies. It is an expression of God's abundant love and desire to bless

The normal form is for one of those ministering to lay hands on the head or shoulder of the recipient Others who are ministering can touch the shoulders Care needs to be exercised; people do not want to be overwhelmed by insensitive enthusiasts! Inappropriate physical contacts must be strictly avoided.

In a healing service the recipient may want to mention what the problem is, and this can be incorporated into a spontaneous prayer, but care should be taken not to allow the moment to develop into a mini-listening session

In small group situations spontaneous prayer is nearly always used. But not all such prayer needs be vocal; laying on hands for a few moments with inner attention to God can be very appropriate.' (Page 247 - 248).

Clearly the 2000 Report expects the laying on of hands to be at the heart of much local

healing ministry. It has clear biblical origins, has been a part of Christian tradition from earliest times, and it is a visible sign of sharing in prayer at times of blessing or need.

As with all healing ministry, the laying on of hands is not an end in itself but a sign of our seeking of the Lord and the touch of his Spirit together. When a minister shares the laying on of hands with another he or she in no sense has status or power over that person. It is truly an open and available sign of love that all Christians can share with each other when they pray together. Ministry team members may give the laying on of hands at a healing service, but any Christians can hold hands as they pray, lay a hand on a shoulder, or even put an arm around a shoulder when they pray with and for each other. However the warning about inappropriate physical contact, (and thus, implicitly, unwelcome physical contact) must be remembered.

It is important to remember that the laying on of hands is not welcomed by all who seek our prayers. Clearly it would be wrong to insist. We need to respond to other people's needs rather than our own agendas. Sometimes we will need to discern the right time and the right way to share the laying on of hands so that it can be gladly received by the vulnerable and fearful as well as the more confident.

Neither the laying on of hands, nor any other means of grace, can be used merely to 'get what we want'. All healing ministry is to do with faith and not self-interest. Grace is God's to give, not ours to take, and the Spirit blows where it will. Outcomes, 'miraculous' or otherwise, will only have true meaning in the love and will of God for each of us.

Whenever the laying on of hands is offered as part of the healing ministry of the Church it is important that all those involved try to pray. The minister will probably be expected to pray, but it is important to encourage the one receiving the laying on of hands to pray also. Those who seek the laying on of hands usually have some idea of the

nature of their need and can be gently encouraged to express the longings of their heart to the Lord. They may be able to speak a prayer aloud, but if not the Lord will hear their silent longing. In this way the laying on of hands becomes a sharing in the Spirit and the seeking of God's will together, rather than something that is passively received.

In the laying on of hands and the prayer that accompanies it we seek the touch of God's Spirit. Such grace is God's gift and not our right. St. John assured his readers: *'This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.'* (1 John 5 v 14). Whatever our circumstances we can do no better than to accept God's will and seek to live in it. The account of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane offers us encouragement to watch and pray with those who seek the will of the Father (Mark 14 v 32 - 38). We cannot demand to have what we want. Our prayer, including the laying on of hands with prayer, needs to recognise this.

The 2000 Report also sounds a note of caution regarding the desire of some to seek prayer with the laying on of hands on behalf of a third party who is not present:

'Care needs to be taken, however, when prayers for proxy healing are requested ... opinions differ as to the appropriateness and use of this practice. This issue should be discussed with the PCC and healing team members, to form a locally acceptable view ...' (Page 270).

However, the Common Worship provision is more open to this practice, see Pastoral Services, Introductory Note, page 12.

Encouraging people to pray the cry of their heart for that other person as a part of their receiving of the laying on of hands will make such requests a genuine sharing in prayer. It will mean they are not allowed to stay in the role of a passive observer, or 'channel', and that may in turn reduce any misunderstanding of what the laying on of

hands is really about.

The laying on of hands is not a way of twisting God's arm more so that He will give us what we want, and people miss the point if they think it is. (see the Development Pack section: Gifts of Prayer)

The laying on of hands is often shared with people as an act of love and fellowship in its own right. However it is also used in conjunction with anointing with oil. Those anointed by the priest can have a hand or hands laid on them in a few moments of silent prayer ending with a spoken 'Amen'. Alternatively the laying on of hands can be a separate action which follows the prayer of anointing. This is a matter for clergy and ministers to consider and agree locally.

Prayer that accompanies the laying on of hands can use a set form of words. Common Worship: Laying on of Hands at Holy Communion (Pastoral Services, pages 33 & 34), and Laying on of Hands with Prayer and Anointing (Pastoral Services, page 93) have a set prayer, and the 2000 Report (page 248) offers suggested prayers. Extemporaneous prayer can also be used if appropriate. If the ministers discern the need for further prayer they can offer to arrange this at a later time, particularly if the initial ministry is taking place in public worship or a group setting.

- **Some possible contexts:** Many churches have a group that meets regularly to pray for those in need. The laying on of hands can be offered to any present, particularly if there are authorised lay ministers or clergy present. Plenty of time needs to be allowed for this as it not uncommon for most people present to request such ministry.

Home visits by clergy and ministry team members can

always be ended with a prayer, and in some circumstances (and with the consent of those present) the laying on of hands can be shared in whatever way seems appropriate.

Distribution of Holy Communion to the sick or housebound can be a welcome opportunity. The sacrament can be received and this can be followed by prayer with the laying on of hands before a blessing. Elderly and infirm people often value the personal contact and prayer this brings to them.

The laying on of hands can be offered regularly at Parish Communion on Sunday mornings. One way to do this is to invite people wishing to receive the laying on of hands to be among the last to come forward at the administration, and to remain at the altar rail after they have made their communion. Ministers can then pray with them. Where there are regularly large numbers of communicants people can be invited to make their communion as usual and then, if they wish to receive ministry, go to the lady chapel or a side room for prayer while the administration continues.

The mid-week celebration of Holy Communion can be a opportunity to offer prayer for healing with the laying on of hands. There will be more time for ministry to those who seek it, provided the congregation can let go of the thirty minute deadline on their Wednesday

or Thursday Communion! Since the numbers are usually much smaller at these Eucharists there can be a much more intimate and personal atmosphere that may well be valued by those present.

Healing services can offer the laying on of hands as their main focus of healing ministry, or offer it in conjunction with anointing with oil.

Ministry team members can be available after services at a designated place in church for any who wish to seek prayer and ministry before going home. Some people find this approach less threatening than in the context of the main act of worship.

The laying on of hands is a good way of expressing solidarity with others in prayer and as a way of conclude times of listening and/or pastoral ministry.

There are many opportunities for this kind of informal ministry, but it should not be shared insensitively or without consent. In fact, as awareness of the spiritual resources of the Church grows there are likely to be more needs than clergy themselves can meet. A ministry team will be able to share prayer with the laying on of hands across a wide spectrum of people and needs. Whenever possible the norm should be that ministry team members offer such ministry in pairs. Clergy may not always be able to keep to such a norm, but an open and inclusive style of ministry is the standard to aim for.

A properly trained, authorised and recognised ministry team who can share in this ministry together will be able to extend the Church's ministry of healing in ways

individuals, whether ordained or lay, cannot. For further suggestions see the Development Pack section: Gifts of Ministry Teams.

Where a ministry team is sharing in healing ministry it is important that all understand and agree the sort of requests and needs they are competent to respond to, and exactly how any referrals will be dealt with. It is also important that church members and others understand the purpose of the ministry team and what it seeks to offer.

The 2000 Report discourages (but does not rule out) 'proxy' ministry, see pages 270 and 316. The Common Worship resources, however, affirm such ministry, see Pastoral Services, page 48, note 2: 'The Laying on of Hands may be received on behalf of a third person who is not present.' A locally agreed response to requests for 'proxy' ministry will need to be worked out.

- **Things to consider:**

In the context of public worship there is often little time for sharing of needs, so before people leave ministry team members can check quietly whether those who have received the laying of hands would be glad of further time for sharing and prayer, and if necessary, make an appointment for follow up.

Ministers should not seek to offer the laying on of hands alone, but in pairs, unless this is clearly not possible to arrange.

It is essential that we do not allow people to think we are the 'givers' and they are the 'receivers'. Jesus Christ is always the giver and we seek to share in his grace together.

We need to be careful not to treat the laying on of hands as 'conveyor belt ministry'. It can be a genuine opportunity for people to reach out to God for themselves and begin to express the cry of their hearts, such opportunities can become 'holy ground' for all who share in them.

We need to be careful of the demands that such shared ministry may make on ministry team members and care for each other well.

3.2 Baptism and Confirmation

The 2000 Report states: *'The prophetic dimension of the healing ministry calls us to new starts in our relationships with God, each other and the world and to seek forgiveness and a new start in our lives. Baptism and confirmation create a new start by incorporating an individual into the Body of Christ.'* (Page 263).

In the Common Worship Baptism liturgy we pray for each one who has been baptised: *'May God, who has received you by baptism into his Church, pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit, and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory.'*

Again, in the Common Worship liturgy all pray for the newly confirmed in these words: *'Defend, O Lord, these your servants with your heavenly grace, that they may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more until they come to your everlasting kingdom.'*

Common Worship initiation services also make provision for those who wish to affirm their baptismal faith. Such candidates are asked to make the declaration: *'I answer the call of God my creator. I trust in Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I seek new life from the Holy Spirit.'*

Each of these (baptism, confirmation, affirming) is a moment of personal choice, public declaration, and invocation of the Living God. They are moments in people's lives that can be profound steps toward wholeness.

It may be worth restating at this point that wholeness is not merely a physical quality of life. Wholeness is to do with our physical, psychological, spiritual, communal and environmental well-being. Every step we take nearer to our Lord in faith and commitment will work wholeness in us.

Clearly we should not bias baptism and confirmation preparation towards explicit statements about healing and wholeness if that deflects candidates from a broad understanding of their faith. Nevertheless, we can point out the implicit themes of renewal, encounter with God, and mutual love and support in the initiation liturgies, and their beneficial effect in God's overall purposes of salvation and wholeness.

Healing ministry is an area of our church life that does require teaching. Families seeking infant baptism and new teenage and adult Christians can be given an introduction to God's gifts of healing and be introduced to the local opportunities they have to access those gifts. Such an introduction, as a part of preparation sessions, may well open up important and relevant questions about suffering, salvation, prayer and God's will even if people do not feel in need of God's healing touch at the time.

Bishops, chaplains and parish clergy are well aware that sick people are sometimes baptised in hospital, and/or confirmed in hospital or in their own homes. Even in

extreme circumstances it is not the thought of a physical cure that is uppermost in people's minds. Rather their desire is for a genuine encounter with God and the peace that can bring. Steps in Christian initiation can be vital stages in our journey into wholeness, even though there is no physical cure or relief of symptoms.

It will help us to remember Bishop Morris Maddocks' definition of Christian healing: *'Jesus Christ meeting you at the point of your need'*. If this is so then the Lord will often begin to answer our prayer for wholeness in ways we cannot see and probably would not choose. The needs of our wounded or broken spirits may well be touched before the needs of our wounded or broken bodies. The Spirit blows where it will and God will meet us in our deepest needs.

It is good to recognise, affirm and teach the journey to wholeness that is expressed in Christian initiation.

- **Things to consider:**

The significance of the language used and the prayer that is made for salvation and wholeness can be introduced and explained during preparation sessions.

Candidates can be introduced to an understanding of healing and wholeness in Jesus Christ.

Information can be shared and discussed on how to access the local opportunities for healing ministry that are available to them.

If it is the tradition of the parish to anoint with oil at baptism and confirmation this can be emphasised as an outward and visible sign of the Holy Spirit

working wholeness inwardly and spiritually.

If it is not the tradition of the parish to anoint with oil at baptism and confirmation it can be considered for the future.

Clergy and others who lead preparation sessions will themselves need a clear theological understanding of healing and wholeness so that they do not emphasise physical wholeness in contrast to emotional, spiritual, communal, and/or environmental wholeness.

3.3 Anointing with Oil

Anointing with oil is the sacrament most often associated with the Church's ministry of healing. To seek anointing is to place ourselves in the way of God's grace and give ourselves into God's will. The anointing itself expresses and affirms God's loving response. David Howell (former Director of the Divine Healing Mission at Crowhurst, former Secretary to the Church's Council for Health and Healing, and Advisor on Healing and Wholeness in Bath and Wells Diocese) has put it this way: *'... to be anointed is to have our whole life re-consecrated to God and our Christian calling re-affirmed. During a time of illness or distress, such a powerful reassurance can be an important factor in our recovery. The working of the Holy Spirit in our life is confirmed. He is raising us up according to His will, filling us with peace, trust, and joy, and guarding us against further assaults of the evil one.'*

The 2000 Report has this to say:

'This, too, is an ancient and biblically attested practice of blessing and empowerment. The kings of Israel were anointed and so the act became a sign of an outpouring of divine blessing and the Spirit of the Lord. ... The disciples sent out by Jesus used oil (Mark 6.13) and the epistle of James mentions the use of oil in prayer for healing ... The early Church used oil in a number of ceremonies including the rites of Christian initiation as well as in healing and exorcism. In time in the Western Church the sacrament of unction came to be largely associated with preparation for death, until a renaissance of its role in healing in the earlier part of this century ... The post-Second Vatican Council Roman Catholic Ritual places it firmly back in its place as a sacrament of wholeness. This is apparent in the order in the ASB Ministry to the Sick.' (Page 249).

The 2000 Report is cautious in its recommendations regarding suitable occasions for anointing with oil. It discourages frequent use, and asserts: *'Many priests follow the traditional custom of reserving an anointing for time of crisis, such as the diagnosis of a life threatening disease or admission to hospital for an operation.'* (Page 234). However it does concede (on the question of how often the same person can be anointed) that the Church of England *'gives no official guidance on this matter, leaving it to the discretion of the clergy.'* (Page 234). Finally it allows that *'If the critical condition persists, it may be appropriate for them to be anointed regularly at appropriate intervals.'* (Page 235).

The 2000 Report affirms: *'Traditionally, oil is sacramental and reserved to priests.'* (Page 250). In practice, anointing with oil usually follows some form of confession and absolution so a priest will normally be present in any case.

This is a rather cautious view of the frequency and appropriateness of anointing. Such limits are not far removed from the 'Last Rites' image of anointing as a sacrament for use only in extremis. In contrast to this many clergy now see anointing with oil as a sacrament of the Holy Spirit, and a sign of the loving presence of God with people in all

times of need. Anointing with oil needs to be used appropriately, but this need not limit it only to times of acute need.

An alternative view of circumstances and frequency might be:

1. A clear intention and desire on the part of the one seeking anointing, and/or:
2. At a eucharist, where there is a clear theme in the prayer and intention of those present, and/or:
3. At a moment of decision and/or a step of faith, and/or:
4. Where reconciliation is affirmed as an important step for a penitent, and understood as a sign of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Clear intention allows for much greater flexibility in the sacrament of anointing. In contrast, the laying on of hands can be shared less formally, and between lay people.

Those who are anointed can have a hand or hands laid on them as a way of ending the prayer of anointing. Alternatively the laying on of hands can be a separate action which follows the prayer of anointing. This is a matter to be considered and agreed locally.

Prayer that accompanies anointing (or anointing with laying on of hands) can use a set form of words. *Common Worship: Laying on of Hands at Holy Communion (Pastoral Services, pages 33 & 34)*, and *Laying on of Hands with Prayer and Anointing (Pastoral Services, page 93)* have a set prayer, and the 2000 Report (page 250) offers an alternative. Extemporaneous prayer can also be used if appropriate. If it is felt that further ministry would be helpful it can be arranged for a later time.

Oils for anointing at baptism, confirmation and in the Church's ministry of healing are blessed at the eucharist celebrated at the Cathedral on Maundy Thursday each

year. Clergy need only to bring suitable flasks or phials, labelled to indicate which oils are required. Additionally, Common Worship gives a prayer of thanksgiving for the consecration of oil in 'A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing' and in 'Laying on Hands with Prayer and Anointing at a Celebration of Holy Communion'. The second of these is recommended *'for occasional use as part of the regular liturgical life of a parish'*.

- **Anointing at the Eucharist:** The ASB order 'Ministry to the Sick' specified that anointing with oil should follow confession and absolution as does one Common Worship liturgy (Pastoral Services, page 20). Other Common Worship liturgies place it after the Intercessions (Pastoral Services, page 33 and 93), but it has also been customary to offer anointing immediately after people make their communion. Common Worship allows this as one of three options (see Pastoral Services, page 48: Prayer for Individuals in Public Worship). Whichever option is chosen locally, it needs to make access to the sacrament of anointing as easy and unstressful for people as possible.

Anointing can be offered from time to time at Parish Communion on Sunday mornings. One way of doing this is to invite people wishing to receive anointing to be among the last to come forward at the administration and to remain at the altar rail after they have made their communion. The priest can then anoint and pray with them. Where there are regularly large numbers of communicants this may significantly delay the end of the eucharist.

Mid-week celebration of Holy Communion can be times when people are able to receive anointing with oil. It might be at the regular mid-week celebrations, or specially arranged celebrations for people or groups of people with particular needs. Since the numbers will usually be much smaller at these Eucharists there can be a more intimate and relaxed atmosphere that is valued by those present.

Communion of the sick or housebound provides a special opportunity for prayer with anointing for the elderly and infirm who are unable to get to church.

Common Worship: The Distribution of Holy Communion to the Sick and Housebound provides for this (Pastoral Services, page 74). It may however be preferable to anoint immediately after the sacrament has been received, rather than earlier.

- **Other opportunities:**

James 5 v 13 - 16 gives specific advice to those who suffer. They are to call for the elders of the church for prayer, anointing and confession and forgiveness of sins. Experience suggests that people ask for someone to go to talk with them rather than asking specifically for anointing, so the minister who visits will need to be ready to discern the appropriate form of ministry and suggest anointing if that seems right. Anointing could then be arranged at a later visit.

Pastoral contacts mean that clergy visit people in need

regularly. Sensitivity is needed, it should not be assumed that everyone will want to receive anointing, but it can be offered and a return visit arranged to give time for proper preparation. If the one to be anointed has a Christian friend, neighbour, or pastoral visitor who visits regularly they may be glad to have that person present for the anointing, but this should not be assumed.

Pentecost is the Feast of the Holy Spirit and is a wonderful opportunity to anoint all present as an outward and visible sign of the inward and visible truth of the Holy Spirit as the gift of the Father to all who repent and are baptised in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2 v 38). Oil for healing, or locally consecrated oil (either of the prayers to bless oil found in the Common Worship services of healing could be used, see 3.3 above). Clearly this will add to the length of the eucharist if there is a large number to be anointed in this way.

As with the laying on of hands, so with anointing, there will be occasional requests for 'proxy' anointing: a request to anoint on behalf of a third party who is not present. This should gently be declined. No-one can receive a sacrament *on behalf of* someone else. We can only pray together for them and encourage them to seek the sacrament for themselves if they are able to.

3.4 The Eucharist

The Eucharist is, to many of us, a healing sacrament in itself. It contains a cluster of symbols, actions, and re-enactments. There is a spiritual movement, an ebb and flow, as we ask for and receive forgiveness, offer the elements, receive them back as the body and blood of Christ, give ourselves to God's service, and receive God's blessing. The liturgy points us repeatedly to eternity and the eternal life of the Spirit within us. Such spiritual interaction can be a means of healing and grace in many ways, whether shared between hundreds in church or just two in extended communion at home.

The 2000 Report recognises the central place of the eucharist in healing ministry:

'All Christian churches celebrate the Eucharist, although not all of those who attend and receive Holy Communion realize that this celebration is the most common form of 'healing service' in its widest and truest sense. ... Nearly all authorized intercessions in prayer books for use at the Eucharist and at other services contain petitions for the sick.

The laying on of hands is widely used throughout the denominations, often at a Eucharist before or after the people have received Holy Communion. This is the most public and distinct form of healing ministry and it highlights the place of healing within the most important service in the parish church.' (Page 64 - 65).

So first of all it is important to recognise and affirm the value of the eucharist in its own right as a moment of grace.

In addition, as the 2000 Report notes, it is common to include the laying on of hands or anointing with oil or both. If this is to be introduced for the first time it may help to

bear the following points in mind:

• **Things to consider:**

Many of us have offered anointing and/or the laying on of hands at the eucharist as simple acts of ministry. But if we are to develop our pastoral care of those we serve, we may well want to develop some form of local ministry team to be available to give support, encouragement and further prayer when the eucharist is ended if it is needed. (See Development Pack section: Gifts of Ministry Teams).

Anointing and the laying on of hands need not be offered at a eucharist with a clear intention of healing prayer. In such a case any publicity should make clear that the eucharist itself will be the sacrament of healing. Clearly those who are not confirmed (and are not yet desirous of being confirmed) will not be able to receive the sacrament.

The eucharist is a wonderful opportunity for encounter with God when shared with large numbers (see *Common Worship Pastoral Services*, page 13f: *A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing*, and page 26f: *Laying on of Hands with Prayer and Anointing at a Celebration of Holy Communion*), or in very small groups of just two or three (see *Common Worship Pastoral Services*, page 51f: *Ministry to the Sick*). Some needs may best be met by arranging a said eucharist in church for just two or three people.

Communion of the sick or housebound is often a special moment for those who receive it. It is a vital act of fellowship for them, it lets them know they are still a part of the fellowship and not forgotten, and it feeds them spiritually through the sharing of the sacrament. It is already custom and practice in many parishes for Readers to assist in this ministry by sharing in taking the reserved sacrament to a wider group of 'home members' of the church.

Dr. Kenneth McCall gave a new awareness to many people with his work on 'healing the family tree'. This ministry finds its spiritual focus in the sharing of the eucharist as a moment of encounter with God and a seeking of God's power to heal all that has been remembered and worked through in preparation for the eucharist. Such celebrations, with a clearly understood intention, and following careful preparation by all present, can indeed be powerful opportunities for grace in people's journey to wholeness.

3.5 Reconciliation of the Penitent

Reconciliation in a formal and individual sacramental act will have an important place in the pastoral care of at least some of those we serve.

It is sometimes hard for people to accept that God really does want to forgive them. It can also sometimes be hard for people to forgive themselves. The sacrament of reconciliation may well need to be introduced to congregations and individual church members with teaching and guidance on preparation.

In the sacrament of reconciliation the priest enacts the forgiveness of Jesus, with the authority given by Jesus (John 20 v 23), believing that the word of forgiveness spoken will be a means of grace to the penitent there and then. The sacrament of reconciliation can be a deeply healing and significant step, leaving the past behind and moving forward both spiritually and psychologically.

The 2000 Report introduces it thus:

'The ministry of reconciliation, whether or not it is associated with spiritual direction, is in itself an aspect of the healing ministry. Going to confession is nearly always a liberating experience when done faithfully, and for many with troubled consciences it is sufficient in itself.' (Page 122).

The Report goes on to emphasise the need for a clear understanding of what is being offered to the one seeking ministry:

'... it (the ministry of reconciliation) needs to be distinguished from counselling. This confusion may arise more because these days the hearing of confessions tends to be more informal, with the confessor (the priest hearing the confession) and the penitent sitting in chairs and only using a kneeling desk for the liturgical prayers of confession and absolution. It is necessary to remember that at the heart of this ministry are the confession of sin made by the penitent to God in the presence of his people (represented by the priest) and the prayer of absolution, pronounced by the priest with the authority of the Church, through which the penitent is reconciled to God and to his people.'

Where a difficult case arises, when the confessor thinks that the penitent would benefit from a session with a trained counsellor, the confessor can suggest this, or seek the penitent's permission to discuss the matter further outside the confessional. If, however, the penitent rejects the suggestion, the seal of the confessional obliges the director (confessor) not to pursue it any further.' (Page 122- 123)

Clearly such ministry, when properly shared with those who seek it freely, can be an important step in our journey to wholeness.

Many people carry heavy burdens of guilt and may, with time and preparation, feel a deep sense of release and new found freedom of spirit through this sacrament. Such ministry can be shared in church or at home, so long as privacy can be guaranteed.

People seeking wholeness in this way are often helped by a degree of spiritual direction. It is important to recognise that informal spiritual direction is given by clergy, on request, and on an ad hoc basis, as a normal part of parish ministry. This may well be sufficient for most penitents. Clergy and other members of ministry teams may have gifts in such ministry, but if they wish to develop formal on-going spiritual direction relationships with people they will need training.

It is important to be clear about this. Spiritual direction is recognised by the Church both as a ministry to which God calls some people and as a skill which needs to be developed by them. It should not be assumed that anyone can do it.

Furthermore, if a trained spiritual director is available, best practice is that directees should not seek a formal on-going direction relationship with a director in the church where they worship and belong.

People in Bristol Diocese might apply for a place on the two year training course run by

Revds. Christine Clarke, John Bowes, Ann McKenzie and others at Wraxall, Nr. Bristol, but places are limited, and the course can only take new trainees every two years.

The 2000 Report also emphasises the need to be absolutely clear regarding the nature of the ministry being offered and/or shared. Pastoral counselling, prayer counselling and spiritual direction are not necessarily a part of the sacrament of reconciliation, or necessary to it. It may be that in some cases such support and ministry will, if appropriate lead to the sacrament of reconciliation. In other cases an outcome of the sacrament of reconciliation may be a desire to seek one of these ministries. Clarity and agreed understandings between those involved regarding what is offered and what is appropriate will avoid misunderstandings. Clarity and mutual agreement will also protect the role of the priest and the seal of the confessional when the sacrament of reconciliation is sought and shared.

The Liturgical Commission will, in due course, produce a Common Worship form for reconciliation, but it is not available yet.

- **Things to consider:** Christians who are not familiar with Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic tradition may not be aware of the need for spiritual preparation for the sacrament of reconciliation. There will be need for some teaching in such cases.

Penitents will need to take time to reflect on their relationship with God, their Christian discipleship, their relationships with family, friends and others, and their attitudes and behaviour toward others. They may need teaching and spiritual direction in this.

Penitents may need encouragement to forgive others, and even be challenged over any reluctance to forgive. Jesus taught his followers to pray '*forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*', a willingness to '*truly repent*', as the Book of Common Prayer puts it, to turn away from all we know to be wrong and turn our hearts and lives over to God in Christ, is an integral part of this sacrament.

When the crowds went out to John the Baptist to receive a baptism of repentance he told them to '*bear fruit worthy of repentance*' (Mt. 3 v 8). Penitents may need to address further issues of reconciliation and restitution with their priest or spiritual director if they are to find the peace of mind they seek.

All people of faith are on a journey to the wholeness that God wills for each of us. The pastoral care we offer people and the prayer we share with them in the Church's ministry of healing will need the support of sacramental ministry, properly exercised, to support them, since the sacraments are marker, sign posts, and points of grace along the way. Together these spiritual gifts are powerful expressions of the love of God, and they can be made available to those who know their need.

4 For Further Consideration

The Development Pack section: *Gifts of Prayer, Gifts of Healing Services, and Gifts of Ministry Teams*, should be considered as directions for development of the 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 emphasises the value of ecumenical co-operation in healing ministry. If there are other congregations seeking to express God's love in prayer for healing and wholeness there may well be potential for developing an ecumenical ministry, but denominational disciplines will need to be respected.