

Reopening the Healing Room

In the Pacific Northwest, a new ministry is reclaiming the gift of healing for a new generation.

Twenty-year-old Keith Goodenberger was desperate. Since the eighth grade he had missed more than a year of school because of severe migraine headaches. He had been on more than 30 medications and undergone three weeks of treatment at the University of Washington's pain clinic. Still his migraines had not gone away.

"I tried everything you can think of to find relief. When you are desperate—or terminally ill—you are willing to try anything," he says.

Keith's parents, Steve and Valorie Goodenberger, who were members of First Presbyterian Church in Spokane, Washington, heard about a place nearby called the Healing Rooms. They decided to visit, though Keith had received prayer before from other Christians.

Valorie, like Keith, had become desperate. "I went thinking we had nothing to lose," she says. Keith, understandably, was less optimistic. "When I first didn't think it was going to work."

The Goodenbergers arrived at the Healing Rooms longing for a miracle. They were led into one of the ministry's eight small prayer rooms, where they received scriptural instruction about healing. Then, three people laid their hands on Keith to pray. Soon, he experienced a strange physical reaction.

"Although I was not on any medication at the time, after 20 minutes of prayer I started to get a high fever and to feel faint," Keith says.

That was more than a year ago. Today, since visiting the

Healing Rooms, his migraines have not come back.

Valorie Goodenberger calls Keith's recovery a "miracle"—while noting it has meant more to her than only a physical solution for her son's illness: "You have no idea, when a miracle happens to your child, how it impacts you."

An Oasis of Faith

Divine healing is making a comeback. The Healing Rooms is one of 60 similar ministries that have sprung up across the country. Yet perhaps nowhere is the popular hunger for a supernatural touch from God more apparent than at this unique ministry located in an office building in the Pacific Northwest.

With a volunteer force of more than 100 people, the Healing Rooms is always busy. No appointment is necessary, and the waiting room looks more like a doctor's office than an oasis of intercession and faith.

The unmistakable sounds of fervent prayer can be heard spilling out from the small rooms. In each room there are three volunteers. One leads in prayer while the other two pray in agreement.

A war room of sorts with a 14-foot-long "wall of healing" is neatly plastered with more than 300 praise reports and a poster that reads, "Make war on the floor." Neatly lining an adjacent wall are urgent prayer requests.

The ministry is located in downtown Spokane and once was housed in the city's Rookery Building—right where healing evangelist John G. Lake 75 years ago prayed for the sick and first called the facility "the healing rooms." Today it is in a new 15,000-square-foot site built after the former location was damaged by a recent earthquake.

According to some estimates, there were as many as 100,000

documented healings during the years of Lake's ministry. Other reports say U.S. government officials labeled Spokane the "healthiest city in the world" at the time.

Cal Pierce, director of the Healing Rooms, believes that Christ's atonement provides both redemption and physical healing. He cannot understand how Christians can so readily believe God for their salvation but not for their healing.

"When we lay hands on people, we pray, 'You are healed'—not—'You are going to be healed,'" Pierce says.

The reason some people are not healed, he believes, is because they have not accepted the provision God has made available. "The impetus is on us," he says. "This is why we try to build faith [and] rid people of doubt and unbelief.

"We encourage people to bring back a note from their doctor, but we don't spend too much time pursuing it," Pierce adds. "We have people fill out testimony sheets, but like the 10 lepers [healed by Jesus], sometimes only one or two people come back."

Still, the reports come from New Jersey, Florida, Maine, Texas, California and nearly every place in between. The ailments are serious: brain tumors, blindness, arthritis, a variety of cancers. The healings aren't all physical, however; about 30 percent are emotional and include depression, anxiety, and marriage and family problems.

The ministry sells about \$7,000 a month in teaching tapes and books on healing, but most of its support comes from people whose lives have been touched by God—such as the lesbian couple who accidentally happened upon the Healing Rooms one day.

The two women, dressed in heavy boots and jeans and sporting numerous tattoos, stepped off the elevator onto the second floor of the ministry and couldn't move. Tears streamed down

their faces as the presence of the Lord enveloped them. Volunteers took them into a room for prayer, where they both met Jesus.

“They couldn’t believe anything so good was free,” says Pierce, who sees spiritual healing as a primary goal.

The 300 people who visit the Healing Rooms each week rarely go away empty. While Pierce does not discourage anyone from seeing a physician or from taking their medication, he is confident that God’s provision for healing is for everyone. “God is no respecter of persons when it comes to healing,” he states.

Pierce and his colleagues choose their semantics carefully. They do not say a person may not be healed after prayer. Instead, they talk as if the healing has already occurred, even if the physical manifestation of it is absent.

For some this is an exercise of faith in the finished work of the cross. For others it is a clever blend of presumption and denial. For the Goodenbergers and many unnamed others, the Healing Rooms is a last resort for physical, spiritual or emotional healing.

Pierce queries: “If you were sick, why would you go to the hospital and get cut on and get sewed up and get a bill when you could go to the Healing Rooms and be prayed for by the healing technicians and get healed for nothing?”

This matter-of-fact approach to healing is what makes the Healing Rooms special. There is no pretense here. There is only the hopeful expectation that God is and has made provision for healing.

Permeating the ministry is a selfless attitude, an overflow from Pierce himself. He is so passionate about what he believes God wants to do in His people that he often dabs the

tears from his eyes while he shares about God's goodness. His heart of mercy for the sick is deeply personal—born from great personal sacrifice and sorrow after he and his wife, Michelle, lost a son to muscular dystrophy.

He would be the first to say that what God is doing through the Healing Rooms is not about Cal Pierce but about God Himself. Pierce is humble, to the extent that it's easy to mistake him for being passive.

"We are in trouble when we think we are anything," he says, shaking his head.

Sensitive as well about being labeled a huckster, he goes overboard to prove the opposite. A cylindrical oatmeal box with the words "Healing Rooms Seed" sits atop the reception desk for those who want to donate.

Jim Goll, the founder of Ministry to the Nations in Nashville, Tennessee, says: "Why is God using this team so wonderfully? Because they don't take any glory for themselves. They are a bunch of desperate nobodies."

Adds Pierce: "God is just looking for ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

Better Than Retirement

Cal and Michelle Pierce were just those kind of ordinary people when God called them to reopen the "healing wells" that were "dug" by John G. Lake's ministry and had been closed for more than seven decades.

Cal, 56, is a businessman, not an evangelist. He and Michelle were thinking about how to spend their retirement when God's call came. Cal was coasting through life, simply looking forward to trips in his motor home after his successful career as a real-estate developer.

Although he had served as an elder and board member at Bethel

Assembly of God in Redding, California, he notes: "I was a bored board member. I carried my Bible and dressed the right way, but I was in a dry and thirsty land."

Once when he heard that God was moving in some strange ways in the community—with people falling down at church meetings—he told Michelle: "Those are the meetings we aren't going to."

Then a new pastor—Bill Johnson—showed up at Bethel Assembly. Johnson had been praying for revival for 14 years and wanted it to ignite at Bethel. He sent out a letter requiring all church leaders to attend an evening meeting. Pierce knew there was no way he could avoid it, but he didn't want to go.

The meeting was conducted like any other until Johnson raised his hands and said, "Come, Holy Spirit." That is about all Pierce says he remembers after "the lights went out," as he calls it. It took two men to pull him off the floor after he had been overcome by the power of God.

For the next year and a half he devoured everything he could get his hands on about healing, revival and historic moves of God. He also discovered a newfound love for being in the house of the Lord. Every time the doors were opened, Pierce was the first one in.

As he puts it: "My program was over. My RV plans were done."

In 1997, he says, he felt a strong leading from God to travel north from his Northern California home. Although he had never been to Washington state, he stopped in Spokane and soon discovered it had been home to John G. Lake's Healing Rooms ministry. Pierce visited Lake's grave site a few miles away in Riverside Cemetery.

"I prayed that God would bring up the healing anointing, like he did with Elisha. It wasn't about me; it was about what God wanted to do," he says.

Pierce is quick to point out that in his unusual prayer he was seeking after God, not man. He says he felt God say to him about supernatural healing: "It wasn't John G. Lake; it was Me. And I am still here."

A powerful stirring began to grow in Pierce to reopen Lake's Healing Rooms, but he wasn't sure how he would do it. After he completed a lengthy fast, Pierce received what he believed was a strong message from God: "There is a time to pray and a time to move. Now is the time to move!" On July 22, 1999, after an intense season of intercessory prayer the original Healing Rooms were reopened.

Likening it to the way Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug during the lifetime of Abraham (see Gen. 26:18), Pierce says: "If you redig a well, you have to go back to the original well site."

Similarly, this is what pastors Jerry and Mary Breeden have done. They too believe God has instructed them to redig the wells of Lake's healing ministry, so they have purchased the former Spokane home of John G. Lake. Today it serves as both a residence and a "healing home."

They provide healing prayer by appointment, in contrast to the Healing Rooms' walk-in policy. Jerry Breeden, 50, an associate pastor at Spokane's Harvest Christian Fellowship, says God has called him to help expand divine healing in the local church, open healing rooms worldwide and launch a divine healing institute.

"Our vision is to bring the issue of divine healing back to local churches and train up people for ministry," Breeden says. The outside observer might see little difference between the Breedens' and the Pierces' ministries, but Breeden views them as part of "different streams."

Can All Be Healed?

Although the Healing Rooms is all about supernatural ministry, the steps by which it arrives at that end are mostly temporal in nature. Training, for example, is seen by Pierce and his ministry colleagues as an important ingredient in the kind of prayer that brings healing. Group training is scheduled every two months, and intercessors are taught about the blockages people have to healing, anointing and the authority of the believer.

The Healing Rooms works closely with churches, but Pierce believes the nondenominational nature of the ministry is a distinct advantage. He is convinced that every church should have a healing room.

“Our prayer is that churches will put us out of business,” he says.

While most regional pastors are thrilled with what is happening at the Healing Rooms, some offer words of caution. Ken Lawrence, a charismatic pastor at the River of Life fellowship in nearby Sandpoint, Idaho, believes wholeheartedly in power evangelism and is careful to acknowledge what God is doing through the Healing Rooms. Still, he says: “We must be careful not to live in the past. We need to move forward, not look back.”

John McKelvey, publisher of the Inland Northwest Christian News, believes God is still in the healing business and that the full gamut of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is at work today. Yet, he says, there is some trepidation among a few evangelicals who are maintaining a wait-and-see attitude.

Randy Beal, senior pastor of First Assembly of God in Spokane, says there isn’t “a more genuine man in town than Cal Pierce,” but adds: “My only concern is in the inheritance philosophy of healing—that if you are not healed it’s your own fault.”

Beal’s ministry staff has been to the Healing Rooms, and they have few qualms about encouraging others to go for prayer.

“When people of faith get together to pray for miracles, great things can happen,” Beal says.

These guarded concerns point to the tricky nature of healing ministry. Most charismatics and Pentecostals recognize that not everyone is healed all of the time. Most of them understand that 2 Corinthians 12:9—when God spoke to the apostle Paul and said, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’” (NKJV)—underscores the reality that God manages to use us in spite of our weaknesses, our insecurities, our inability to speak well and even our physical limitations.

Still, Pierce believes Christians need not be “going into battle on crutches. [If you are sick] take your healing and begin to confess it.”

He believes the worst way for people to try to determine if they are well is by looking to their bodies for confirmation. Faith for healing, he says, does not come from what we see. “God is not trying to decide if He wants to heal the sick. He has already done it. All you have to do is receive it, and it’s yours.”

But the line between faith and presumption is a tenuous one. For those who do not see immediate results—and some clearly don’t—the weight of guilt can be a heavy burden to bear.

In the meantime, Pierce and his Healing Rooms associates are busy doing the work they believe God has called them to. Sadly, they say, healing has become more of a sign to Christians than to unbelievers that God is real. It should be the other way around, they say.

Healing is available, Pierce says, to those who will reach out to God for it—like the woman in Matthew 9:20-22 who had been bleeding for 12 years and reached out to touch Jesus so she could be made well.

Says Pierce: "If you want a move of God, then you have to start moving yourself. To get healed is easy—God does the work. All we have to do is receive it." *

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