**Ministry to Persons who are**

**Sick or Confined**

The ministry of the church to persons who are sick or confined is rooted in the conviction that God desires wholeness for all. The good news contained in the healing stories of the Gospels reveals that the power of God breaks into human experience; that the compassion of Christ reached the hurt and outcast person. They tell of healing actions by which people are restored to health and wholeness. The works of Christ are reinforced by the faith and action of the early church as described in the Epistle of James. The suggestion by James that the sick call for a visit from the elders is a reminder that they are an important part of the congregation. If the sick cannot assemble with the congregation on Sunday, then the congregation, through its representatives, should minister to the sick wherever they are.

Three things about these healing stories and practices have implications for the church's ministry to persons who are sick or confined.

1. Jesus employed both word and touch in healing, often in combination.

2. There is often a direct link between forgiveness of sin and physical well being.

3. There is often a relationship between wholeness and restoration to community, indicating that our ministry to sick and shut-in persons is a communal responsibility.

**Pastoral Considerations**

Those who visit in the name of the church prepare for their sacred task with Prayer. While visiting, it is important to concentrate on the person and to be sensitive to the faith journey in which they are on at the time.

As well as general prayers, be specific in prayer concerning the person, this illness, the concerned loved ones. The visitor is leading a person to dialogue with God in the most simple, direct words possible.

Through SCRIPTURE, God speaks to us of compassion, love, and constant presence whether the occasion is one of joy and relief, or one of pain, frustration, loneliness or despair. The psalms are a rich source of lament as well as thanksgiving and praise. As a rule, readings should be brief, one or two verses may be all that is needed.

SILENCE is a ministry. The quiet presence of the visitor may be more comforting than words, giving time for God's Spirit to speak and act.

LISTEN. People who are ill do not want to talk about trivial things. They may want to speak of things that are difficult to express. Listen.

TOUCH can be a healing action. To hold hands during conversation, silence or prayer suggests inclusion and a connectedness with others. For some people, touching is not easy or comfortable and the visitor should be aware of the limitations and sensibilities of the patient. There can be legal implications if touch is or appears to be inappropriate. In spite of the need for restraint, touch is a necessary part of healing and wholeness.

CLEANLINESS is essential. Hands should be washed between each visit to avoid spreading infection from one patient to another.

Those who are sick and those who are confined are not always the same. The sick are often able to go out and to join the community at worship. The confined may be a healthy person who is the sole care-giver for a dependent family member and suffers from the imposed isolation. All require the ministry of the church at their own point of need.

The resources which follow include readings and prayers for use in a variety of situations with those who are ill or confined. Three orders of service are provided:

Proclamation and Prayer;

Holy Communion;

Anointing and the Laying on of Hands.

All three services could be adapted for use in the church, home, nursing home, hospital, extended care facility or other institution. This is the ministry of the congregation and members of the congregation should be encouraged to be present and to participate.

From the earliest days, the church has ministered to those who were ill through ANOINTING and THE LAYING ON OF HANDS. Although lost from use at times and abused at others, the healing ministry of the church through touch, anointing and prayer is rightfully being reclaimed.

In anointing, the use of olive oil is traditional but any odourless oil from natural sources is acceptable. At the appropriate time in the service, the minister dips a thumb in oil and makes the sign of the cross on the person's forehead while saying the words of anointing.

The minister, with others assisting, may proceed to lay hands on the person, offering prayer for healing and words of benediction. Members of the congregation should be encouraged to participate in the laying on of hands and should know at what time in the service the action comes and what is expected of them. Be sensitive to the nature of the illness and where hands may be placed without injury. Normally, the minister will place a hand on the head of the person while others place a hand over that of the minister's. This procedure may vary.

People need not be physically sick to request or receive anointing and the imposition of hands. This is a prayer for wholeness. Therefore, there are several occasions when the rite of healing may be used. It may, after careful instruction of the congregation, be used in a public service of worship which is a Service of the Word or a Service of the Word and Holy Communion. Depending on the circumstances, it may be appropriate after the sermon and before the prayers of intercession; or it may be more appropriate after the communion of the people and before the final benediction. When it follows communion, the community have been nourished at the Lord's Table and reminded of their unity in Christ before engaging in this ministry.

**Scripture Resources**

Scripture readings must sometimes be quite short -- one or two verses may have to do. In reading longer passages, read slowly and meditatively. Do not rush through to get to the point where you can explain what it means -- let the scripture speak for itself. Suggested scripture resources are listed below.

**In time of suffering**

*Psalm 88*

*Psalm 102:1-13, 18-22*

*Matthew 11:28-30*

*Romans 5:1-5*

*Romans 8:35, 37-39*

*I Corinthians 12:7-10*

**God’s supportive presence**

*Exodus 33:14*

*Psalm 46:1-7, 10-11*

*Psalm 91:1-6, 11-12, 14-16*

*Isaiah 43:1-3a*

*Isaiah 61:1-3*

*Matthew 11:28-30*

**Forgiveness of sin**

*Psalm 51:1-2, 7-12*

*Psalm 103:1-13 (14-18\_*

*Matthew 9:2-8*

*Romans 5:8*

*II Corinthians 5:16-21*

**Patience and Trust**

*Psalm 27:1, 4-9, 13-14*

*Psalm 73:26*

*Mark 14:36*

*I Peter 4:12-13*

**The Christian perspective**

*Psalm 145:14-22*

*Romans 8:18-27*

*I Corinthians 1:18-25*

*Colossians 1:22-29*

*I John 4:16*

**Thanksgiving on recovery**

*Psalm 30:1-5, 11-12*

*Psalm 116:1-9, 16-19*

**For the dying person**

*Psalm 23*

*John 14:1-6*

*Romans 8:35, 37-39*

*Revelation 21:1-7*