

A Report and Resources from the
Congregational Resource Guide

for

*“Becoming a Holy and Healing Church:
A Workshop with Graham Standish”*



This report is also available online, with links to resource providers, at
www.congregationalresources.org/healingchurch/workshopStandish.asp

- **Introduction**

In May of 2007 a two-day conference, "Church for the 21st Century," was held at the Washington National Cathedral. Inspired largely by Diana Butler Bass' book, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, the conference featured (in addition to Diana) such creative thinkers as Phyllis Tickle, Sam Lloyd, Marcus Borg, Barbara Brown Taylor, Michael Battle, and Tony Jones. Each of them shared their thoughts and questions about the challenges and opportunities currently facing congregations in America.

Also featured were congregational leaders who offered workshops on the practices discussed in *Christianity for the Rest of Us*—practices such as hospitality, testimony, discernment, and theological reflection. One of the workshops—led by Graham Standish—explored the practice of healing, especially healing prayer.

- **About Graham Standish**

N. Graham Standish is the pastor of Calvin Presbyterian Church in Zelienople, Pennsylvania. He also serves as an adjunct professor in the Doctor of Ministry and Certificate in Spiritual Formation programs at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, where he focuses on spirituality and congregational leadership. In addition, he teaches in Pittsburgh Presbytery's Commissioned Lay Pastor's Training Program and has served on the editorial board of *Presence*, the journal of Spiritual Directors International. A retreat leader and spiritual director, Graham holds a Ph.D. in formative spirituality from Duquesne University, an MSW from the University of Pittsburgh, and a Master of Divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Congregational Resource Guide staff attended Graham's workshop, "Becoming a Holy and Healing Church." Here are highlights of what we learned and a set of resources for congregations considering the ancient but vital practice of healing prayer.

- **Churches and healing**

Graham pointed out that many Christian churches focus on Jesus' teaching and preaching ministries, as well as his crucifixion and resurrection, while giving less attention to Jesus' healing ministry. This is unfortunate, because 40 percent of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and more than a third of Luke and John, focus on healing.

And while Scripture tells us that Jesus came to save us, the idea of "salvation" at one time was associated with healing: the word is from the Latin "salvus," which means to save and to *heal*. ("Salvus" is also at the root the of the word "salve," which refers to a substance that brings healing to a wound.) New Testament Greek translated "to save" as "sozo," a word that (like "salvus") means to save and to heal.

Yet today's churches have largely lost that connection between salvation and healing. Some churches associate salvation with being saved from sin in this life and hellfire in the next, while others associate salvation with (in Diana Butler Bass' words) "being a good person, a good citizen, helping others and being nice."

Why the lack of attention to healing practices and ministry? Why the disconnect between salvation and healing? Graham suggested that Christian history may provide some clues. For the ancient Christian communities, healing prayer and laying on of hands were significant liturgical practices. But large-scale deaths, such as those caused by the Black Plague during the Middle Ages, led Christians to associate "salvation" with saving souls for the afterlife.

In the Renaissance and later, medicine gained importance to the point where Christians started viewing it as a replacement for—rather than a complement to—prayer. And Enlightenment thinking tended to separate physical health from the realm of the soul or the spirit. By the mid-20th century, mainline Christians were so steeped in what Graham termed an "ultra-rational" culture that they often felt compelled to give "scientific" explanations for biblical stories of healing—even if doing so distorted the stories.

- **New interest in healing prayer**

In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in the connection between prayer and healing. The interest has been spurred, in part, by greater understandings of the connection between the mind and the body, as well as by the movement for holistic health care. Publications such as *Spirituality & Health*, and studies funded by organizations such as the Templeton Foundation, have drawn public attention to ways that prayer can affect personal and social well-being.

While many churches are not yet comfortable with including healing prayer in their liturgies and ministries, other churches—such as Calvin Presbyterian—are beginning to embrace this ancient practice. As *Christianity for the Rest of Us* explains, "Calvin Church has come to believe that healing is the work of God, based in the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and that we open ourselves to it through prayer."

- **Introducing healing prayer in your church**

If you are a congregational leader who would like to include healing prayer in your church, or who has discerned that God may be calling your church to this practice, Graham advises you to introduce it *slowly* and *gradually*. Any attempt to push it on a congregation that is not ready will only backfire.

When Graham became pastor at Calvin, he introduced healing by giving sermons in response to biblical readings on the topic. He also began discussing healing in adult education settings. Later, he offered the healing rite during Communion and trained others to do so. Still later, he formed a group that met for intercessory prayer on behalf of others in the church, the community, and the world. A group was also formed to visit those who were sick and to pray for and with them. Now, Calvin has a "prayer shawl" ministry—where church members knit shawls, pray over them, and provide them to those in need of healing.

None of these activities were "programs" driven by an agenda. Rather, they arose from the church's willingness to seek God's guidance and then to trust what Graham calls the "gentle nudgings" that felt right to them. Together, these activities express what church leader Diane

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McClusky calls "Christ's healing ministry of love."

- **A guide to healing prayer**

Calvin Presbyterian Church has created "**A Guide to Healing Prayer**," which explains healing prayer and offers ways to engage this ancient and sacred practice. Thanks to Graham Standish and the members of Calvin, this guide is available as a gift to those who visit the Congregational Resource Guide. You may print, view, and share this guide by going to this online address: <http://www.congregationalresources.org/healingchurch/guidehealingprayer.pdf>

Graham concluded his workshop with these thoughts about the practice of healing prayer. You might consider them as you use the "Guide to Healing Prayer" and other resources to begin a healing prayer ministry:

- We are called to serve as conduits of God's grace. In prayer, we ask God to open our spirits, minds, bodies, and relationships so that God's healing power may flow into us—and through us to others.
- God heals at the deepest, most spiritual levels first; the primary healing is of the soul and spirit.
- Remember that "to heal" means to make whole—and holy. The Old English word, "hal," is at the root of "heal," "hale," "healthy," and "holy." As John Koenig says in his essay on healing from *Practicing Our Faith*, "the central image for us is not cure but wholeness." And as Graham says in *Discovering the Narrow Path*, "Seeking healing means seeking wholeness and holiness for self, others, and the world instead of cure; too often people want God to cure them and then leave the rest alone."
- Just as some have viewed medicine as a replacement for (rather than a complement to) prayer, others have gone to the opposite extreme, endangering themselves or others by refusing medical intervention. God as Incarnational Presence works not only through prayer, but also through all practices that honor the body.
- Pray *specifically* but accept *faithfully*, giving thanks for God's healing work in and through you.

- **Resources**

On the following pages is a list of annotated resources related to healing and prayer. Other books by Graham Standish are listed as well.

For those wishing to explore additional dimensions of health ministry, CRG staff encourage you to visit the "Health Ministry" section of the Congregational Resource Guide. A special sub-section, on "Mental Health," is also featured.

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A Guide to Healing Prayer (Downloadable Flyer)

This guide to healing prayer tells us that God's healing begins with faith and surrender. It encourages us to put aside doubts (or, if that is too difficult, to ask God to have faith for us) and to give God "everything, including the power to choose what kind of healing to give you." The most important thing, says author Graham Standish, is trust—trust that God is healing us, even when it may not feel as if anything is happening. Also included are a sample prayer and suggestions for setting up a prayer discipline. You may view, print, and share this gift from Calvin Presbyterian Church by going to this online address:

<http://www.congregationalresources.org/healingchurch/guidehealingprayer.pdf>

Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance (Book)

N. Graham Standish, Author. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Challenging our over-stimulated Western lifestyles, Graham Standish encourages us to follow the "narrow path"—a path "rooted in God and God's will for us." This book explores "the kind of life that leads to a commitment to Christ, compassion for others and ourselves, and communion with God." The chapter on healing suggests ways we can become conduits of God's grace: by expecting that God can and will heal; by seeking God's guidance in discerning what and for whom to pray; by living prayerful lives; by praying for specific needs; by persevering; by thanking God; and by accepting the ways God heals.

Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith (Book)

Diana Butler Bass, Author. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

Christianity for the Rest of Us explores Diana Butler Bass' three-year study of mainline Protestant congregations that are discovering spiritual vitality. Such vitality comes through a willingness to be formed in a faith that deepens our trust in God's abundant love and strengthens our capacity to love others. The signposts of faith formation are practices from the Christian tradition that people do in community. One of these practices, healing, is highlighted in a chapter that focuses on Calvin Presbyterian Church and its ministries. Bass discovered that Calvin and other churches are places where those who receive God's healing grace are transformed, and in turn offer healing to the world.

"From Edge to Center: Overcoming Fear to Accept God's Call" (Article)

Diane McClusky, Author. *Congregations*. Spring 2006. Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 24-6. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute.

Diane McClusky, a prayer minister and healing ministry coordinator at Calvin Presbyterian Church, writes about her response to God's call. After being trained to pray with and anoint those who are sick, she began to experience God's love flowing through her—"a love that is so much more than I am capable of by myself." At Calvin, an email prayer concern ministry arose, as well as a "prayer shawl" ministry and an evening service of centering and healing prayer. Central to Diane's involvement in these ministries is gratitude: for the ways that God through Christ stands with her, holds her up, forgives her, and allows her to serve others.

Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People (Book)

Dorothy C. Bass, Editor. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Practicing Our Faith explores twelve central Christian practices—shared activities addressing fundamental human needs that, woven together, form a faithful way of life. These practices are grounded in ancient traditions, yet are informed by present needs and realities. John Koenig's essay on the practice of healing asserts that transformation happens when our illnesses are experienced in the context of "Christian paradox"—particularly the paradox that in the mystery of death symbolized by the cross we find the hope of new and resurrected life. Koenig outlines the history of Christian healing, describes congregational healing ministries, and suggests forms that healing ministries may take in the future.

Practicing Our Faith (Web Resource)

The "Practicing Our Faith" Web site, sponsored by the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, helps people engage in practices that connect eternal truths to present times. The twelve practices featured on the site include honoring the body, dying well, and healing. Each practice is further explored—through relevant quotes and scriptures, reflective discussion questions, sermons, worship materials, resource lists, and suggestions for ways to apply a practice in everyday life. Visitors to the site will especially appreciate reading about what different faith communities are doing to promote healing and wholeness. Activities from prayer to health screenings to spiritual support are described in detail.

Knitting into the Mystery: A Guide to the Shawl-Knitting Ministry (Book)

Susan S. Jorgensen, Susan S. IZard, Authors. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2003.

Roman Catholic spiritual director Susan Jorgensen and United Church of Christ minister Susan IZard combine prayerful reflection with knitting skills to present a guide to "contemplative knitting." In the process of learning this mindful, meditative practice, one creates shawls—and prays—for those who are sick or bereaved. The authors contend that both the givers and the receivers of these shawls are blessed as a result. Well illustrated, *Knitting into the Mystery* provides knitting instructions, suggestions for starting a prayer shawl ministry, and stories of shawls given and received in love. Also included are prayers, from various religious traditions, which can be offered with the shawls.

The Healing Light (Revised Edition) (Book)

Agnes Sanford, Author. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1972.

Agnes Sanford begins this classic on healing by observing that if an electric iron doesn't work, we don't dispute the existence of electricity. Nor do we plead with electricity to come into the iron and make it work. Instead, we correct the wiring so that electricity flows into the iron. Sanford believes that the power of God's healing energy similarly can flow into us and through us if we allow ourselves to become conduits of such energy—by relaxing, meditating upon God's presence, asking God's Spirit to dwell within us, and giving thanks for God's healing work. Numerous stories of healing illustrate the author's concepts.

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The Faith Factor: Proof of the Healing Power of Prayer (Book)

Dale A. Matthews, Author. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1998.

Dale Matthews, professor of medicine at Georgetown University, emphasizes the importance of a "faith factor" in one's own and others' health and well-being. This "faith factor" can enhance the immune system, help prevent and fight disease, and lead to greater emotional and spiritual resourcefulness. Matthews discusses the twelve elements that contribute to the healing efficacy of faith: *equanimity; temperance; beauty; adoration; renewal; community; unity; ritual; meaning; trust; transcendence; and love*. He then shows how these elements are cultivated through prayer, scriptural reading, and involvement in a faith community. The book concludes with an annotated list of resources on healing prayer, prayer ministries, spiritual direction, and Bible study.

Healing and Christianity: A Classic Study (Third Edition) (Book)

Morton Kelsey, Author. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995.

Noting John Polkinghorne's observation that freedom exists on not only the human level, but smaller (even subatomic) levels, Morton Kelsey asks: "Why then should we not grant to the Creator of freedom, freedom to act in specifically providential ways? The Divine is free to move into creation." From this premise, Kelsey examines biblical texts on healing and their relevance to today's churches. He also explores the impact of emotions on our bodies as well as the Christian worldview that calls us to carry forward Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. He concludes with practical suggestions for churches seeking to participate in a faithful and life-giving healing ministry.

The Handbook of Religion and Health (Book)

Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, David B. Larson, Authors. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.

The Handbook of Religion and Health summarizes and interprets the results of numerous studies on the intersection of religion and health. Psychiatrists Harold Koenig and David Larson join psychologist Michael McCullough to explore the historical contexts of this topic. They assess religion's positive and negative effects and present research on how religion affects mental health, physical health, and the use of health services. Implications of this research for professionals in both health and religion are presented as well. The authors conclude that overall, beliefs and practices "rooted within established religious traditions were found to be consistently associated with better health and predicted better health over time."

Additional Books by Graham Standish:

Becoming a Blessed Church: Forming a Church of Spiritual Purpose, Presence, and Power (Book)

N. Graham Standish, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004.

Graham Standish believes that a blessed church is one where people experience *God*, rather than simply experience church. Yes, the congregation will talk about God and serve God, but its

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overarching desire will be to know and *experience* God. Standish describes the biggest obstacle to such experience as "rational functionalism"—thinking that keeps a congregation rooted in restrictive and logic-bound theology. In contrast, the blessed church has a vibrant sense of faith, hope, and love; embraces the sacred; sees itself as the body of Christ; is filled with God's purpose, presence, and power; and is unafraid to serve God in its own unique way.

Forming Faith in a Hurricane: A Spiritual Primer for Daily Living (Book)

N. Graham Standish, Author. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998.

True to its title, *Forming Faith in a Hurricane* encourages us to strengthen and deepen our faith by exploring what it means to grow spiritually amid life's sometimes stormy contingencies. Graham Standish puts forth four central ideas about faith: that faith is always a *process*—an ongoing journey requiring nurture and care; that faith always entails *balance*—between passivity and responsibility, prayer and action, the individual and the community; that faith is always *relational*—rooted in a loving relationship with God and neighbor; and that faith requires us to *anchor ourselves in God*—choosing spiritual disciplines not as ends in themselves but as activities that help us seek God.

Humble Leadership: Being Radically Open to God's Guidance and Grace (Book)

N. Graham Standish, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007.

This book discusses humble leadership and compares it with other leadership approaches. While not dismissing the styles employed in corporations, Graham Standish explains how and why a pastor or other congregational leader should lead differently. For Standish, humble leadership is self-aware, prayerful, unifying, and Spirit-led; he devotes a chapter to each of these qualities. The final chapter examines ways to put theory into practice. Five essential skills are named: (1) lifting up other good leaders; (2) eliciting ideas, seeking God's guidance, and setting a direction; (3) giving guidance and then letting go; (4) accepting criticism, resisting offense, and providing support; and (5) becoming thankful.

Paradoxes for Living: Cultivating Faith in Confusing Times (Book)

N. Graham Standish, Author. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Noting that "paradox" comes from *para* (meaning "beyond") and *dox* (meaning "a belief"), Graham Standish asserts that a paradox appears contradictory but reveals truth beyond the apparent contradiction. This book explores such Christian paradoxes as these: to be strong, we must be weak; to save our lives, we must lose them; to know God, we must know ourselves; in trivial things lies greatness; to become mature, we must become children; to receive, we must give. The author devotes a chapter to each paradox—offering stories, insights, scriptural references, reflective exercises, and questions for reflection. Appendices supply an introduction to spiritual reading and a guide for group reflection.

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