

A Healing Touch

Mention "faith healing" in most circles and cynicism descends. Images of quacks, charlatans and "Leap of Faith" style religious entrepreneurs ripping off ever gullible "believers" have hardened the arteries of the Aussie heart. However there is one healing ministry in Australia that is totally different from Steve Martin's portrayal of the religious shyster. The healing ministry of St. Andrews Anglican Cathedral has been around in its very Anglican way for over 25 years now run by two gentlemanly canons with a distinct absence of chorus lines, brass bands or travelling medicine shows. The healing ministry run by Canons Jim Glennon and Jim Holbeck is arguably one of the largest healing ministries anywhere in the world and currently helps some 7000 people per year including many overseas and interstate visitors. I was introduced to its ministry by a Townsville Christian Lyn Crossland who has survived two bouts of "terminal" secondary bone cancer and who gives testimony to the help the healing ministry of Jim Glennon has given her in fighting disease. I took a 4 day visit to the Centre and came away extremely impressed with what seems to be a sane, healthy and deeply spiritual ministry.

Living under the horrified nose of the arch-conservative Moore College the delightfully charismatic healing ministry functions in a diocese noted for its opposition to things Pentecostal, charismatic or miraculous. The theology behind the healing ministry has had to be worked through very carefully and one senses the soundness that has come from living within a healthy tension. On going to the healing services or on staying at "Golden Grove", the residential centre you are struck by both the peacefulness and the thoughtfulness of the place. It still uses the Anglican prayer book and order of service and is possessed of the quiet dignity of tradition. The fire of the spirit is in the fireplace of sound tradition. The central theological maxim seems to be that in the cross of Christ there was made provision for every problem and that it is up to the believer to take hold of God's provision through faith and prayer. The ministry believes that Christ's death on the cross was a historical fact along with his resurrection from the dead. It has no place for sceptics such as Bishop John Spong or Barbara Thiering who "modernise" or deny the historical basis of these events. The cross and the resurrection are central to the healing process according to St. Andrews Cathedral.

In direct contradiction to the New Age movement healing is not just a matter of attitude according to Canon Jim Glennon, the founder of the ministry and its chief spokesperson. Attitude is important but healing is something God does for you - and you receive through faith. Canon Glennon prefers the term "divine healing" to "faith healing" because he says it puts the emphasis back on God - the Healer. Many illnesses seem to have an attitudinal component, particularly arthritis and cancer. According to the Healing Centre cancer sufferers are often people who internalise their stresses until their body suffers at its weakest point. Much

time is spent in helping people overcome destructive attitudes and obstacles to their faith. A cancer support group meets each Wednesday to pray for, encourage and support people being healed from cancer. At "Golden Grove" there is an office "prayer line" where people can ring up to be prayed for as they undergo treatment or suffer a bad day. Encouraging volunteer staff answer the phone and pray for the request. Most healings take time though a few have been instantaneous. The general result is that people "do much better than the doctors ever expected". The rate of recovery of people helped through the Cathedral seems to be considerably higher than average.

People are never told to "throw away their medication" or to disobey doctors' orders "by faith". The Centre advises full cooperation with the endeavours of the medical professions. The Healing Centre believes all wisdom and all healing is from God. The Healing Centre offers a very personal and supportive environment free of the bustle of hospital life or the anonymity of a waiting room. The Healing Centre supports the medical profession by helping people retain their inner peace and dignity as they pass through sometimes humiliating medical procedures and times of great weakness and pain. The loving, caring atmosphere helps people retain their inner resources so they have strength to fight disease and purpose in life. This alone is an important contributing factor in the accelerated rate of healing observed.

The Centre would be most irate if it was all put down to psychology or a placebo effect. Canons Holbeck and Glennon believe that it is the God of the Bible who actively and powerfully heals as He has promised to in the Scriptures. They point out that Jesus is said to be "the same, yesterday, today and forever" and therefore His healing ministry will continue through His church now He has "ascended into heaven". It is also pointed out that Scripture says "through His stripes we are healed" meaning that the sufferings of Jesus on the cross opened the way for physical healing to all believers. Yet it is not only Bible-believing Christians that seek out the Healing Centre. Many people who would not otherwise darken the doorway of a church attend the Wednesday night healing service seeking a "healing touch" from God. Most Wednesday evenings see anywhere between 200-500 people packing the Cathedral precincts. There is a time of worship, a powerful Biblical sermon on some aspect of healing or the Christian life and then communion is administered according to the prayer book. During a special "ministry time" toward the end of the service all who come and ask for prayer receive ministry. They are surrounded by small groups of two or three Christians trained to pray for the sick - generally of the same gender as the person being prayed for. Hands are laid on heads or on the part of the body needing healing. Someone starts softly praying and the others follow "by the leading of the Spirit". Each of those in the small group pray once or maybe twice. Sometimes there will be tears or a moment when God becomes very real to everyone concerned. Emotions are present but kept at a thoroughly Anglican level. After ten minutes or so everyone takes their seats again. God has briefly touched the lives of a hundred or so people and healing is beginning for many. Each person

who gives their name in is prayed for by a special prayer group for six weeks afterwards.

For people coming from outside of Sydney there is "Golden Grove" a former stately home come convent now the guest residence for the Healing Centre. Canon Jim Holbeck lives in and provides spiritual leadership and counselling. Golden Grove is operated mainly by voluntary staff and has been running for the last ten years as a welcoming Christian environment for those in need of healing. Those interested in knowing more about the Healing Centre can contact it on Sydney (02)