

Chapter six: Making whole

This chapter has comments on the following services in LB:

PASTORAL SERVICES A Service of Healing
A Service of Reconciliation
New Beginnings in Faith

Reception of a Member by Transfer

Reception of a Member-in-Association

Each appears also in PB.

A SERVICE OF HEALING *PERSPECTIVES*

Few of us are unmoved by Jesus' direct question to the man lying by the Pool of Bethzatha: 'Do you want to be healed?' (John 5:2-9). The man had been lying there for so long and had pinned his faith on a myth concerning the troubling of the water; the question (from our perspective) was at least fair. His reply is barely an affirmative, but it is enough: on a word from Jesus, he takes up his pallet and walks.

It seems obvious that the church's ministry of healing is based on the practice and example of Jesus. That the ministry of Jesus was marked by compassion for the sick cannot be doubted. But the stories of healing in the New Testament are frequently only in part about physical healing. The Bethzatha story has a great deal more to say about the laws of the sabbath and Jesus' relationship to his Father, than with Jesus' ability to heal. In many of Jesus' healing stories, we are challenged to think at least as much about the forgiveness of sin as the healing of the body. In the pivotal story in Mark 8:22-26, where (for the only time) Jesus has to make two attempts to effect a healing, we are enabled to see the blindness of the disciples and to observe the way Jesus teaches them (in the subsequent chapters) to see who he is.

So, we must recognise that the gospel sets us a riddle: that stories of healing may both be and not be about healing. On our part, it is important that we do not suggest that the only healing we expect in our prayers is physical, that we are not less subtle and inviting in our teaching about healing than the gospels.

The mystery is yet deeper. Paul was one who cried out for healing, and it was not granted. The word from the Lord was, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). The service of the gospel did not keep him from suffering — hence his catalogue of the wounds of the evangelist in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29. More disturbing still, Jesus cried out to be delivered from drinking the cup, but accepted that the cross was the will of his Father. Are we to be more fortunate than that? Do modern disciples in fact not have to take up the cross? Again, we must be careful to avoid the suggestion that God's will is to be equated with physical or mental well-being.

The quotation from the Epistle of James at the beginning of this service poses the problem even as it invites us to pray for healing. The 'sick' of 5:13 are not only the physically sick; the word also covers misfortune and hardship, yet the leaders of the community are invited to pray. The prayer takes precedence over the anointing (verse 14); it is *prayer* which arises from faith which is the agent of healing rather than oil (verse 15). 'Save' cannot be equated with 'heal', though they are connected; 'raise them up' means 'to get them out of bed' but has echoes of the resurrection, for healing and wholeness are a gift of the kingdom, where those who forgive shall find themselves forgiven. Yet we are bidden to pray when we are suffering, as well as to sing praise when we are cheerful (5:13). For further thought, consult the commentaries!

There is thus a challenge to study the scriptures and to teach what is meant when people are invited to pray for healing or to ask for anointing. If we offer less than the gospel, we shall leave people worse off than when they turned to us. Only the Crucified One can make us whole (so the Introduction).

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION LB 418/PB 91

A service of this kind should not be read out of a book. The provisions in *Uniting in Worship* are there as guidelines, to be modified as occasion requires. This particular service will be part of a greater whole where, for instance, some teaching may have taken place — so the introduction will vary accordingly.

Services of healing are frequently associated with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and therefore take place in the normal context of worship as in The Service of the Lord's Day. This is an important affirmation that each of us is constantly in need of healing or, rather, that all of us are constantly offered the healing and salvation which is proclaimed in Word and sacrament in the ordinary life of the church.

For those who cannot come to the normal services, the provision for Communion Beyond the Gathered Congregation (see LB 134) may be appropriate here. Thus the sick are assured that they belong to the body of Christ, the gathered congregation of worshippers.

SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

This canticle, for all its ancient tone, was probably compiled by a noted London Congregationalist pastor, Dr Henry Allon, about 1860. It is a series of biblical reflections woven into an antiphon, 'O Saviour of the

world, who by your cross and precious blood has redeemed us' which was used by the mediaeval service for the visitation of the sick. It places our penitence in its right context: as a response in faith to the saving love of Christ crucified. The text is in both LB and PB.

Three possibilities are now offered for ministry: for the healing of the sick or disabled; for the healing of personal relationships; for healing within society. This choice at least makes it clear that healing is a very broad category.

A: FOR THE HEALING OF THE SICK OR DISABLED

The context is intercession, prayer for people in need, some of whom may not be present. It is a public rite, and therefore a general invitation to come forward (or to ask for someone to come to them) may be given. Nevertheless, the service is mainly intended for those who have responded to the church's provision and who have had some opportunity to learn what it means. For those who respond spontaneously, some further counselling and pastoral contact should be offered.

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

This is not, at base, a ritual act: it is a natural, human one. These days, even the Anglo-Celt is learning to reach out to his/her neighbour, to accompany words by gestures in the congregation as in the home, in the privacy of the family. It is natural to lay hands on someone with whom we are praying. It is a gesture of love, of solidarity. It also identifies the person: it is *this* one whom we commend to God.

This ministry is of the whole church: a matter of obedience in those to whom the ministry of the Word is committed, for this is a ministry of the Word; and a call to those who pray in faith. Few words are provided, and few are necessary.

In the blessing (laying on of hands being associated with blessing, see LB note v), 'a secure hope and a confident peace' are gifts of faith, not primarily psychological in nature: their object is Christ.

THE ANOINTING

Note (vi) (LB 417) points out that this special act should not be carried out lightly, and therefore those who receive it ought normally to have requested it beforehand and have received some instruction. This ministry is then less likely to be mistaken for magic, and can be received with joy and faith.

The rite is carried out by the minister alone, for practical reasons. Olive (or some other vegetable) oil is traditionally used. An assistant should hold the container — a small stoppered bottle is best — and the thumb is lightly dipped into the oil. The sign of the cross is an appropriate gesture to make, usually on the forehead. Some cotton wool is useful both for cleaning the minister's hands and for wiping any oil which might flow into the eyes, a wound, etc. If the head is bandaged, some other part of the body may be anointed e.g. the breast or the back of a hand. It is good to consult medical or nursing staff if this takes place in a hospital.

All this should be done with due seriousness, but also with simplicity

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

(2 Corinthians 4:8–12 RSV)

And they [the twelve] cast out many demons, anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.

(Mark 6:13 RSV)

If anyone brings an offering of oil, (the bishop) shall give thanks . . . saying, O God, sanctifier of this oil, as you give health to those who are anointed and receive that with which you anointed kings, priests and prophets, so may it give strength to all who taste it, and health to all who are anointed with it. (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Constitutions*, c.215AD)

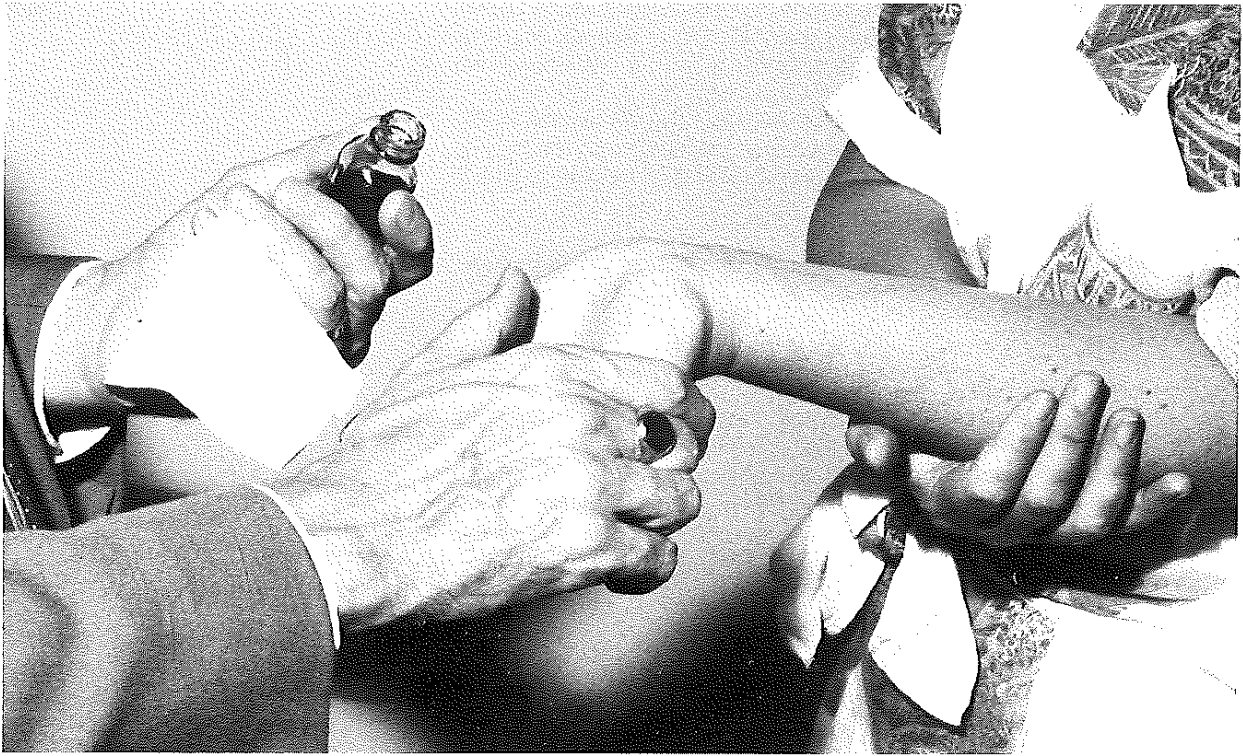


Photo: Eddy Marmur

and directness. Some silence will leave space for people to pray and to capture the solemnity of this ministry.

At a bedside, all that is needed to conclude the service is a brief prayer of thanks and a blessing (on LB 424). Obviously, services of this kind should not be long. In a larger gathering, the laying-on of hands and anointing will be in the larger context of the Service of the Lord's Day, including the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and will move to the Sending Forth as provided there. A prayer for use after holy communion (in the spirit of the Taizé community) is provided at LB 426.

B: FOR THE HEALING OF A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

This may be used as part of the Reaffirmation of Marriage (LB 403) or in the public reconciliation of any other division in parish or congregational life.

C: FOR HEALING WITHIN SOCIETY

These prayers may be included in any service as intercession, though there may be occasions in particular communities where representative persons in dispute may be brought together to pray and be prayed for.

(In first editions of LB, line 5 of the second prayer on p. 423 should read 'By the gentle power of the Holy Spirit'.)

A SERVICE OF *PERSPECTIVES* RECONCILIATION LB 427/PB 96

This service is, as it were, the obverse of the previous one. 'A Service of Healing' responds to that public part of Jesus' ministry which restored people to life and wholeness; 'A Service of Reconciliation' deals with the fundamental alienation which destroys human beings from the inside: their alienation from God and each other. Jesus sees the connection between the two: 'See, you are well! Sin no more.' (John 5:14).

It is clear that Jesus does not accept the assumption of his time that sin causes particular sickness. The story of the man born blind (John 9) is evidence of that. Yet to be separated from God is to undergo hell. The whole gospel is addressed to that fundamental gulf; the good news is that, in Jesus Christ, it is bridged. That is the context of ministries of healing and reconciliation. We have been made whole. We are well with God. And we are called to a life of right relationships, to *be* the new creatures we have been made in Christ. Indeed, only because we know the gospel of Jesus Christ can we recognise the sickness from which we have been healed, the sin which no longer divides us. Confession begins with grace and victory.

Some suggested hymns from the Australian Hymn Book:

2, 28, 39, 44, 61, 141, 158, 167, 168,
169, 275, 301, 462, 481, 518, 532,
553.

Some prayers from the Treasury of Prayers in PB 21 iff.

Nos 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 25, 27, 32,
35, 40, 44, 45, 50.

A Final Prayer

The Almighty Lord, who is a strong tower to all who put their trust in him, to whom all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth bow and obey: be now and evermore your defence, and make you know and feel that the only Name under heaven given for health and salvation is the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(*The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979
[Episcopal Church, U.S.A.]
— used with approval.)

Some suitable biblical passages:

Deuteronomy 29:15–20; Psalms 23,
121, 130; Isaiah 1:16–18; Isaiah
55:1–3, 6–7; Hosea 11:1, 3–4; Joel
2:12–13; Matthew 5:1–12; Mat-
thew 7:21–27; Matthew 9:1–8; Mat-
thew 16:24–26; Mark 2:15–17;
Mark 3:31–35; Mark 10:41–45;
Mark 12:28–34; Luke 6:36–38; Luke
11:5–13; Luke 15:11–24; Luke
18:9–14; Luke 23:33–34, 39–43;
John 8:3–11; John 10:7–11; John
15:9–14; John 20:19–23; Romans
5:6–11; Romans 7:15, 20–24;
Romans 8:14–17; 1 Corinthians
13:4–8, 13; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21;
Galatians 5:16–25; Ephesians
2:4–10; Colossians 2:6–7, 12–13;
James 1:22–25; 1 John 1:5–9; 1
John 2:9–11; 1 John 4:16, 18–19.

Nor is private absolution less efficacious or beneficial [than public prayer], when it is used by those who need relief of conscience. For it sometimes happens, that he who hears the general promises of God, which are addressed to the whole Church, nevertheless remains in some suspense, and is still disquieted with doubts as to the forgiveness of *his* sins. But if he discloses secretly to his Pastor his distress, and hears the Pastor applying to him in particular the general doctrine, he will be straightly assured where formerly he was in doubt, and will be liberated from every trepidation, and find repose of conscience . . .

But when it is a matter of the keys [see Matthew 16:19; John 20:23] we must always beware lest we dream up some power separate from the preaching of the gospel . . . we shall see that any right of binding or loosing which Christ conferred upon his church is bound to the Word. This is especially true in the ministry of the keys, whose entire power rests in the fact that, through those whom the Lord had ordained, the grace of the gospel is publicly and privately sealed in the hearts of the believers. (John Calvin, *Institutes*, III, iv, 12, 14.)

The design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God, 'Confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.'

To this end, we intend, —

1. to meet once a week, at the least.
3. to begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. to speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word or deed, and the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.

Some of the questions proposed to every one before he is admitted among us may be to this effect:

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?

The confession of sin takes place in several contexts, as Calvin pointed out and affirmed. The most common is the 'general confession' in a Sunday service, where all join in a prayer for this purpose (LB 580–590). There the minister of the Word declares the word of forgiveness on the authority of the gospel (see the discussion at that point in *The Service of the Lord's Day*). The other main context is private, when (as Scottish ministers were advised) someone comes to make confession 'for the quieting of conscience'. Even in private, it is a ministry of the Word, dependent for its efficacy on the same gospel. This latter ministry has been exercised for years in the Reformed churches without a manual. The provision of *A Service of Reconciliation* for the Uniting Church gives guidelines to ministers and support to those who seek such ministry.

There is much pastoral wisdom in the Notes. For example, note (vii) contains a warning that there is a fine line between a need for Christian ministry and a need for psychological counselling.

Most conversations of this kind probably take place in a minister's study. It would be good if there were a clear space in the study where a cross or some other helpful symbol could be placed as a focus. For that very reason (studies being busy places) it may be best to go to the church building, and find a place where two sinners equally in need, equally under grace, can sit together without formality (see Note v). The building is usually full of the signs of the life of a community: 'here pardon'd rebels sit, and hold communion with their Lord' (Isaac Watts).

ACT OF CONFESSION

The service is in both books, with slightly more provision in LB. The service as printed begins rather abruptly: it presupposes some preparation, and the proper place to start is the scriptures. The conversation may begin with reading and reflection on a biblical passage, including a psalm. Luther commented that he used the psalms as 'fire-lighters' to warm his heart when it was cold. Having been thus encouraged by the Word of God, he would then begin to pray.

We only come to this ministry because of the work of the Holy Spirit, so the first words ask for the Spirit's help. Knowing that God is utterly worthy of our trust, we may open our life without fear. The minister is also bidden to keep confidences (Note iv) and may thus be trusted as God is trusted. The minister, the Notes say, is 'a representative of the whole church' (Note i) — and our need is made known in the context of 'the communion of saints in heaven and on earth, and before you, my brother/sister', so we are by no means alone.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

After some time of naming the particular burdens, some words of counsel and encouragement may be said, before returning to the more formal words of confession. In confidence in Christ, the burden is handed over. Prayer follows, and then a clear declaration of forgiveness. The gospel is applied, through the medium of another Christian, person to person. What Christ has done for the whole world, he has also done for me. The statement 'You are free' has something of the openness of biblical words about it: it conveys both the truth of the gospel and the liberation of a person.

THE PEACE

Here the kiss of peace has its full meaning: reconciliation in Christ. The Peace belongs in the Lord's Supper, and in the life of the Lord's People, so its use naturally leads the person back into the fellowship, into the worship of the Christian community. That is the ordinary place where the gospel of the forgiveness of sins is ministered in the Christian life; there the signs of reconciliation, Christ's body and blood, are recognised and received.

Some further word of prayer — thanksgiving, perhaps — may be appropriate, but the service should not go on. The essential things have been said and done, and life now opens up in a fresh way. 'You are well: sin no more.'



Photo: Eddy Marmur

2. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit, that you are a child of God?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
(from the *Rules of the Band Societies*, 1738, drawn up by John Wesley. Things told 'in band' were to be kept secret.)

[Christian] ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and light-some, and said, 'He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death'. Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden.

(John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678).

God in Christ has given to men in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

(from the *Basis of Union*, paragraph 3.)

A CELEBRATION OF PERSPECTIVES NEW BEGINNINGS IN FAITH LB 433/PB 99

This is one of several services which may be used to affirm or reaffirm faith. Apart from the regular commitment of the Lord's Supper, these are found in the 'Baptism and Related Services': the Congregational and Personal Reaffirmation of Baptism, and the Covenant Service. The difference between those services and this is that this celebration of new beginnings does not presuppose baptism. One possible use for this service might be when someone is converted to faith in Christ, and who wishes immediately to witness to that experience, before taking instruction and prayerful preparation for baptism. Other people, who are already baptised, may prefer a service of witness that is not built on that sacrament, though they should be invited to study the Personal Reaffirmation of Baptism service very carefully.

Primarily, this is an opportunity for thanksgiving and testimony. As with several other orders in *Uniting in Worship*, such services have been held for years without the need for special orders, but the publication of this outline claims that part of our tradition, and both encourages and guides its continuance. It is intended to be part of a normal service of worship, which may well follow the Service of the Lord's Day. If the person(s) celebrating a beginning in faith is not baptised, the Lord's Supper would not be appropriate.

1 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

These simply provide a context for the witness. The involvement of minister and elder affirms the place of the person in the life of the church and its pastoral care. The person may wish to reflect on one of the scripture passages, and place their experience in the context of the biblical witness.

3 WITNESS

A brief testimony may then follow, or someone close to the person may speak for them.

4 CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

'There is no such thing as a solitary Christian', wrote John Wesley. This response affirms that the person belongs in a community of faith which knows the love of God the Holy Trinity and which witnesses to it in worship and service.

6 PRAYER WITH LAYING ON OF HANDS

As has been said above, this is a personal not a formal gesture. The scriptures frequently refer to the laying on of hands at various moments in the lives of Christians. It is the natural accompaniment to prayer.

7 BLESSING

This is really the conclusion of the laying on of hands with prayer. It pronounces God's blessing on the person rather than on the congregation — similar to the Blessing of a Marriage.

8 INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

The experience of the love of God in Christ is not a private possession: it is an evangelical gift. It is a gift which issues in service, *diakonia*. So an invitation may be given for others to make a public commitment or to reaffirm their faith. A similar call is made in the service for Personal Reaffirmation of Baptism (see LB 64).

The service then continues as planned. A number of hymns and songs are suggested at LB 438.

RECEPTION OF A MEMBER BY TRANSFER LB 439/PB 102

These two pastoral services belong in this section, which at every point affirms people's place in the Christian community, the church. The text might be 'Once you were no people, but now you are God's people' (1 Peter 2:10). So a particular congregation welcomes Christians from other places and other traditions into their fellowship.

RECEPTION OF A MEMBER-IN- ASSOCIATION LB 443/PB 105

To underline the fact that all Christian discipleship is a response to the gospel, these ser-

vices appropriately follow the preaching, and find their place among such churchly responses as the offering of faith, of material goods, and of intercessory prayer.

In each service, there is opportunity to affirm the faith as received by the Uniting Church in Australia, to hear the public affirmations of potential members, and for the church to express a welcome. Printing the services in the PB allows people to reflect on what membership means, and makes the words and responses available to the various participants.

