



# SALEM Digest

Autumn/Winter 2006 • Topics of interest to friends of Salem Christian Mental Health Association

## HEALING GRACES

Judy Cook

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven.*

(Eccl.3:1)

Melissa (not her real name) lived for many years with a debilitating, degenerative, and incurable disease whose symptoms robbed her of a normal, healthy life with her husband and children. She sought healing in many ways: through the care of doctors, through obtaining adequate rest and nutritious meals, through seeking comfort from family and friends, and through being prayed for in her church. She also sought miraculous healing from Christian friends (not from her own church) who believed with her that Jesus still today answers our requests for his healing touch in miraculous ways. They prayed fervently and God granted Melissa complete healing, in an instant, which was then confirmed by her doctor.

Melissa, of course, was overjoyed. She asked her pastor if she could share with the congregation her joy and relief, and testify to the goodness of God. She wanted to celebrate with her church family what God had done for her and is able to do for others. Her pastor was cautious. Perhaps he worried for others in the congregation who might not experience healing of their illnesses; or perhaps he feared Melissa would be judged by some who might interpret her desire to tell as personal pride in being “chosen” for healing. Whatever the



Pablo Picasso

case, God was thanked during congregational prayer for Melissa’s improved health but she was not permitted to testify publicly at her church about the how and what of this miraculous cure.

The caution experienced by Melissa’s pastor connects to a number of legitimate questions we need to ask: How does God heal us? Why are some people healed miraculously and not others? How do gifts of healing practiced by medical and other professionals in society combine with, or are different from, healing gifts specifically bestowed on the church by the Holy Spirit?

There are many different ways in which physical, emotional, and spiritual healing are accomplished. The most profound, and yet most commonly experienced way healing happens is in our own bodies. If I scrape my elbow through a fall, pain immediately alerts me to treat the affected area; the extra production

of white blood cells begins to fight any possible infection which might result; a scab forms in a few days, and two weeks later the only evidence of injury is the pinkish color of the healthy new skin which has replaced the bloody, raw-looking wound. My elbow has healed, with a minimum of involvement on my part. Such a wonderful, built-in capacity for physiological healing is understood and accepted by all as a created given. We don’t give it much thought.

Pharmacological healing is also widely known and accepted. Doctors prescribe chemical or herbal remedies to heal a vast array of illnesses. These remedies cooperate with our own healing capacities to restore us to better health. Surgery is an extension of this type of healing, where a diseased part of our body is removed or corrected in the expectation that either our own bodies or medication will compensate for the lost or altered part.

Psychological or emotional healing involves changing our thinking, feeling, and behavior, in order to be more healthy. Starting with Sigmund Freud’s groundbreaking work describing and treating psychological conditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, different therapies continue to be developed today which help people who are emotionally distressed heal with the help of counselors, pastors, and medical personnel trained to treat mind and relationship disorders. It is important to note that ill health can include physiological, psychological, behavioral, as well as relational aspects of a person. We do not live in isolation; we are not just bodies. We are “fearfully and wonderfully

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## Director's Corner

**Mark Vander Vennen,**  
MA, MEd, RSW

Dear friends,

Often the issues we deal with do not come in neat, tidy packages—they come in complex messes. Jesus has come to enter these messes, and he invites us to follow him.

One of the messes of our time is the relationship between mental health issues and poverty. Often those who struggle with mental health diagnoses also struggle with severe poverty, usually because of the significant obstacles that mental illness can throw up in a person's life.

Poverty then in turn significantly impairs one's ability to deal with and even thrive alongside of the mental illness. Add to poverty realities like isolation, stigma, family breakdown, violence and homelessness, and then it becomes clear that for some people mental illness comes in a complex, mutually reinforcing package. Effective mental health work requires dealing with the whole package.

That's why the Board of Salem has embraced "WrapAround."

WrapAround is a proven way of bringing community and professional supports together to tackle the whole complex of issues, with the person affected in charge of the process.

To further this development, we're thrilled that World Vision Canada has joined with us (and we with

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## HEALING GRACES

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made” as complex human beings. All aspects of who we are can become diseased, and every aspect of our being—both individually and collectively—is prone to sin and sickness in our fallen world.

And that is where spiritual healing comes in—into this fallen world. The good news continues to be that “God is with us.” How is God with us? He sets us free from sin and bondage, and he heals our diseases. “I will pour out my spirit,” God said, and “you will receive power” to witness—that is, to tell *and to show* who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

What Jesus has done for us is usher in the new kingdom—the one that is peaceable, where weapons are recast into “pruning hooks,” where bodies are restored and souls are set free; where relationships are mended. Every five-year old kindergartner knows about show-and-tell, and God knows the church, Christ's body, needs to be able to demonstrate, as Jesus did, what it means to have God bring Heaven to earth: it means that the blind can see and the lame walk; it means that Melissa is freed from her debilitating illness.

This is where we need to be clear that miraculous healing serves a larger purpose than just the restoration of an individual to renewed health, wonderful as the experience of such restoration is for the person and those close to him or her. God's redemptive purposes are mysterious—

“too wonderful for us,” as David said in the Psalms. But we can know that he uses “all things for our good,” when we trust him to be redemptive, both when he heals us, as well as when he does not.

We can know that God's timing is precise, that at the right time he will heal us, either in this world or the next. We cannot always know the ‘why’ of something, but we can know the ‘what’—that is, we can know that God has a good purpose in mind for all of his creation, including, but not limited to us. God has, however, chosen to involve us in his redemptive purposes. How? By giving those who profess to follow Christ the power and authority Jesus possessed, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And why would Jesus entrust to us such awesome power as the power to heal and do miracles, and, more telling, why would we accept such an awesome responsibility? The truth is that many post-Reformation churches (in the Luther and Calvin traditions) have chosen not to accept the Holy Spirit's invitation to work with him to make Jesus, in all his power, known. We have accepted gifts of preaching, of teaching, of serving, of wisdom and knowledge, of faith—but not often the dynamic gifts of healing, of miracles, of prophesy, of tongues. It strikes me that this must grieve the Holy Spirit.

In the same way that power tools used to trim hedges or saw wood cannot be entrusted to novices, so the power gifts of the Holy Spirit must be exercised carefully and with discerning by mature Christians, who

are “humble of heart.” The Holy Spirit will work through whoever seeks to do God’s will and is open to receiving what is needed to make Jesus and his kingdom known, but the Holy Spirit invites; he does not coerce. The disciples followed Jesus around, watching and asking questions for quite a while before Jesus sent them out to practice what they had seen and heard. We too need to learn and practice. To that end, Salem invited Rev. Cindy Strickler to lead us in a prayer healing seminar (see related news item).

As with all the other healing modalities, there are solid principles to be learned in the practice of prayer healing. The organization

Cindy is part of (Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International) is dedicated to teaching these principles and to helping churches develop healing teams—for the benefit of the body of Christ, but more importantly, to enhance our capability to be witnesses of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in a world loved by God.

*Judy Cook, M.Ed. is a Family Therapist and Clinical Director at Salem Christian Christian Counselling Services in Hamilton, Ontario.*



## Director's Corner

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them) to develop a downtown Hamilton WrapAround project focused especially on single moms, often single moms with no fixed address. World Vision has accepted Salem as one of its *Partners to End Child Poverty*. They are interested in testing the effectiveness of the WrapAround process, and then in the possibility of replicating this project in other areas across Ontario and Canada.

This is a multi-year partnership. During the first year, World Vision will be working with Salem to strengthen our internal governance and policy development and further develop our ability to manage projects. If this year proves successful, then the project will begin with support from World Vision over a multi-year period.



World Vision  
Canadian Programs

We are delighted by this partnership and grateful to World Vision Canada—this is precisely the type of beautiful partnership that Salem seeks. Please pray and support not only Salem but also World Vision in its important work.

A second project that Salem is piloting is the Congregational Assistance Plan (CAP). Through CAP, a church congregation makes available to all of its members the possibility of up to eight counseling sessions per year from a qualified local Christian counselor.

We are working with two churches in our CAP pilot project, one in the Hamilton area and one in the Durham region. Towards the end of the first year, about 12% of the families in one church and 16% in the other have

# SALEM



Christian Mental Health Association

## *If you are experiencing*

- Individual or couple difficulties
- Parenting struggles or other relationship conflicts
- Depression, anxiety, or other debilitating syndromes

## *We can help*

**For more information call**

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**To book an appointment call**

**Hamilton area: 905-528-0353**

**Bowmanville area: 905-623-9901**

*Salem offers qualified, professional therapy for individuals, couples and families, including inner healing prayer therapy, play therapy, and art therapy.*

**Confidentiality is Assured**

used or are using CAP. Clearly, CAP has touched a need.

We are now looking to expand the pilot project into a second year by adding up to four additional churches. If you are interested in exploring CAP for your church, please contact me at [markvv@salem.on.ca](mailto:markvv@salem.on.ca), or by calling 1-866-347-0041.

Jesus came into messes—including our own. May God bless you as you follow Him into the areas of your own lives and of your communities that need the healing only Jesus and his Spirit can bring.

# Beautiful Partnership

## Mark Vander Vennen

On September 23, 2006, Rev. Cindy Strickler led a number of interested people through a day of reflection on prayer healing. By way of demonstration, the event also included some practice in healing prayer. For me, Cindy's expert leadership stimulated a number of reflections.

The central realization for me is that mental health practice and prayer healing each have a legitimate place in God's ongoing work of healing, and they need each other. They operate best as partners in the healing process, each with their own role to play.

I have seen situations where prayer is used as a way of avoiding the therapy work that needs to be done. The approach seems to be, "if I pray hard enough, or with enough faith, then the trauma or the emotional pain will go away." The therapy world talks about how, in response to trauma or threat, we often choose to "fight, flight or freeze" rather than face the very difficult and painful issue. Sometimes we "flee" into prayer to avoid

the emotional work that needs to be done—and then, when the healing doesn't happen, we end up discouraged, even tortured by doubts about our own faith.

I have seen prayer done in a way that seeks to remove ourselves from the picture. If the phrase "it's all about you, Jesus" is taken to mean that I must disappear, then I may have rejected God's deliberate choice to heal in partnership with me.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that "Jesus puts us on the path to personhood." Jesus sets us on the often difficult but rewarding journey of becoming emotionally mature adults, people who experience the world with childlike wonder but with emotional independence and maturity. We do not emotionally regress in order to gain a closer intimacy with Jesus.

I have also seen counselors and mental health workers overlook or dismiss the importance and power of prayer in the healing process. Prayer doesn't lend itself nicely to the categories used in mental health and social work. For some thera-

pists, prayer sounds like hocus-pocus—or worse, like dissociation from the real issues. Prayer is sometimes seen as evidence of pathology. Thankfully, I have also seen more openness in the mental health profession to faith than ever before in my 20 years in the field.

I hope then that both fields are maturing—the practice of prayer and the discipline of mental health. I hope and pray that each is discovering a beautiful partner in the other, because they need each other to better participate with Jesus in his healing of the world. And I thank Cindy Strickler (and Judy Cook, who organized the event) for showing us more clearly the outlines of that beautiful relationship.

*Mark Vander Vennen, M.A., M.Ed. is a Registered Social Worker and Family Therapist. Mark is the Executive*



*Director of Salem Christian Mental Health Association.*

## Prayer Healing Seminar



On September 23, 2006, Rev. Cindy Strickler, Pastor with the Presbyterian Reformed Ministries International (PRMI) at Black Mountain, North Carolina, led a prayer healing seminar for Salem, made possible by a grant from the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program of the Christian Reformed Church, funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc.

Forty-one pastors, therapists, and prayer counselors learned through lecture, discussion and practice how the healing gifts of the Holy Spirit can be understood, received and developed for the benefit of those seeking counseling and healing. Dr. Marta Durksi, a therapist in Oakville, stated what was generally felt by all the participants. She expressed appreciation for Cindy's "caring manner," and found the seminar content to be "Biblically grounded" and "a significant opportunity for learning." Participants expressed appreciation and interest in being invited to future seminars that seek to integrate all healing modalities, including prayer healing.

We at Salem want to thank the administrators of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program for their sponsorship of this seminar.



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