

Booming Ministry Fuels Church Growth

A Spokane, ministry is spawning healing rooms globally

Prayer for healing is hardly new, but in recent years healing rooms have been spreading worldwide in a ministry trend that isn't expected to slow.

Launched in 1999, the International Association of Healing Rooms (IAHR) now oversees some 1,900 rooms in 52 nations, with roughly 1,000 in India alone. In healing rooms across the U.S., Europe, Asia and Africa, people have been healed of blindness, brain tumors and even HIV, says IAHR founder Cal Pierce.

"What is so powerful is this work is done by ordinary people doing an extraordinary work through the power of the Holy Spirit," Pierce says.

In India, healing rooms have fueled church growth, said Abraham Sekhar, a longtime church planter and IAHR's national director. "In three months, a church that was 70 people almost doubled," Sekhar says.

Based in Spokane, Wash., the IAHR follows in the footsteps of healing evangelist John G. Lake. The ministry is even headquartered in a building where Lake prayed for the sick in the early 1900s. The Spokane healing room has a ministry team of 125 and functions much like a doctor's office, with 15 to 20 intercessors regularly on hand to pray for the sick. It is also a base where Pierce trains others to operate healing rooms from local churches or as outreaches.

Empowering laity to pray for the sick is likely what's fueling the healing rooms' spread, says Candy Gunther Brown, Ph.D., a religious studies professor at Indiana University who has

researched IAHR and other healing ministries, including Heidi Baker's Iris Ministries in Mozambique.

"There's a turn away from the sense that there needs to be a particularly gifted healing evangelist, people like Oral Roberts and Kathryn Kuhlman ... and this growing emphasis that healing can come through the prayer of any layperson," says Brown, author of *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, which releases in February.

Whether the IAHR will stay predominant in the healing rooms movement is yet to be seen. But Brown says Pentecostalism has "exploded" in the last century partly because of reports of divine healing, and she believes interest in divine healing will only increase in the U.S. and abroad.

Despite claims that the U.S. is becoming secular, Brown says there is a deep interest in spirituality. Reports about the growing number of unchurched Americans point to a disillusionment with organized religion, not faith.

"People are interested in spiritual power," says Brown, who is writing a book on the topic titled *Miracles Cures? Divine Healing and Deliverance in America*. "If they think they can find it in Pentecostalism, they're going to go there. If they think they can find it in yoga and therapeutic touch, they're going to go there. There's this longing for spiritual power, and the more globalization and pluralism and interaction of cultures, the more there is a drive to compare and look for where that experience, where the spiritual, where the powerful can be found."

A former real estate developer, Pierce embraced healing ministry after experiencing renewal at Bethel Church in Redding, Calif. He teaches that it's God's will that all be healed.

"When Jesus took it to the cross, He finished it there. Now it's our responsibility to finish it here. That's why we have

to lay hands on the sick and see them recover. So we see an army beginning to do that and destroying the work of the enemy.”

In India, Sekhar wants to see a healing room established in every village. He says 1,000 healing rooms that reach 1 million people each year isn't enough in a nation with more than 1 billion people.

“That is nothing compared to the number of people in India and the number of sick people,” Sekhar says. “We are hoping every year we will be able to establish more healing rooms.”