

## The Healing Ministry of Glendale Presbyterian Church

### **1. Introduction**

It was very difficult to find a church that qualified for the "overt healing ministry" required in the syllabus. Finally a friend of mine recommended Glendale Presbyterian Church. My wife and I have attended sessions of Prayer for individuals as also their annual Healing Conference where we were ourselves a Prayer Team ministering to people.

### **2. History of the Healing Ministry**

On the Healing Conference Robert Whitaker offered a class on "Introducing a Healing Ministry into a Church" in the course of which he talked about the way Glendale Presbyterian Church came to be involved in Healing Ministry. This gave also a good insight into the Philosophy of Ministry of Glendale Presbyterian Church.

Their Healing ministry began in the early 60s when people prayed for members of the congregation who were in hospital. This was no overt healing ministry, but was a start. Then Robert Whitaker began to be concerned about healing. At that time he was the associate Pastor of Glendale Presbyterian Church. He proposed to introduce a healing ministry to the senior Pastor Bruce Thielmann (Spelling might be wrong). He was assigned to investigate the topic of healing together with a committee (Presbyterian Characteristic) which was headed by an accomplished physician, in order to insure that nothing got out of hand.

When he was looking for documents of the Presbyterian Church on this topic he found a position paper from the 1940s and also some later documents. So he could work on the basis of them.

Together with the committee he reviewed scripture passages concerning healing and took the members of the committee to other churches which practiced Healing and individuals who had been healed.

One healed person that was interviewed and surveyed by the committee was a doctor himself. He had colon cancer and was healed through prayer. He collected all the documents pertaining to his illness like X-rays and medical documents. The head of the committee looked into these documents for a long time and was very impressed and finally convinced that healing was possible today.

Then Healing was cautiously introduced with a Healing Service once a month on a Sunday evening. The first times it was performed the senior pastor had special results when he prayed although he was formerly very skeptic of Healing Ministry. This helped to firmly establish Healing in the Church. After some years another Pastor came and the Healing Ministry slowly dwindled away. The lack of a supporting prayer ministry is seen by many as the reason for it.

Some years later the congregation became conscious of the need for Healing again and the Ministry in its current form was established.

### **3. Philosophy of Ministry**

Information about Glendale Presbyterians Philosophy of Healing can be found in the following documents:

1. Tract of Glendale Presbyterian Church "*The Church's Healing Ministry*"
2. Info-Sheets "*Training for the Ministry of Healing/Wholeness*"
3. "*The Work of the Holy Spirit*" by the Special Committee to the 182nd General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The following text quotes heavily from the above:

Healing is a ministry that encourages and often produces wholeness of the whole person. Healing is understood to be done by "God the Holy Spirit through prayer, the laying-on-of-hands, anointing with oil and the sacrament". This is understood as the biblical means also used in the New Testament and are employed by Jesus Christ and his apostles. Healing is available today like it was in those days. Healing is no substitute for medical treatment or diagnosis but is understood to work in conjunction with it.

The ultimate goal is **not** the recovery of health or the prevention of death but the restoration of the person into the right relationship with God, so that he is able to receive the divine grace. It is understood that healing frequently occurs as a result of the reconciliation of the person to God.

The Healing ministry is not confined to the physically sick, but for anyone desiring "wholeness of body, mind and spirit". Healing touches the whole person, broken relationships, broken spirits and broken bodies.

Healing can be public since it signifies the caring of the fellowship for the sick person and thereby is an expression of love within the fellowship. This cannot be provided by pastoral care alone.

The Healing Power is released by the prayers of two or more gathered in his name. Signs like healing following those prayers are a witness for the unbelievers.

The Ministry cannot fail since it is recognized that "sickness and death finally prevail over the temporal life of man". Healing is intended to built a relationship with God to face the "full reality of his finitude and his sin and at the same time have hope for growth". Healing helps to relate man to the Eternal, "enabling him to face the future, whether it be recovery in this world or death and resurrection in the world to come."

The ultimate healing is the resurrection life in Jesus Christ.

In the carrying out of the ministry the one praying is to listen to God and not do anything on his own. No persuasion or pushing is to be attempted while ministering. The one praying should simply listen to God and do what He tells him to. If there is need for deliverance the person should be taken to a separate room and people with experience in these things should join the team.

#### **4. Evaluation**

The way the Healing ministry was introduced into Glendale Presbyterian Church is exemplary and should be imitated by others. Churches have often been ripped apart by controversy about healing instead of strengthened like this one.

R. Whitaker was very careful in his introduction. He worked from the foundation of the Presbyterian Church instead of pressing foreign doctrine on them. He made it a joint venture with respected members of his congregation participating in the search for truth in this area. This resulted in the congregation being on the same level with him.

God finally gave his approval when this ministry was introduced, in that the skeptic senior Pastor himself experienced His authority over the church as also an authority to administer healing effectively.

Since I have personally participated in administering healing, I was surprised by the balance of doctrine to be found. This was just the style I was used to in my Lutheran-Home-Church in Germany. It felt very comfortable to minister that way without any wild emotional outbursts by someone or by persons pushing others into doing something. I would really enjoy continuing ministry in that church.

It is amazing how thoughtfully their doctrine is developed in the documents and how this results in a harmonious ministry of Healing. Committees have a use after all, they smoothe out all extreme positions and give a comfortable doctrinal position.

This comfortable position might sometimes become too comfortable and lead to a loss of zeal. Doctrinally I suspect that there is too much readiness to acknowledge a theology of suffering. I can read from their doctrine "If prayer does not work, then you have to accept the suffering as from God", although I did not find this written anywhere. Is there the readiness to fight in prayer for the healing of a person? Is there still zeal in prayer?