

**Guidelines for Healing Prayer Ministry in the Diocese of Portsmouth**

Introduction

Healing prayer ministry teams have become well-established within a number of parishes in the Diocese of Portsmouth. There are also parishes who aspire to having such prayer ministry as part of their pastoral ministry either within or additional to normal weekly services. There is a need for guidelines as to good practice for members of these teams in order that congregations have confidence in the prayer ministry being offered and all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety of the persons receiving and delivering this ministry.

These guidelines have been adapted from the House of Bishop’s Report *A Time to Heal* ***(A Time to Heal, The Archbishops Council, London, Church House Publishing. 2000)***, and the linked Handbook: *The Development of Good Practice in the Healing Ministry* and are commended to parishes for guidance as to good practice for Healing Prayer Ministry within this Diocese.

Attached to these Guidelines are **Appendices** which outline guidance regarding **Appropriate Training**, current **Diocesan Safeguarding Policy** and example **Role Descriptions** as they relate to this ministry.

Principles Underlying Healing Ministry

The practice of Christian Healing Ministry assumes certain principles derived from the theological tradition and practice of the church in which ministry is carried out. Whereas these are to some extent generic within the breadth of Anglican tradition, there is a need for clarity and are set out within the Report *A Time to Heal*. In summary these include:

* That there are sound theological reasons why the Christian church is called to pray for healing and that we should expect to see evidence of God’s healing in this day.
* Christian Healing is defined in *A Time to Heal* as: *“progress towards health and wholeness. The process through which the individual develops a physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social state of well-being, in harmony with God, with others and with the environment.”*
* That all Christians, both lay and ordained are called to pray for the sick and those in need:

Our prayer for healing is based on the authority given us by Jesus to pray in His Name and we have no other inherent power or authority of our own, but are to be reliant on the Holy Spirit.

* Although all Christians are called to pray for the sick it is appropriate within a parish church setting for those who have been given authority by their incumbent to be available to pray for others, and that as members of a healing prayer ministry team they shall be responsible and accountable to the incumbent. [Where there is a vacancy they will be accountable to the Area Dean as well as their churchwardens.]
* Those undergoing designated training shall attend with the knowledge and support of their incumbent, but completion of a course does not necessarily imply permission to pray for healing unless authorised by their incumbent to do so.
* That training and experience should be as much about spiritual growth and development of right attitudes and gifting as it is about gaining knowledge or practising ways of praying for others.
* It is recognised that Gifts of the Holy Spirit may be exercised by individuals within the healing ministry: These need to be used humbly and under authority and with openness to correction where necessary.
* The context for prayer for healing will be varied and includes pastoral ministry as well as congregational opportunities.
* The offering of prayer ministry during or after services will vary according to the custom and tradition of each parish church and will be at the direction of the Incumbent. Opportunities for prayer ministry, with or without the laying on of hands and/or anointing with oil, include the Common Worship “A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing”, which may or may not be a service of Holy Communion.

House of Bishops’ Guidelines for Good Practice in the Healing Ministry

(The following guidelines for good practice are taken from the Handbook: *The Development of Good Practice in the Healing Ministry*):

“The healing ministry is Jesus' ministry entrusted to us, always to be exercised with reverence, love and compassion. The guiding principle is to recognize the presence of God in those receiving this ministry and honour his presence in them.

1. **Prayer and preparation.** The healing ministry is based on prayer in the name of Jesus Christ; those involved in this ministry should be prayerful, regularly practicing Christians who acknowledge his healing love and are willing to pray and listen for guidance in order to minister appropriately to others.
2. **Safety.** All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure the safety of the person receiving this ministry. People have a right to know what is being provided and how they will be ministered to.
3. **Accountability and diocesan regulations.** Everyone involved in the healing ministry needs clear lines of accountability to recognize who holds relevant authority within their parish church. All reasonable steps should be taken by those involved to ensure their awareness of current law as it applies to this ministry, e.g. data protection, informed consent. Legal liability issues must be considered from an insurance viewpoint. Existing diocesan regulations should be also followed.
4. **Training.** Individuals should receive appropriate training in this ministry and be kept up to date with developments and its ecumenical expression. Healing team leaders must ensure that members have opportunities for training and a common understanding of good practice.
5. **Competence and boundaries.** Persons in this ministry should be aware of their personal limitations and ensure that they are properly prepared and fit to be involved. If fitness is doubtful or compromised or there is a conflict of interest, they should withdraw from ministering to others. Professional boundaries with health care professionals and chaplaincies should be observed.
6. **Personal conduct.** The healing ministry is part of the message of the gospel; the personal conduct of everyone involved should encourage confidence in this ministry and not undermine it. Language, personal hygiene, general appearance, body language and touch used by those ministering should be appropriate, considerate and courteous towards those receiving it. No-one should be ministered to against their will.
7. **Confidentiality and public statements.** People's privacy and dignity should be respected and protected. Any limitations to confidentiality should be explained in advance and any disclosure should be restricted to relevant information. It should be conveyed only to appropriate people, normally with the parishioner's consent, and not misused in any way.
8. **Counselling and psychotherapy.** These specific treatments, as distinct from pastoral care and listening, should only be provided by accredited counsellors and therapists who adhere to the codes of ethics and practice of their regulatory organizations and who have professional insurance cover.
9. **Deliverance.** The House of Bishops' guidelines (1975) should be followed and diocesan advisors consulted when necessary.\*
10. **Partnership.** The healing ministry should be carried out in co-operation, where appropriate, with chaplains and representatives of our ecumenical partners, and those involved in professional and voluntary healthcare, whilst recognizing that they may be bound by other codes of conduct.”

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(\* The House of Bishops’ Guidelines for Good Practice in the Deliverance Ministry have been revised in 2012)

Additional Diocesan Guidelines Regarding Healing Prayer Ministry Teams

* Developing a Healing Prayer Ministry Team
  + Development and leadership of any prayer ministry team should be under the direction of the incumbent.
  + It is advisable that there should be a prayer ministry team leader who is responsible for the supervision of the team and accountable to the incumbent.
  + There should be prayerful discernment both by individuals seeking to be involved in a prayer ministry team as well as the incumbent and team leadership as to whether they have the appropriate qualities and gifting.
  + Individuals admitted to a team should be regular members of the church, authorised by the incumbent with the support of the PCC.
  + The size and composition of teams will vary with the needs and practice of each parish church, but consideration needs to be given for both men and women to be involved and for there to be appropriate leadership, oversight and accountability.
  + **All members of parish prayer ministry teams are expected to complete DBS checks and safeguarding training for both children and vulnerable adults. The process of ‘Safer Recruitment’, including the need for referees, should be followed. [See Diocesan Website ‘Safer Recruitment’ for a full description of this process as well as the Church of England “Safer Recruitment Practice Guidance 2016”.]**
  + **PCC and Diocesan Safeguarding policy and practice guidance should be adhered to at all times and team members should attend relevant safeguarding training on appointment and thereafter according to current Diocesan Guidelines. [See Appendix 3. “Safeguarding Guidelines for Healing Prayer Ministry”]**
* Personal Qualities of Members of Healing Prayer Ministry Teams:

In addition to the above comments it is desirable that members of teams should:

* + Be of sufficient maturity in the faith, in good standing within their church and community and be committed to personal disciplines of regular prayer and Bible study.
  + Demonstrate an appropriate compassion and empathy towards the needs of others.
  + Be reliable and trustworthy.
  + Be willing to submit to the authority of their incumbent and team leader and be accountable to them.
  + Demonstrate a willingness to learn, to be corrected if necessary, and willing to update training according to the guidelines for the Team.
  + Have an ability to listen; not only to those seeking help but also to God and other members of the team. (A course such as “*Just Listen*” available via the *Acorn Christian Healing Foundation* may be helpful.)
  + Be self-aware in terms of their own physical, mental and spiritual needs and when these may affect their involvement in this ministry.
  + Understand the limitations of their experience and ability and seek help where needed.
* Specific Guidance for Good Practice
  + Consideration should be given for the need to avoid 1:1 opposite sex prayer ministry. Ideally prayer teams should consist of same sex pairs offering prayer to an individual of the same sex or a mixed sex pair able to offer prayer for those of either sex.
  + In this regard the setting for prayer ministry in church should take into account the need to maintain confidentiality and privacy as well as being open and visible.
  + Parental consent is required where prayer for children is concerned and parishes should consider guidelines for prayer teams to address these situations.
  + Prayer for healing should be seen as occurring alongside conventional medicine and should be supportive of current and planned healthcare interventions. Current medication or treatment plans should not be undermined whether intentionally or not.
  + Particular care is needed when praying for those suffering from mental illness. Prayers for those suffering from mental illness should aim to be brief and supportive, mindful of potential vulnerability.
  + Those suffering from psychotic illness need special consideration, especially if symptoms are not controlled. Indications of this might include reference to voices, disordered thinking that is difficult to follow and grandiose or persecutory ideas. There is often awareness that the individual has lost a sense of reality and behaviour may be unusual. In severe depression suicidal ideas may present themselves and there may be withdrawal, poverty of speech and self-neglect. These situations need careful handling and it is important that members of teams should seek the help of others who have appropriate experience and include their incumbent or available clergy in managing the person’s needs. Urgent referral to mental health services in rare circumstances may be needed.
  + If there are suggestions in the course of prayer ministry that someone may need help with deliverance ministry this should always be referred to available clergy who would then be able to access the help of the Diocesan Deliverance Adviser if necessary. Diocesan Deliverance Guidelines must be followed.
  + A clear distinction should be made between prayer for healing and counselling: The temptation to engage in prolonged discussion of personal needs and to be directive in giving advice is to be avoided. Consideration should be given for persons thought to be in need of counselling to be referred with consent to appropriate pastoral care within the church and encouragement to seek referral to healthcare or other approved counselling as necessary.
  + Confidentiality of information given by those offered prayer ministry should be respected and care taken not to pass on information to other parties without the specific consent of those ministered to. Such information should be relevant, restricted and only given to those who need to know in order to take action for the benefit of the individual. There are exceptional circumstances where for legal reasons disclosure needs to be made to others with or without consent: This should be done preferably with the knowledge and understanding of the individual and with full discussion of the reasons for such disclosure. Examples include a disclosure of child or vulnerable adult abuse, a safeguarding issue, a potential or past criminal activity where there is likelihood of harm to others, psychotic illness needing urgent medical intervention especially where there is possibility of self-harm or harm to others. These circumstances will usually require the knowledge and assistance of available clergy and safeguarding, medical or social services advice sought.
  + There should be a process in place for the appropriate management of complaints against members of a prayer ministry team.

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