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Dear friends,

Sue and I have spent a great deal of time in the last few months reading, thinking and praying about the Christian Healing Ministry. I guess, like many people, I have always had some concerns about 'faith healing' and tales of charlatans. I recall that when I was in Leyton there was a crusade in London for an American healer. There was a large billboard on the road between the curate's house and the church that I walked passed each morning. To advertise this crusade that was a large image of an overturned wheel chair. Next to it was the caption, *Come to Wembley on (the date) and see miracles happen*. I found this very uncomfortable. Yes of course God can and does make extra-ordinarily miraculous things happen. But they are not a show, not a spectacle, not something for which to sell tickets. I also knew a very troubled woman from the parish who went to this meeting. I had to pick up the emotional pieces when she was not apparently healed. I guess this has made me uncomfortable and has hung like a shadow over my approach to ministry through the years.

Yet we read of Jesus healing in the Gospels. We read of him sending the disciples to heal. We read of Paul and Barnabas in Acts naturally healing people. Down through the ages the Church has been involved in healing, founding many hospitals, with nuns taking the equivalent role of nurses. Many churches have in the last thirty years rediscovered the centrality of the healing ministry to their practice of church, including Church of England Churches. Archbishop Rowan is Patron of Burrswood Hospital in Kent, where clinical and pastoral care are seen naturally to complement each other in the healing of body, mind and spirit. It was the founder of Burrswood, Dorothy Kerrin, who appears to have re-awakened in the Church of England the belief that healing is at the centre of the Good News of Jesus Christ. So why are we afraid of the idea and consider it to be rather dangerous?

The reality is that we do associate it with faith healing and charlatans. However, we need to clear our minds of these preconceptions and look to consider a new definition of healing. The Christian Healing Ministry is about healing in body, mind and spirit. Perhaps it would be more helpful to say spirit, mind and body. For the healing of our spirit is a great gift from God. With a deep assurance of God's love for us, we can endure much that happens to our frail bodies. It is our spirit, renewed through the Holy Spirit, that can give us a new way of viewing life, and different priorities. In many of his letters in the New Testament, Paul writes about developing the 'mind of Christ', by which he means allowing God to direct our thoughts and attitudes. Both of these are often healings that happen in a slow and developing way, but can completely transform someone's life. Defined this way, the healing ministry is really central to much of our work in the parish.

Of course, physical healing is more problematic. I have known people be healed after much prayer from conditions that defy explanation. I have also known of people who have not been healed. This makes it look like God is partial, sometimes listening and other times ignoring. We know that cannot be so. We also know that at the time of Jesus the Pharisees blamed illness and disability on the sins of either the person or previous generations in their families. Jesus demonstrated that this understanding was simply wrong. We cannot know why some people are healed and others are not. But that should not stop us praying for healing in spirit, mind and body. We already pray for people in our services and have a prayer chain for those for whom we pray each day. Ingatestone PCC had an away day in June to begin to consider the Christian healing ministry. There will be the opportunity for more people in the parish to consider these issues. We may well also be looking to introduce a regular service at Ingatestone Church with a focus on healing.

It amazes me that after thirteen years in ministry I am only now really beginning to give proper consideration to something that should be central to our faith. For I personally know that twenty-two years ago in hospital God healed my spirit.

Yours in Christ, Patrick.