

# Healing Touch and Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry

## Educational Programs Appropriate for Christian Healing in Our World Today

A Statement to All Healing Practitioners Regarding the Committee on Doctrine's recent Guidelines for Evaluating Reiki to the American Catholic Bishops

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The United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Doctrine recently published "Guidelines for Evaluating Reiki as an Alternative Therapy." In response, many Catholic institutions eliminated Reiki, Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry (HTSM) and Healing Touch, (HT) as well as other forms of energy healing from their list of complementary therapies offered in their institutions. Within these institutions, both Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch programs have provided continuing education classes to nurses, chaplains and the public, teaching safe and effective non-pharmacological techniques to relieve pain and discomfort. In response to the Guidelines to the bishops, these programs were eliminated because many Catholic institutions and agencies made the assumption that HTSM and HT were the "similar therapeutic techniques" referred to in the document.

The purpose of this article is not to respond to the assessment of Reiki as a valid form of healing for Christians. Rather, the intent is to assure Healing Touch and Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry practitioners that these programs are indeed appropriate for Christian practice. It is troubling that many institutions equated all therapeutic energy medicine practices with Reiki, which is a single modality. The conclusion of the USCCB Committee on Doctrine's Guidelines is that the practice of Reiki is in the realm of superstition and, thus viewed as:

"Not compatible with either Christian teaching or scientific evidence and that it would be inappropriate for Catholic institutions, such as Catholic health care facilities and retreat centers, or persons representing the Church, such as Catholic chaplains, to promote or to provide support for Reiki therapy."

Catholic sisters, nurses, chaplains, and priests over the past twenty years have personally embraced many different forms of therapeutic complementary healing techniques. These practices include learning to become a healing presence, the laying-on of hands, Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry, and Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch, and Reiki. Their list of practices also includes aromatherapy, cranial sacral, polarity, and other uniquely inspired healing techniques, based in ancient knowledge. For these health care practitioners, this work is an expression of their Christian call to service.

The Committee on Doctrine's Guidelines addresses the lack of science behind Reiki so I would like to give a brief summary of what I find to be the scientific basis for energy healing.

### The Science behind Energy Healing

Energy can be both measured and photographed. You might recall that early photography of energy fields was with Kirlian photography. Now scientists are able to provide quantitative measurements of the energy field using sound and radio frequencies which are beamed into the subject and recorded as they emerge from the body. Semi-qualitative analysis uses video camera and computer to measure light reflected by the subject's energy field.<sup>1</sup> Disharmony in the body's magnetic field can thus lead to illness and researchers are producing credible evidence to support this belief.

Dr. Richard Gerber MD explains that the etheric field which extends two to four inches away from the body is a "holographic energetic template." It is an exact duplicate of the physical body. When this etheric field is healthy and orderly, the body, in turn, reflects a state of health. The etheric field controls the flow of life energies into the body. Patterns of illness occur at the energetic level long before they are manifested in the physical

body. Energy therapists through their experience can “sense” or “feel” or “see” pattern changes in the field. Studies conducted in Japan have shown that practitioners can emit powerful biomagnetic fields in the same frequency range that biomedical researchers have identified for jump starting healing of soft and hard tissue injuries.<sup>3</sup> The laying-on of hands and other forms of energetic healing are therefore useful in restructuring this etheric field toward a healthy pattern.<sup>2</sup> When we see disease in the body, it manifests as chemical imbalances but the underlying problem is actually electromagnetic. So, “balance can often be restored by providing the correct or ‘healthy’ frequency, and entraining the oscillations back to coherence.”<sup>4</sup>

There are many theories in physics which can only partially explain or give an underpinning for how energy healing really works. Marilyn Schlitz, current President and former Director of Research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, reflects what many already feel. It is only a matter of time she says, before physicists and researchers from many different fields will be able to understand not only how body/mind/spirit are connected, but also what is happening when someone touches another with an intent to heal. The most profound implication is that we are all interconnected at a level that boggles most of our minds. If I touch another with the intention to heal, I can influence that person’s energy and physiology. This requires that I be more thoughtful and responsible for my actions. How we connect to our Source, to God, is a critical factor in all of healing.<sup>5</sup>

To do energy healing, one must be in their heart and come from the heart. Psychologist Robert Keck Ph.D., writes that love can be an incredibly powerful healing force. “We cannot underestimate the healing power of human connectedness fueled by the energy of love” he says.<sup>6</sup> Graham, Litt and Irwin’s book, *Healing from the Heart*, summarizes what many of us are coming to understand about healing. That is, “the heart as the inner point of human personality is open directly to God...” and “What flows from the heart is love, an emotion as necessary for health as water.”<sup>7</sup> The Institute of HeartMath researchers has found that sincere “heartfelt” experiences bring about increased coherence in the heart’s electromagnetic field. These coherent frequencies of the heart have healing power.<sup>8</sup>

Patient satisfaction was not considered in the Committee’s Guidelines to the Bishops on Reiki and similar energy techniques. Numerous research studies in Healing Touch have shown an overwhelming positive response as to a sense of improved relaxation, improved sense of control, positive change in energy, improved interpersonal relationships and improved sense of well-being, decreased anxiety, pain, and decreased side effects of cancer treatments. Healing Touch has had a research committee, headed by a clinical research specialist, for over ten years. The committee has published many studies in juried nursing and science journals. Not to be overlooked -- the body of personal testimony on how the work has improved one’s life speaks strongly to the nature of how we heal.

The Commission on Doctrine raised the question of appropriateness of Christians doing energy healing. The practice of Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch as complementary therapies appropriate for Christians to practice is addressed in the subsequent the following section of this article.

### How Is the Work of Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch Appropriate for Christians to Practice?

All energy healing has its roots in the laying-on of hands which was practiced by both Jesus and the early Christian church. Writings of the ancient Greeks and other early cultures extol the benefits of touch coupled with the intent to heal. The sacred scriptures of the Judeo-Christian tradition contain many stories of healing through touch. Both the Old and New Testament healing stories challenge our faith and understanding. In the final verses of the Gospel of Mark, we read that Jesus told his disciples that one of the ways that his disciples will be recognized is that, “They will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Mark 16:18.

This gives rise to the question: “What actually happens when we touch another with intent to heal?” With prayer, a healing practitioner can become an instrument or vessel through which God’s healing energy can flow to someone in need of prayer and healing. The hands may be off the physical body, in the energy body [energetic field] or if appropriate, the practitioner

may use light touch on the physical body. Sister Mary Elizabeth O'Brien, nursing professor at Catholic University, states that, "Loving empathetic, compassionate touch is perhaps the most vital dimension of a nursing theology of caring." (Italics mine) In other words, touch is within the very fabric of being a nurse.<sup>9</sup>

In spiritual healing the practitioner connects to God [pure energy] to become a conduit of this higher energy for someone else's healing. Every time we interact with another person there is an exchange of energy during which both practitioner and recipient are revitalized. Therefore, this is not transference of the healer's own energy. This energetic "boost" assists in resolving present disease processes and helps the recipient return to a state of balance. This is not done with a conscious intent to direct God's energy, but rather, a prayer or intention offered through a heart connection between practitioner and recipient for the highest good of the recipient.

Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch, are both programs in energy healing and do have significant differences. Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry grew out of the Healing Touch program in response to those who wanted to know how Healing Touch related to their Christian faith and life experience. HTSM is steeped in the Christian tradition of prayer, laying-on of hands and anointing with oil and is based on the Christian and Hebrew scriptures, whereas Healing Touch is a nursing modality with a clinical focus. The intent of HT is to restore balance to body/mind/spirit. It is spiritual healing that is appropriate for all spiritual paths. "Healing Touch is the art of caring that comes from the heart of the healer and reaches to the person who is receiving help." Janet Mentgen, RN, founder of Healing Touch.<sup>10</sup>

Both Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch educational programs emphasize self-care and being of service to others. They are both based on a philosophy of caring compassionately for another human being with the aim of restoring harmony and balance within the person's "energy system." Whether one calls upon the many names of God or simply taps into "higher energy" all Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch practitioners recognize that healing is not of human design. When acting on behalf of another, we become conduits or instruments of healing for others. We do this with-

out attachment to a particular outcome. When we give touch from the heart, God uses us as conduits to pour compassionate graces where they are most needed. Healing is one of those moments of grace. The primary steps in any healing intervention are centering—connecting to God [Divine Source, Higher Energy], setting intention for the highest good for the individual, assessing the need and treatment [action].

There are Codes of Ethics and Standards of Practice in both the Healing Touch and Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry programs to which students and practitioners alike agree to adhere in their practices. The public are protected and guarded by these standards. The following are taken from the HTSM Standards of Practice:

#### Standard 7

"HTSM healing practitioners recognize that God, the Divine Source is the cause of all healing. The HTSM healing practitioner is a facilitator of the health/healing process, not the cause of the changes."

#### Standard 8

"The HTSM practitioner recognizes and holds sacred, the individual's right to choose their own spiritual path and respects all spiritual beliefs and practices of the client. The goal is to support the person on his/her own spiritual path using Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry as a resource to complement that path. HTSM healing practitioners offer this work to others out of Christian love, compassion and service to all brothers and sisters and hold as a model, the healing ministry of Jesus to all peoples."

When the client or patient requests healing prayer and/or healing work, there is a client/practitioner relationship that is held sacred.

Christian beliefs are based on the principle of the greatest commandment, "love one another." These are the words that Jesus spoke when he was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" He replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your

neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:30. And again he said "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." John 13:35. The principles upon which Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry and Healing Touch educational programs are built are in fact, completely compatible with Christian beliefs according to the Sacred Scriptures.

### What Can We Positively Do in Response to the American Catholic Bishops Statement?

1. First, pray for the Bishops to discern the sacredness of these ministries. There is untold power in prayer.
2. Respect patients' rights and wishes when they request healing prayer and/or Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry or Healing Touch work.
3. If the institution for whom you work for forbids the practice of Healing Touch or Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry, inform your patients when they request these forms of healing that you are able to pray for their healing from a distance.
4. If you are a nurse or chaplain in a hospital, nursing home or hospice, you can remind administration that patients have a right to request healing prayer and complimentary energy healing modalities, and that to interfere is to deny patients their rights.
5. Continue to come from the heart and continue to practice healing as taught by Jesus. This includes prayer and the laying-on of hands and by extension, other hand-mediated healing techniques.
6. Remember that you are a conduit, an instrument and vessel through which God's healing energy or grace flows to others. This occurs whether you are praying formally or informally for others in your ministry.
7. Continue your educational process either as a student or graduate of Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry or Healing Touch. The more you learn, the more you will discover that doing less in your practice is actually doing more.

8. If Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry or Healing Touch can no longer be offered in your Catholic institution, move the program to another venue.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Jane and Grant Solomon, *Harry Old eld's Invisible Universe*, p. 24.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard Gerber, MD, *Vibrational Medicine*, p. 51.
- <sup>3</sup> James Oschman, PhD, *Energy Medicine, The Scientific Basis*, pp. 79-80.
- <sup>4</sup> James Oschman, PhD, *Energy Medicine, The Scientific Basis*. P. 135.
- <sup>5</sup> Marilyn Schlitz, "Intentionality in Healing: Mapping the Integration of Body, Mind and Spirit," *Alternative Therapies*, Nov, 1995.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Keck, *Healing as a Sacred Path*, pp. 168, 171.
- <sup>7</sup> Rochelle Graham, Flora Litt, and Wayne Irwin, *Healing From the Heart, A Guide to Christian Healing for Individuals and Groups*, p. 21.
- <sup>8</sup> G. Stroink, "Principles of Cardiomagnetism," in *Advances in Biomagnetism*, S.J. Williamson, et al., editors.
- <sup>9</sup> Sister Mary Elizabeth O'Brien, *Spirituality in Nursing, Standing on Holy Ground*, pg. 16.
- <sup>10</sup> Dorothea Hover-Kramer, Janet Mentgen and Sharon Scandrett-Hibdon, *Healing Touch, A Resource for Health Care Professionals*, p. 162.