



## Healing as a Ministry of the Church

It has been an accepted truism that the church has a healing ministry. But different approaches have been taken throughout history to conduct this ministry. In the early church it was acknowledged that the “gift of healing” was one of the many gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-11). But even then the work of physicians was known and apparently valued, and at least one became a Christian—“Luke the beloved physician” (Col 4:14). At another time (the sixteenth century) an anonymous writer spoke of the “sacramentes of the chirche: the whiche cureth, releueth & heleth all defautes.” Furthermore, the word *Seelsorge* (“care” or even “cure of souls”) has been part of the living language of the church. And of course the church has founded hospitals and other institutions at home and in foreign lands. Clearly, many approaches to healing ministry have been taken.

In modern times healing has been understood increasingly as a domain over which the medical profession should most properly preside. But healing is a process of profound dimensions, involving virtually all aspects of a person’s life—physical, spiritual, psychological, social, environmental, and even political. This has become recognized widely, as the essays which follow illustrate so well. Within the broad complex and complexity of what healing entails, it is clear that the church can and ought to have a role, a “ministry of healing.”

The first two articles in this issue offer perspectives on healing. The very first has been written by a physician and surgeon, *Richard YaDeau*, who distinguishes between the intervention which medications and surgery can provide and the healing process itself, which involves a person’s psycho-social and spiritual needs. He indicates ways in which a pastor and congregation can aid healing, ways in which pastor and physician can collaborate, and ways in which they face common problems. *Ralph Peterson* surveys aspects of the church’s ministry of healing, relating it to the themes of Christian anthropology, Word and Sacrament, stewardship of creation, and witness in the public sphere.

The next section of articles approaches the theme from exegetical, theological, and pastoral insights. *Daniel Simundson* surveys health and healing in the Bible, within which healing means more than attaining physical health. He raises eight issues in regard to sickness and health and shows how various biblical writers and theological perspectives respond to them. *William Hulme* draws upon personality theory, theological resources, and illustrations from his own ministry to speak of pastoral care as an expression of the corporate ministry of the church. *Stanley Olson* provides insights for preaching on several miracle stories of healing in the Gospels, showing how they connect up with other themes in the ministry of Jesus and the perspectives of the evangelists. *Stewart Govig* writes concerning ministry with the handicapped.

He offers theological resources, sharpens our awareness of the needs of the handicapped, and provides specific suggestions for ministry with them. *Charles Kammer* leads us to take another look at grace. Grace has been interpreted as an individual's possession, which has supported divisiveness and oppression. But if its social character is considered, grace can be the basis for healing human communities.

The Resources section contains two articles. The first is an informative survey of health and healing in America, written by the Assistant Surgeon General and Director of the Centers for Disease Control, *William Foegen*, who suggests that churches could spark a revolution toward giving prevention of disease a priority in our country. The other, by *John McConomy*, offers theological insights on ministry with the aging, followed by four specific suggestions for action in the congregation. As usual, we offer reviews of significant books in theology and ministry. We are also including with this issue an index for volumes 1 (1981) and 2 (1982). Hereafter an index for each volume will be included in the fall issue of that year.

A.J.H.