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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

HEALING TOUCH: A PATH TO TRANSFORMATION

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College
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ABSTRACT

Healing Touch: A Path to Transformation is a thesis that explores the transformative nature of Healing Touch, an energy based healing treatment used by the Healing Pathway, a program offered by Naramata Centre, a retreat and educational centre affiliated with the United Church of Canada. The thesis offers definitions for healing and transformation. It offers insights into energy work that is specific to the Healing Pathway but is applicable to other forms of energy work. The thesis outlines the history of the Healing Pathway including healing traditions from the Gospels and the early Church, the work of modern energy healers and organizations such as Agnes Sanford, Brugh Joy, Therapeutic Touch, and Healing Touch International. It briefly presents a scientific rationale for energy based healing including the connections of stress, hormones and the physical body that Gabor Mate outlines in his work. The thesis is a qualitative research project which uses a specific model of theological reflection developed by Robert Kinast with the acronym NAME, (Narration, Analysis, heart of the Matter and Enactment) to interview four co-researchers about their experiences with the Healing Pathway. This model encourages co-researchers to share their stories so the paper is also a form of narrative inquiry and because I use my experiences to validate the experiences of the co-researchers it is heuristic in nature as well. The thesis discovered that people are transformed in a myriad of ways. The Healing Pathway has a role to play in the modern church as it is what Sallie McFague refers to as an embodied way of knowing God.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

General Statement

As the Alberta and Northwest Conference of the United Church of Canada gathered in Sherwood Park, Alberta for their 82nd Conference Meeting in May 2009, one of the opening remarks included an invitation for members to take part in a Healing Touch treatment as part of their self-care. Volunteer practitioners offered treatments as part of their involvement with the Healing Pathway, one of the programs offered by the Naramata Centre that teaches and supports healing ministries in local congregations. Involved with the *Pathway* since 2002, I found it interesting, that at my table, there was no discussion about why Healing Touch would be offered at a church gathering or even whether it would be appropriate to do so. The only conversation was about people sharing when their appointment was or debating whether they would go for a treatment.

The Healing Pathway was begun in 1993 and has quickly been adopted as a healing ministry by many United Church congregations. It is gratifying to me, that there has been such acceptance of this ministry that involves energy work, but it has done so largely without any formal recognition by the United Church of Canada.

One of the main tasks of theology is to evaluate new forms of ministry within the church. For this reason, as Earle Sharam, the Principal of St Stephen's College, has said,

Healing Touch should be subjected to a critical even if appreciative, evaluation.¹ If Healing Touch is simply a new form of pop-psychology or a way to reduce stress, then it is not a productive way for the church to be investing its time and talent. However, if Healing Touch can play a role in transforming people's lives, then it could become part of the life and work of the church, whereby local churches might choose to invest their energy and finances in such ministry.

The Research Question

I began this project by wondering if people were transformed by their Healing Touch experience but quickly realized that, because of my experience and the experiences of others whom I know, that I came to this subject with a bias that people are indeed transformed. The question then became: what does this transformation look like, or how are people changed by this experience? By developing a series of questions, I created a theological reflection process to allow interviewees to share their experiences of Healing Touch and to begin to articulate how those experiences had transformed their lives. Thus my research question is: how are people transformed by Healing Touch experiences?

Definition of Terms

Healing Touch

For the purposes of this paper, "Healing Touch," refers to healing treatment techniques used to affect a person's energy field. These techniques are normally taught and endorsed by the Healing Pathway, Healing Touch International, and Therapeutic Touch.

¹ Earle Sharam, conversation with author, Edmonton, AB, 2007.

These organizations have their own theologies and teaching purposes, but their general goals and techniques to affect changes in people's energy fields are similar.

Healing Pathway

The name Healing Pathway or simply the Pathway refers specifically to a program of Naramata Centre which is “designed to enable people to develop the gifts and skills of healing hands within the Christian tradition, and to foster the development of healing ministry in congregations and other communities.”² The Naramata Centre is an educational retreat centre whose “mission is to be a place of learning, spiritual nurture and renewal”³ and is affiliated with and partially supported by the United Church of Canada.

Transformation

The word transformation is really what my thesis is about. I see transformation as a “significant change that adds meaning to a person's life”⁴ It offers people a new way of seeing themselves, or changes how they experience their relationships with God. Transformation may also allow people to experience other aspects of their lives in new ways.

Seeing things in a new way is not, in itself, transformation. Transformation occurs when we begin to think or act in new or different ways. Kirk Hadaway, in his book, *Behold I Do a New Thing*, shares these insights about transformation:

We must be transformed into people whose eyes are open to the signs of God's kingdom. Transformation is a magical process, but it does not happen all at once through the wave of a wand, a trip down an aisle, or the praying of a prayer. We move from insight to understanding to a new incarnation, as a

² Naramata Centre. *The Healing Pathway*, <http://www.naramatacentre.net/programs-healingpath.asp> (accessed June 14, 2009).

³ Naramata Centre. *Mission Vision and Values*, <http://www.naramatacentre.net/about-mission.asp> (accessed June 14, 2009).

⁴ Clair Woodbury, conversation with author, Stettler, AB, 2008.

new way of seeing becomes a new way of being. The process is continuous. . . . [W]e enter into a cycle of continuous transformation as the light of God and the sustaining ground of a Christian community allow us to grow, develop, and bear fruit.⁵

What Hadaway refers to as the fruit is the evidence of transformation. We may be aware of, or exposed to, new things, but if this experience does not result in a new way of thinking, acting or relating then transformation has not taken place.

Tom Harpur, in *Finding the Still Point*, sees transformation as a process that can begin by knowing ourselves better. He tells us, “[w]hen you ‘wake up’ to the world . . . you become aware of aspects of your own life, or of the lives of others, that lay wholly unconscious before. The end result will be greater self-knowledge and sensitivity to a much wider world – a kind of transformation indeed.”⁶ Transformation does not have to be dramatic, it can be subtle, and it must be life changing.

I do not believe that transformation is always something evident to outside observers. Transformation may be internal rather than external. Harpur shares with us part of his transformation process when he says, “[i]t was uncanny in one way, but I felt peaceful as a process of transformation seemed to be going on deep within.”⁷

A question I struggle with is whether transformation can take place as part of an intellectual process. I suspect not. Knowledge may contribute to the transformational process but if transformation is to be long lasting and life changing it needs to be a change of the heart, a conversion. Diana Butler Bass, in her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, shares a

⁵ Kirk C. Hadaway. *Behold I Do a New Thing: Transforming Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 117.

⁶ Tom Harpur. *Finding the Still Point* (Kelowna, B.C: Northstone, 2002), 51.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

story about Bernard whose life is transformed within the context of the Christian Church. She makes some interesting observations about his transformation:

On this journey he continually finds meaning, deeper purpose, renewed identity, and greater love. Bernard changed. Christians call change conversion, a change of heart that revolutionizes the whole of life. The biblical word for this is *metanoia*, a radical encounter with God that turns life around. The paradigmatic *metanoia* story in the Christian tradition is that of St. Paul. . . [I]t was a process of transformation [for Bernard], a change of heart that is still occurring for him⁸

Transformation is a word that is used widely and loosely in the world today. It means many different things to many different people. For the purpose of this paper, transformation is a change of heart that occurs within people that is life changing. It results in a changed perception of self, the world or God, which has the ability to change relationships. This change of heart gives new meaning to people's lives and manifests itself as a new way of thinking or acting in the world which may be internalized or may be externally exhibited.

Healing/Health

“Healing” is another word that means different things to different people. If you were to ask medical doctors, they would likely tell you that to heal means to bring about a physical cure. In many Christian traditions, healing is closely related to *shalom* or peace.

In his book, *Healers at Work*, Peter Downie discusses nine healers and explores their healing modalities. He, too, found it necessary to define what healing is in the context of alternate therapies:

I've wondered how best to express the critical distinction between curing and healing. To that end, it seems to me that while a medical condition can sometimes be cured, the human condition – individually and collectively – is almost always in need of some healing. This kind of healing is about reaching

⁸ Diana Butler Bass. *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 221-2.

an emotional, physical, and/or spiritual equanimity with the demands and complexities of modern life in North America. It's a healing which takes for granted the elaborate interconnectedness and value of the heart and soul and mind and body all striving together to reach that elusive moment of a true and profound sense of well-being. It's a healing which battles against what writer and philosopher Sir Laurens Van der Post calls the modern crisis of feeling "unknown in the universe." This is a healing which connects us not only to those we love, but also to life, with all the joy and sadness and mystery it contains.⁹

In addition, Dorothea Hover-Kramer, in her book *Healing Touch*, suggests that healing is not only about the individual but is also related to how that individual is in relationship to God and community. She tells us:

The word *heal* is derived from the Greek stem *holos* and the Old English *haelen*, again implying wholeness and heartiness that goes beyond merely overcoming an illness.

Some theorists see life as a continuous flow of the essential life force or *Qi*. In this context, healing implies movement from a disturbed or complex flow pattern to a more harmonious one. This harmony encompasses our internal states as well as our relationships with the rest of the environment, our families, our communities, the world. Thus, the process of healing is conceptualized as an integral part of a functioning organic whole. Noted nursing theorist Martha Rogers views healing as a movement toward harmony of the human and his [*sic*] environment to ever more evolved patterns of integration. Another nursing leader, Janet Quinn, describes healing as finding the right relationship between the individual and the entire environment. These definitions suggest that healing is not only an internal process but also one of harmonious interaction with our living environments.

Inherent in the concept of healing is a wider interpretation of our human reality; illness is not only a physical problem but an indication that there may be imbalance in other aspects of one's life as well. True well-being is much more than mere homeostasis in the organs. It is harmonious evolution within physical beings with material bodies, we are also emotional beings whose feelings can deeply influence the physical; we are mental, idea-generating beings whose thought patterns do indeed impact the physical and emotional aspects; and most importantly we are spiritual beings having a brief human experience who are intimately connected to the Creative Source. Healing, in this light, is a multidimensional process toward ever-increasing

⁹ Peter Downie. *Healers At Work* (Kelowna: Northstone, 1996), 10.

levels of wellness in every part of our reality, and can occur even in the face of an ongoing or chronic problem.¹⁰

In his book *Healing Touch*, Zach Thomas sees a connection between healing and faith. He defines health and wholeness as “cooperation with the Creator for reorganizing unbalanced aspects of life in order to live more deeply integrated personally and communally.”¹¹

There is also an aspect to healing that is relational. We need to be in good relationship with self, community and God if we are to be truly healed. Thomas tells us that “[w]e need to be guided by an understanding of health and wholeness that reconnects people not only to their bodies and psyches but to meaningful relationship to God, to one another, and to the earth.”¹² Part of Thomas’s discussion is about healings or miracles that occur at religious sites to which pilgrims come to be healed. He shares with us that “[p]hysical cure is the exception, not the rule. What does happen more commonly is a “tremendous transformation of faith” that enables people to live more fully regardless of the outcome of their physical illness.”¹³ For many of us who define ourselves as Christians, there is a connection between wholeness and faith.

Diana Butler Bass has studied mainline churches that are what she describes as “vital.” Some of those churches are intentional about being a “healing presence” in their communities. She makes some interesting observations, the first being about healing as harmony. She says that “[h]armony is the overcoming of division, hatred, and discord; the mending of what is displaced or broken. In short, harmony is a kind of healing or making

¹⁰ Dorothea Hover-Kramer. *Healing Touch: A Guidebook for Practitioners* (Albany, N.Y: Delmar Thompson Learning, 2002), 8-9.

¹¹ Zach Thomas. *Healing Touch: The Church’s Forgotten Language* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1994), 45.

¹² Ibid., 47.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

whole; the creation which is disordered into what is ordered. To find harmony is to find balance, to touch the center point of wholeness.”¹⁴ Bass also discovered that these faith communities she studied saw a connection between salvation, sin and healing. This is interesting because the people I know who are involved in healing ministries would not often make that connection, but these churches that are thriving in the midst of decline for many mainline churches believe that healing is a form of salvation and frees us from the affects of sin. On salvation she says:

They understand the link between healing and salvation: God’s healing is offered for the sake of the world. The people of . . . do not focus on the ideas of “personal salvation” in the way their evangelical neighbours do. Instead, for them God’s salvation is a process of healing whereby they are transformed – and, in turn, they open themselves to transforming the world.¹⁵

On sin she offers this:

We practice healing, and as we practice it, we learn the quiet dimensions of *shalom*, the unheralded dimensions of salvation, of compassion and charity. Graham Standish says, “Salvation is a healing process in which Christ’s healing love heals our souls from the damage and power of sin so that we may be transformed by God to become the stewards of healing ourselves.”¹⁶

Finally, I believe that whenever healing occurs within the context of a Christian community, it is explicitly linked to the love of God. Morton Kelsey, who wrote *Healing and Christianity*, describes it in this way:

Healing, then, is one way of opening our eyes to the creative love of God, so that we who are healed or see healing performed begin to know the reality of the loving God and seek the divine fellowship. . . . People who come to know the power of God through physical or emotional healing often want more of this God and spend more time with this divine Lover and become instruments of this God in the world.¹⁷

¹⁴ Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 104.

¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁶ Ibid., 113.

¹⁷ Morton Kelsey. *Healing and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 73.

I believe the reason there appears to be so many explanations as to what healing and health might look like is because healing is unique to each human being. Just as each person is unique, so is his or her healing journey. Some of the commonalities are wholeness, balance, harmony, being loved and being in good relationship, or *shalom*.

Personal Interest to Researcher

This project has been worthwhile for me because of my personal experiences with Healing Touch through the Healing Pathway. My story looked as if it would become a tragedy. Like many people, I experienced a marriage breakdown. I was farming and, as it often can be for farmers, this was more than the end of a marriage. It resulted in the loss of my business and vocation, of my house and my home, and of my family and children. As it can be for many farmers, farming was my way of life and was linked to my self-identity.

I still remember my last year farming, how lonely it was, and how much I had to do to liquidate the farm while grieving the loss of my family. I was unable to sleep and often awoke in the middle of the night in blind terror. It was obvious to all who knew me that I was not doing very well, so when one of the practitioners from our local Healing Touch group invited me to come for a treatment, what could I lose?

This was a new experience for me. We began with a meditation to connect us all together and to earth energy. To this day I remember that groundedness and connection to the earth. When I got up on the table and their hands were upon me, I immediately felt warmth radiating through my body. As the treatment continued, I lost all sense of time and place but this warmth was transformed into an awesome feeling of love. I knew at a cellular level that this was the presence of God, filling every part of my being. I also knew at that moment that

I was not alone, that I would never be alone, and that I was loved. My fear dispersed, as if it had been lifted from me physically.

When the treatment was finished, I was a little disoriented and dizzy, and my ears were filled with tears even though I had no recollection of having cried. As the warmth dissipated, I began to shiver and they wrapped me in a quilt. I remember their compassion and concern for me. One of the practitioners has since passed away and I often wonder if she knew what a profound difference that evening made in my life.

I had a lot of hard work and many difficult decisions to make in the months that followed. Life was not easy. I was still lonely at times and I missed my family. It was harder than you can imagine to walk away from that farm, my life. I could not work for a long time afterwards and starting a new life was difficult as well. But my fear never returned and afterwards, I knew that I was not alone, that God was with me and that, somehow, everything would be all right.

I continued to receive treatments and the following year, began to take some of the workshops. Over the years, the Pathway has helped me immensely. When I approached the end of my discernment into ministry, I had no clear vision about what God was calling me to do. It was during what is called in the Healing Pathway, the Sacred Chakra treatment that my call to ministry became crystal clear. I still had much grieving to do, and part of the grieving process for me, is to “let go” of things and turn them over to God. Healing Touch allowed me to do that.

When I was appointed to my first Pastoral Charge, Knox United Church in Killam, Alberta I sponsored a Phase I workshop there. The workshop enabled some of the people in my congregation to experience God in a new way, and it also allowed them to heal. We now

have a small healing ministry here and I believe it has a positive influence for the people involved in that ministry but also for the congregation and the community as a whole.

Marcus Borg, in *The God We Never Knew*, discusses a way of thinking about God that he calls panentheism:

as a way of thinking about God [panentheism] affirms both the transcendence of God and the immanence of God. For panentheism, God is not a being “out there.” The Greek roots of the word point to its meaning: *pan* means “everything,” *en* means “in” and *theos* means “God.” Panentheism thus means “everything is *in* God.” God is more than everything (and thus transcendent), yet everything is in God (hence God is immanent). For panentheism, God is “right here,” even as God is also more than “right here.”¹⁸

Panentheism, then, refers to the immanent nature of God, which is well attested to in scripture. Borg reflects on the story of Moses encountering God in an interesting and provocative manner:

Moses asks God, “What is your name?” In Hebrew, God’s response is *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, a difficult phrase that is most commonly translated into English as “I am who I am.” But Martin Buber, the best-known Jewish religious scholar of this century, argues persuasively that the Hebrew verb *ehyeh* means “being there, being present” and the phrase as a whole should be translated, “I will be present as I will be present.” God’s name suggests that God is the presence “who is present in every now and every here.”¹⁹

My experiences in the United Church of Canada tell me that the church does well teaching people about the transcendent and immanent nature of God, but not of providing opportunities for people to actually experience God’s immanent nature. I will discuss this further in my concluding chapter. I had always known I was loved by God but I had not actually experienced that love in a real and tangible manner until my first Healing Touch treatment when I was over forty years old.

¹⁸ Marcus J Borg. *The God We Never Knew* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Once a person experiences the love of God rather than only knowing cognitively that God loves them, the experience changes the nature of the person's relationship with God. This relationship becomes much more intimate. Borg explains that scripture speaks to this intimacy by using the expression, "knowing God. This does not mean knowing *about* God but a direct knowing like that experienced between lovers. Indeed, sometimes the word for sexual intercourse is used to speak of knowing God."²⁰

My story is a comedy, in the classical sense of this word. It is a story that, by all accounts, should have ended in tragedy, but unexpected and undeserved grace averted the tragedy and brought about healing. Through the Healing Pathway, I was able to experience God's grace and began a journey towards wholeness in the midst of brokenness.

I have carried out this study because I wanted to know whether other people have had similar experiences with the Pathway that I did. It transformed my life and I wanted to know how it transformed other people's lives and whether they, too, experienced the immanence of God through Healing Touch. Involved in pastoral ministry in the United Church of Canada, I believe that one of the roles of the church is to transform people's lives. I needed to know if the Healing Pathway contributes in a significant way to people's transformative experiences in meaningful and life-giving ways and, if it does, whether the church should support Healing Pathway ministries and what that support might look like.

Method

The research for this study is in two parts. The first looks at scripture and other literature to determine if the work of the Healing Pathway has a basis in scripture and what

²⁰ Ibid., 36.

historical precedence it might have in the church. This part of the research will look briefly at other kinds of healing and energy work within the context of a religious community. It will also explain the work of the Healing Pathway.

The second part of the paper is a qualitative research project. Qualitative research is defined as, “a loosely defined category of research designs or models, all of which elicit verbal, visual, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory data in the form of descriptive narratives like field notes, recordings, or other transcriptions from audio and videotapes and other written records and pictures or films.”²¹ The data for this paper was collected by tape-recorded interviews that were transcribed into written form, using a specific type of theological reflection with the acronym NAME developed by Robert Kinast in his book, *Making Faith Sense*. It is a form of phenomenological inquiry and because this type of theological reflection encourages people to share their stories, it is also a form of narrative inquiry. The research consists of the stories of people who have had involvement with the Pathway. In a later chapter, I will reflect on their stories and identify some of their common elements. Since I use my experience to validate their experience the study is also heuristic in nature.

In the conclusion I explore what these experiences might mean for individuals, for local congregations and for the United Church of Canada as a whole.

²¹ Don Ratcliff, *The Qualitative Research Web Page, Part I –Introduction*, (January 2005). <http://qualitative-research.ratcliffs.net/1.htm> (Accessed June 26, 2010).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A great deal is written about energy work, spiritual healing and the mind-body connection. I researched literature related to the work of the Healing Pathway and to other forms of energetic healing. The distinct theology of the Healing Pathway is rooted in Christian scripture and the practices of the early church. I reviewed literature that supports this theology. To collect and analyse data, I used an approach that combines theological reflection with qualitative research. My research question asked how people are transformed by the Healing Touch experience, so developing a definition for transformation for the purposes of this paper was important. In my conclusion I examined the role that the Healing Pathway may have in the future of United Church of Canada congregations. Therefore, my literature review looked at research in a number of areas: energy/spiritual healing, theology of Christian healing, theological reflection and qualitative research, transformation and the role of the church in mainline denominations. Because the focus of this paper is on the transformative nature of Healing Touch and not on whether it is a valid form of “healing” I chose to only review literature that supports the work of the Healing Pathway.

Theology and History of the Healing Pathway

Healing Touch is a form of energy healing and energy healing that has a long history in humankind found in many cultures. *Imagery in Healing: Shamanism and Modern*

Medicine, by Jeanne Achterberg, outlines the practice and history of energy healing from primitive societies to modern culture.

I choose to take seriously the healing ministry of Jesus, his disciples, and the early church and how their practices relieved human suffering. My observation is that “something profound and out of the ordinary” occurred that prompted people to believe that Jesus of Nazareth and his followers were healers, and that belief was essential to propelling Christianity into a religion that is still relevant 2000 years after the death of Jesus.

Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles: How the Early Believers Experienced God, by John Pilch is summarized quite succinctly on the back cover as a book that,

examines religious ecstatic trance experiences and healing events reported in the Acts of the Apostles. It applies insights from the social sciences, namely: cultural anthropology, cognitive neuro-science, and medical anthropology to the interpretation of these events. It also presents Luke’s continuous story-line in Acts from a literary and theological perspective. Whether or not one considers these events to be literally factual, fact-with-interpretation, or Lucan composition, the message makes plausible cultural sense to a first century Mediterranean listener or reader.²²

Tom Harpur, in *The Uncommon Touch*, examines the history, roots and theology of what he refers to as Judeo-Christian Healing. He explores Therapeutic Touch, Energy-Field healing, the spiritual factor, prayer as it contributes to healing and the role of worship and liturgy in healing. He also examines the scientific and psychiatric rationale of spiritual healing and ends with a chapter that explores the challenges and roles of a church that accepts this phenomenon.

Healing and Christianity, by Episcopal priest Morton Kelsey, takes a much deeper look at the theology, history, and rationale for religious healing. The

²² John J. Pilch. *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), cover.

Librarian's World is quoted on the cover as saying, “[t]his . . . [is] the definitive work on [religious] healing, examining medical and psychological developments and their interrelatedness with the healing of mind, body, spirit, and emotions, [as a] comprehensive examination of healing including Jesus’ healing ministry”²³

Zach Thomas, *Healing Touch: The Church's Forgotten Language*, also explores the history and theology of “bodywork” or energy based healing systems within the church. He also promotes Healing Touch as a form of liturgy and pastoral care in the modern church.

Energy/Spiritual Healing

Some of the earliest work in modern times, with respect to energy healing as part of the Christian tradition, was carried out by Agnes Sanford and her son, John. John Sanford’s study of the causes and implications of illness in the gospels, comparing them to some of the psychotherapy models to explain illness, is invaluable because even today energy work is being done in both the secular and the church worlds. There exists a tension between these two worlds around how we name the energy and how we account for the healing that takes place. He explores energy healing from both Christian and scientific perspectives.

In the mid-seventies, Brugh Joy was doing some group work with meditation and exploring the potential for using the human bio-energy field to promote health. His book documenting that work is, *Joy's Way: A Map for the Transformational Journey*. It is interesting as a precursor to Healing Touch but his theories and practical work are not as well developed as some of the literature on energy work that has been published since.

²³ Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, cover.

Healing for Life: A Remarkable Exploration of the Successes and Failures of Spiritual Healing, illustrates that spiritual healing takes many forms. Clare Nonhebel uses combinations of touch and prayer to bring about healing. Her interpretation is literalistic and readers may struggle with some of her images of how God and Christ are present in the world.

Peter Downie in *Healers at Work* interviews a broad range of modern day healers. He helps us define what healing is about. He makes the valuable point that, regardless of the mode of healing, compassion is the basis from which all healing operates.

Healing Touch International (HT), Therapeutic Touch (TT) and the Healing Pathway are interconnected. *Healing Touch: A Guidebook of Practitioners* by Dorothea Hover-Kramer, and *Accepting Your Power to Heal* and *Therapeutic Touch* by Dolores Krieger outline the history and basis for HT and TT. Each has a spiritual basis, and both use a scientific or medical model for doing energy healing. The main function of these books is to promote the benefits of doing energy work and to describe treatment methods.

Healing from the Heart by Rochelle Graham, Flora Litt, and Wayne Irwin also describes how to give treatments and provides a historical and theological rationale for the Healing Pathway. This book may be considered the handbook of the Healing Pathway. Flora Litt is a therapeutic touch practitioner and a teacher of spiritual practices. Wayne Irwin is a minister in the United Church of Canada. Rochelle Graham is a physiotherapist, an instructor for HT, and a past director of the Healing Pathway at the Naramata Centre. The book is also expansive in its approach covering history, theology, scientific basis, instructions for giving treatments, and how to implement a healing ministry in a congregation. It is not an academic text written for theologians but a book written to give lay people a comprehensive guide to

understand and practice Healing Touch in a Christian context. In the epilogue of their book, they summarize it by saying:

We have offered a biblical rationale for the healing ministry and an examination of prayer practices. We have presented scientific methods of treatment based on ancient and current bio-energy theories and referred to contemporary scientific evidence supporting these theories. We have pointed to mysteries and apparent truths, which, for some, may challenge our “boogle threshold.” In so doing, we acknowledge that creation is far more magnificent than any present understanding, and that divine love remains an unfathomable mystery. In Jesus we have all the revelation of truth and love that we need for life. Yet God continues to reveal to us wonders of the universe, even as we live within a limited conceptual framework. New discoveries continue to challenge our present views of reality, both religious and scientific. But as our realization of it all is expanded, faith is enhanced.²⁴

Scientific evidence to support energy work is found in many studies of energy healing. The most comprehensive study is by Itzhak Bentov, *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*. Writing for people with a good understanding of physics, Bentov discusses how the universe operates as a measurable energy vibration. He also offers a complex argument that time is only fixed by the constraints we put on it because of our physical bodies; once we are not confined to our bodies, time becomes a continuum by which we may travel forward into the future or back into the past. The most helpful scientific evidence for those interested in energy healing is found in Delores Krieger’s book, *Therapeutic Touch*, a work often quoted or referred to in other books about Healing Touch. She tells us that:

[b]oth the healer and the healee have experiences during the Therapeutic Touch process; however, it is of interest to note that they have different experiences. Perhaps this is most clearly demonstrated in a study reported by Peper and Ancoli on Krieger doing Therapeutic Touch on a group of four patients from an outpatient pain control center of a large hospital, a study which has since been replicated. These show consistent electric encephalographic findings. . . . In each case, the patients went into a low

²⁴ Rochelle Graham, Flora Litt, and Wayne Irwin. *Healing From the Heart* (Kelowna, B.C.:Wood lake Books, 1998), 217.

amplitude alpha state, a state of calmness and well being from the onset of the Therapeutic Touch treatment and stayed there throughout the process. The patients were not aware of this; all they felt was that they were in a relaxed state of well-being, and they enjoyed the experience to the extent that they were all willing to volunteer for further studies on Therapeutic Touch. On the contrary, the person playing the role of healer went into a rhythmical, very high amplitude beta state (with all known extraneous artefacts controlled), which is indicative of a state of deep concentration similar to those occurring in mature meditators²⁵

Gabor Maté documents connections between emotions, stress, hormones, and physical health in *When the Body Says No*, an exploration of the connections between hidden stress and chronic illness, and in *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* which illustrates connections between childhood stress and addictions. When we consider the affects that Healing Touch can have on our emotional and spiritual health, and the affects that Maté documents between stress and the physical body, it is easy for us to understand that Healing Touch affects our physical health as well as our spiritual and emotional health.

There are many ways in which we pray and Healing Touch, as practiced through the Healing Pathway, would be a particular way of praying. Larry Dossey in his two books, *Healing Words: the Power of Prayer*, and *Healing Beyond the Body: Medicine and the Infinite Reach of the Mind*, examines connections between healing, health and prayer. Bernie Seigel, in his two books, *Love, Medicine and Miracles: Lessons Learned About Self-Healing From a Surgeon's Experience With Exceptional Patients*, and *Peace, Love and Healing: Bodymind Communication and the Path to Self-Healing* explores the roles positive thinking and mental imaging have in promoting healing. In the same vein as Seigel's work are some of the approaches that Deepak Chopra advocates in his book, *Quantum Healing: Exploring*

²⁵ Dolores Krieger. *Therapeutic Touch: How to Use Your Hands to Help or to Heal* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1979), 70.

the Frontiers of Mind/Body Medicine. I found this book interesting because I believe that we encounter the holy in many different ways and “*Quantum Healing* provides an historical overview of how these principles have come to be understood by both Western science and by Ayurveda, the ancient life science of India.”²⁶

I also accessed some Internet sites to research auras that are the energy field surrounding the body, which some HT practitioners can see and Reiki, another form of energy healing.

The study of connections between energy and the human mind, body, and spirit, is exploding in terms of theories and works written. Because this paper is about the transformation that occurs through Healing Touch, I have briefly touched on some of the important texts that inform the Healing Pathway.

Theological Reflection and Qualitative Research

I have collected data for my project, and analysed this data using a method that combines qualitative research and theological reflection. Because this method also encouraged people to share their stories and explore myths that inform their lives, my project also used a form of narrative enquiry.

Qualitative research collects and analyses data by identifying common threads or themes. Qualitative research methods differ in detail, but essentially try to collect data without manipulating the interviewees, and then sort that data to extract themes. These themes are then evaluated for meaning. The three texts used to develop the research model

²⁶ Deepak Chopra. *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Science* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), preface.

used for this paper are: *Read Me First: A Users Guide to Qualitative Method* by Janice Morse and Lyn Richards, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* by Michael Quinn Patton and *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* by Gretchen B. Rossman, and Sharon F. Rallis.

I used a specific way of collecting data described by Patricia O’Connell Killen and John DeBeer in their book, *The Art of Theological Reflection*. According to Killen and DeBeer, theological reflection is “the artful practice of bringing our lives into conversation with our Christian heritage in a way that nurtures insights for us . . . [by requiring] that we move out of the opposed standpoints of certitude and self-assurance in order to welcome the insights that genuine conversation between our lived experience and our religious heritage brings.”²⁷ I also used Robert Kinast’s method of theological reflection, to which he gives the acronym, “NAME,” and which he describes in his book, *Making Faith Sense*. These were the two texts for a course titled, “Theological Reflection and the Practice of Ministry,” taught by Margaret Clark and in which I participated at St. Stephen’s College in 2006. Together, the books provide an overview of the effectiveness and importance of theological reflection as well as outlining several ways in which to do theological reflection.

D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*, tell us that “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.”²⁸ Because of the nature of narrative inquiry, authors describing narrative inquiry do not like to define it. They prefer to present case studies, allowing the reader to infer their own definitions. Clandinin and Connelly describe a number of education-based case studies in their book. Max van Manen, *Writing in the Dark*,

²⁷ Patrica O’Connell Killen and John DeBeer. *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), 143.

²⁸ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly. *Narrative Inquiry* (San Fransico: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 20.

Phenomenological Studies in Interpretive Inquiry, uses a similar model, describing fourteen different experiences through case studies. He tells us that “[t]he person interested in human science research needs to learn textually how others reflect and write and address the topics of their interest.”²⁹

The way I think about the power of story, and how I define myth, is influenced by a course I took from Geoffrey Wilfong-Pritchard, at St. Stephen’s College, in 2004, “Story (Narrative) Theology.” In one of the papers I wrote for this course, “Stories as Pastoral Care,” I took an in-depth look at the healing qualities of sharing stories non-judgmentally. I approach narrative by reflecting upon some of the readings from that course: *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* by Fredrick Buechner, *Story Theology* by Terrance W. Tilley, *The Gift of Story* by Ralph Milton and *Faith-full Stories: The Narrative Road to Religion* by John Hoffman.

Transformation and the Role of the Church

Transformation is a key theme in this paper so it was important that I develop a definition for this word in the context of the role of mainline churches in transforming people’s lives and of what that transformation might look like.

I relied heavily on two texts written by people who are concerned about the role of mainline denominations: *Behold I Do a New Thing: Transforming Communities of Faith*, by C. Kirk Hadaway and *Christianity for the Rest of Us* by Diana Butler Bass. Herb Miller of the *Parish Paper* suggests that by “[u]sing a fresh, insightful set of typologies to identify

²⁹ Max Van Manen. *Writing in the Dark: Phenomenological Studies in Interpretive Inquiry* (Canada: The Athlouse Press, 2002), i.

typical congregational personality patterns, Hadaway effectively argues for purpose-centred rather than method-driven church transformation efforts.”³⁰ Marcus Borg describes Butler Bass’s book as “[t]he most important book of the decade about emerging Christianity and the renewal of mainline congregations. [It is e]xciting and encouraging, hopeful and helpful, and filled with examples of vital Christian practices from which all interested in the future of the church can learn.”³¹ *Radical Gratitude*, by Mary Jo Leddy, gives us a theology of life that is helpful to members of a thriving congregation. Of lesser import, because of its rigid views about the role of the church and what transformation might look like is, *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren.

These books were instrumental in helping me to develop a definition of transformation; they also played an integral part in my exploration of the role of the Healing Pathway in the future of United Church congregations. I believe that, in the future, emerging Christianity will be at the centre of thriving mainline congregations. I explore that concept in my conclusion making use of two books by Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* and *The God We Never Knew*.

Other books that contributed to my vision of congregations in the future are *Meeting Jesus in Everyday Life* by Clair Woodbury, and *Soul Food: Stories to Nourish the Spirit and the Heart* by Jack Kornfield and Christina Feldman. Tom F. Driver looks at the importance of healing liturgies in, *Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*. I think the best book on discernment is, *I’d Say Yes, God, If I Knew What You Wanted* by Nancy Reeves.

³⁰ Hadaway, *Behold I Do a New Thing*, cover.

³¹ Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, cover.

Concluding Statement

More and more is being written about this exciting area of research. I have explored some of the most current material as it applies to the Healing Pathway and to personal transformation.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research project to determine how people are transformed by the phenomenon of Healing Touch. It is both phenomenological and heuristic in its nature, and uses a narrative inquiry approach. I interviewed four interviewees using a theological reflection model that encourages interviewees to share their stories and name the myths that are central to their life experiences.

Interviewing Procedures

I interviewed four people in depth, on one occasion each, using a theological reflection model with the acronym “NAME.” The interviews, of between one and two hours duration, took place at locations of their choosing. Interviewees were first invited verbally and, those who expressed interest in the project were sent a letter to confirm their intention to participate (Appendix 1).

I wanted to interview participants with a range of experiences. To ensure that interviewees had a sufficient depth of experience to be able to reflect on those experiences, I chose participants that had completed a minimum of one Healing Pathway workshop. This meant that they had an opportunity to give and receive four different treatments – Soaking Prayer, Magnetic Clearing, Full Body Balance, and the Sacred Chakra.

I limited my selection of interviewees to people who had experience in the Healing Pathway because the style of interview I chose was interactive and I wanted to use my experiences in the Pathway to validate their experiences.

Interviewees included people whose participation in the Pathway ranged from a Phase I Healing Pathway workshop to one person who had completed all four phases of the program and was an instructor. Age was not a criterion but I wanted both genders represented. One man and three women participated. After listening to the taped interviews several times and using the transcripts to ensure accuracy, I wrote up the interviews in a narrative format to facilitate understanding by the readers of my paper.

Data Collection

I used a method of theological reflection called NAME. This method is outlined by Robert Kinast in his book, *Making Faith Sense*. NAME is an acronym for a specific way of doing theological reflection:

N – narration;
A – analysis;
M – meaning (spiritual); and
E – enactment³²

I chose a specific model of theological reflection because I wanted a common narrative format in order to identify common threads or themes in their stories. As Killen and DeBeer put it, theological reflection can “attune us more acutely to the movement of God’s spirit in our lives and help us to hear God’s word more fully and deeply.”³³ For the purposes of this paper, I examine the transformative nature of Healing Touch, and as Killen and DeBeer tell

³² Robert L. Kinast. *Making Faith Sense* (Collegville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 20.

³³ Killen and DeBeer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 80.

us, “[i]f we want to encounter the wisdom of our Christian heritage in a way that empowers and offers transformative insights, we must bring that heritage into our reflection from the standpoint of exploration.”³⁴

Kinast charts a helpful way in which to envision how his model of theological reflection helps people to identify what occurred during their Healing Touch experiences, and why such experiences helped transform their lives within the context of Christian community.

Table 1: Kinast’s Model of Theological Reflection³⁵

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Framework</i>
1. When we enter our experience , we encounter our feelings .	1. Focussing on some aspect of experience .
2. When we pay attention to those feelings, images arise.	2. Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter .
3. Considering and questioning those images may spark insight.	3. Exploring the heart of the matter in conversation with the wisdom of the Christian heritage .
4. Insight leads, if we are willing and ready to action .	4. Identifying from this conversation new truths and meaning for living

In the narrative segment of the reflection, interviewees were encouraged to share their reason for participating in the Healing Pathway. They were asked to describe their experiences generally or the most significant treatment that resulted in a profound physical or emotional experience. I wanted to know what was happening to their bodies in terms of sensations, vibrations and temperature, whether they saw any images or colours and what emotions they experienced.

³⁴ Kinast. *Making Faith Sense*, 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

In the analysis phase we focussed on the one sensation, image or feeling that resonated the most deeply. By focusing on the sensation that they experienced, they were encouraged to share the story that the sensation evoked. The feelings that arose as they shared their stories or recalled during their treatments helped point to the “heart of the matter” where healing had occurred or, more likely, continues to occur because healing is often a journey and not a onetime event.

To extract meaning from their experiences we identified a biblical story or character with whom the interviewee felt an affinity. We had conversations about these similarities, and also about aspects of the scripture story that differed from their own. Through this process of reflection, we were able to gain meaning and insights that enabled the interviewees to identify the transformative nature of their involvement in the Healing Pathway.

During the enactment phase of this process, interviewees described ways in which their relationships with themselves, the world, or God might have changed. Finally, they were asked whether the Pathway had helped them change their thinking, acting or relating, the true test of transformation.

Appendix Two outlines the interview process. The follow-up questions inviting interviewees to add to, or clarify, their interviews are provided in Appendix 3.

Data Analysis

I am using Kinast’s NAME method of theological reflection as a means to collect data, as it is a form of Phenomenological inquiry. In their book, *Read me First*, Janice Morse and Lyn Richards tell us that, “[p]henomenology offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretive,

and engaging mode of inquiry from which to derive the essence of an experience (van Manen, 1990)”³⁶ The “essence of experience” is essentially the same as “heart of the matter,” which Killen and DeBeer define as “the phrase which refers to the central question, tension, issue, theme, problem, or wonderment of an experience.”³⁷

Morse and Richards tell us that phenomenology is based on two assumptions. The first is that lived experience is how humans perceive the world. The second is that those perceptions occur in the context of each individual’s relationships to things, people, events and situations.³⁸ The theological reflection on Healing Touch focuses on the interviewees’ perceptions of what happened during that experience, why it happened, and whether it transformed their relationship to self, God, community or their perception of life in general.

The process I used encouraged interviewees to share their stories and whenever we explore someone’s story it becomes a form of narrative inquiry. As noted in Chapter 2, narrative inquiry is difficult to define because it is about story and it is hard to predict what insights you will acquire and how you will acquire them, when you enter into someone’s life experience. D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly in, *Narrative Inquiry*, make the observation that when you conduct narrative inquiry it is relational. What the interviewer brings in the form of past experience and myth to the interview interacts with the experience that the interviewee is sharing. They tell us, “[W]e are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer research understandings.”³⁹ The relationship becomes integral to the study. We do narrative inquiry knowing that we are

³⁶ Janice M. Morse and Lyn Richards. *Read Me First* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing), 44.

³⁷ Killen and DeBeer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 61.

³⁸ Morse and Richards, *Read Me First*, 45.

³⁹ Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*, 61.

not removed from the study because we are part of the study. Clandinin and Connelly describe the process, telling us that:

[c]ollecting and analyzing stories is only part of narrative inquiry. It is in the living and telling of experience that we locate what represents our sense of our experience as narrative inquirers. Although we discussed several issues, on reflection, we understand that relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively. Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally. Participants are in relation, and we as researchers are in relation to participants. Narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation.⁴⁰

It important then, when doing narrative inquiry to be aware, that whether you intend to or not, your experiences as a human being and the relationship that you have with interviewees influences and contributes to the study.

I had not intended to do a theological reflection on my own Healing Touch experiences as part of this paper, but as a result of my involvement in the Healing Pathway, and my passion for this subject, my inquiry became Heuristic as well as Phenomenological. Michael Patton, in his book, *Qualitative Evaluation*, describes “Heuristics as a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher.”⁴¹

Because some of my personal experiences during a Healing Touch treatment have been so powerful, and because I have witnessed intense responses to Healing Touch in workshops and at the Healing House in Naramata, the inquiry becomes heuristic in scope. I also intend to use my experiences as a form of validation of the experiences of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 189.

⁴¹ Michael Quinn Patton. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, Second edition* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications), 71.

interviewees. Patton helpfully describes what happens when a phenomenological inquiry becomes heuristic in nature:

There are two focussing or narrowing elements of heuristic inquiry within the larger framework of phenomenology. First, the researcher *must* have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study. Second, others (interviewees) who are part of the study must share *an intensity* of experience with the phenomenon. Heuristics is not inquiry into casual experience. Heuristic inquiry focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and interviewees. It is the combination of personal experience and intensity that yield an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon.⁴²

Citing Bruce Douglas and Clark Moustakas, Quinn adds that “Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviour.”⁴³

The advantage of a heuristic inquiry is that its power lies in its potential for disclosing truth.⁴⁴ That has been helpful in my project because one of the challenges of this inquiry was to get people to move beyond superficial understanding of their experiences into deeper conversations about the spiritual affects of their experiences.

The study also became narrative because some of the interviewees identified core myths that motivated and influenced their lives and how those myths changed through the transformative nature of Healing Touch. In my paper, *Stories as Pastoral Care*, I discuss how the myths by which we live our lives can be barriers to healing. The word myth is often misunderstood. We do not need to ask ourselves if we have myths; we need only ask what they are. Everyone has a myth, or root metaphor, that gives their lives unity and meaning.

⁴² Ibid., 71.

⁴³ Bruce Douglass and Clark Moustakas. *Heuristic Inquiry: The Internal Search to Know* (Journal of Humanistic Psychology 25 (3, summer), 1985) 42.

⁴⁴ Patton. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 73.

One way we may challenge or change those core myths is by adopting new ones.⁴⁵ John Shea, in his book, *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography* gives us some insights into how powerful our myths are when he says:

[T]he ultimate home of myths are the primordial situations of human existence. Trivial occurrences are not the stuff of myth. Mythic activity arises out of and configures the experiences of life and death, awe and reverence, psychic and political struggles, the meaning of sex, the relationship with nature, the hope of an afterlife, etc. The ambition of myth is not to be one more interesting but forgettable account but to become the structure of consciousness through which human situation will be appropriated. . . . Mythic activity goes beyond, more accurately goes through, the shaping of consciousness to embody values and encourage attitudes. Myth is not a neutral assessment of the human condition but an attempt to actively engage the entire person in a particular rendition of the processes of life. In this sense it is unashamedly biased and asks from its adherents more than a nod of the head. Donald Evans has characterized religious (mythic) language as self involving. To speak the myth is to adopt the attitudes the myth proposes.⁴⁶

Also, as I further explain in Chapter 5, simply sharing our stories is one of the most healing things we can do.⁴⁷

The interviews were transcribed and then coded according to themes. Themes were determined after the interviews rather than before lest, as interviewer, I might be too controlling of the process rather than allowing it to unfold. Gretchen Rossman and Sharon Rallis in their book, *Learning in the Field*, tell us that, “[p]henomenological analysis requires that the researcher approach the texts with an open mind, seeking what meaning and structures emerge. The first step in reducing text is to read them and mark the passages that strike you as interesting. You often rely on your intuitive sense of what is ‘interesting.’”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Wayne Hughes. *Stories as Pastoral Care* (Story Theology, St. Stephen's College, 2004), 11-12.

⁴⁶ John Shea. *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography* (Chicago IL, Thomas Moore Press, 1978), 64.

⁴⁷ Hughes. *Stories as Pastoral Care*, 15.

⁴⁸ Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis. *Learning in the Field* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing), 184.

These common threads and themes generated an understanding of the lived experience from which I discerned how people are transformed by the Healing Touch experience. The intent of the study was not to examine how people might be transformed by receiving a single treatment, so for my purposes I chose to limit the study to people who had participated in at least one full training workshop sponsored by the Healing Pathway, a curriculum of Naramata, a learning and retreat centre affiliated with the United Church of Canada. This was to ensure that all interviewees had a sufficient depth of experience to reflect upon their transformation. A smaller and subsequent discussion, based on this transformative experience, and based on my understanding of the roles of the church in these times was, is it a worthwhile ministry in which churches might invest their time and energy?

Ethical Issues

Selection Process

Interviewees chose to participate after responding to a verbal and then written (e-mail) invitation. The primary consideration for selection (see Interviewing Procedures) was depth of experience. They were given several opportunities to withdraw from the project: when first asked, when they received the written invitation, when they were contacted to arrange a time and place for an interview, at the beginning when they heard and signed the informed consent forms (Appendix 4), during the interview and when they received the narrative of their interview. Interviewees will also have the option to receive the finished thesis by e-mail.

Validation

After the interviews were written as a first person account, a copy of each participant's story was e-mailed to them with an accompanying letter (Appendix Four). In the letter they were asked if the story accurately reflected what they said, if I heard what they said correctly, if I forget to mention something important or if there was something else they would like to add to their story.

All four of the interviewees responded to the letter. Two of the participants were pleased with their stories and felt that no changes were necessary. One of them commented, "I read my piece and I was amazed that I shared all that with you in one afternoon. I think that you have very accurately captured my experience." One participant needed some of the paraphrasing clarified and we did that through a phone call. One participant sent the story back by returned e-mail with suggested changes included in a different coloured font. Many of those changes were incorporated. Some of the changes, for example adding phrases such as, "I think" were not, since they did not add to or change the story in any significant way.

Confidentiality

Interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality and assured that privacy would be respected throughout the project. Names, personal information and all data have been kept in a secure file. The transcriber is a legal secretary whose profession requires an oath of confidentiality. The only other person with access to the information is my thesis supervisor, Rev. Dr. Fran Hare. Her position at St. Stephen's College and her profession in pastoral ministry assures that she operates ethically, and respects confidentiality. The interviewees were given pseudonyms and were identified by gender but not by age or location. After the

completion of my thesis all tapes, transcripts and documents pertaining to identification will be destroyed.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the qualitative research design and a theological reflection model (NAME) used to collect the data for this project. Chapter 4 outlines the biblical basis and the history of Healing Touch, culminating in the formation of the Healing Pathway at the Naramata Centre. Chapter 5 presents the individual reflections in a narrative style for ease of reading; these stories are analysed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 4

History of the Healing Pathway

Healing Stories in the Bible

Scripture gives us insights into the history of healing in the contexts of Jewish and Christian traditions. There are many healing stories in the Bible, most notably those of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of Paul.

There is much debate as to whether these stories are historical accounts of actual physical healings or are myth used to illustrate a particular theological thrust. Morton Kelsey, in *Healing and Christianity*, states:

We find that everywhere Jesus went he functioned as a religious healer. Forty-one distinct instances of physical and mental healing are recorded in the four gospels (there are seventy-two accounts in all, including duplications), but this by no means represents the total. Many of these references summarize the healings of large numbers of people. . . . It is also clear that Jesus sent his disciples out to continue this basic ministry (Mark 6:7-13; Matt. 10:5-10; Luke 9:1-6). The book of Acts records how well they carried out this commission. It is difficult to see how Bultmann and others, and many who follow him, can eliminate this entire ministry on theological and philosophical grounds by calling it mythology. It is particularly difficult when we realize, on one hand, that these stories form one of the earliest levels of the gospel tradition from the point of view of form criticism, and on the other, what a close relation modern medicine has shown between psyche and body and how much they interact with another.⁴⁹

Further on in his book, Kelsey continues his reasoning by making this observation:

It is clear that the healing incidents recounted in detail were selected out of a wide range of possible ones, and in the telling conveyed the amazement of

⁴⁹ Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 43.

those who witnessed them. . . . The modern rejection of the healing stories is mostly a *blanket rejection* which is theological and – over and above our own inexperience and sense of impotence in the matter of healing – entirely theoretical. . . . By a circular reasoning they simply assume God does not touch human sickness and heal it. As C. S. Lewis pointed out in his excellent essay *Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism* this kind of rejection is very questionable.⁵⁰

Tom Harpur, in his book *The Uncommon Touch*, also struggles with this question of myth versus physical healings. The healing stories are so central to Jesus' ministry that it is very difficult for a person to do any serious study around Jesus, without somehow dealing with them. Harpur tells us:

Luke's Gospel takes this seminal concept of Mark – that Jesus acts and heals in and through the energy and power of the Holy Spirit of God – and develops it as the key to the entire secret of who Jesus was and what he came to do. He understands the phenomenon of Jesus' person and ministry totally in terms of his being filled and directed by God's spirit.⁵¹

Among the more credible sources we look to today in the liberal Christian tradition are the Jesus Seminar scholars who according to Tom Harpur, believe that Jesus was a healer. For the purposes of this paper we need to acknowledge that healing stories in the New Testament may be accounts of actual physical, emotional, and spiritual healings. As Harpur writes:

The question here, of course, is the one that goes beyond Jesus' technique alone and asks what was the secret of his healing power? Before answering this, however, there is a prior question. Did he really heal at all, or are the stories of the miracles simply the later invention of credulous followers anxious to hype the reputation of their leader? Since many of them can be shown to have had a symbolic meaning – for example, people have their “ears” opened by the Gospel or their “blindness” gives way to spiritual sight – are we really dealing not with events but with theological insights put forward as narratives for greater dramatic effect?

⁵⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁵¹ Tom Harpur. *The Uncommon Touch* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 61.

This is a much more complex and tricky question than it appears at first sight. However, since there are plenty of scholarly works you can consult on the matter, here I will lay out as directly and as simply as I can what makes the best sense to me. I am totally convinced that in the presence of Jesus, often at his touch or command, sick people became well. Even the California-based Jesus Seminar, in its ongoing radical and controversial attempt to sift and test the Gospels in order to discern Jesus' precise words, has stated its conviction that he was a healer. In other words, even the most determined bid to get behind the New Testament tradition to the historic reality comes up against the fact that in the ministry of Jesus the lame walked, the deaf had their hearing restored, and the blind were made to see. Whatever else he was, whatever else he claimed to be, Jesus possessed an ability to free people from certain bodily and mental or emotional ills.⁵²

Will we ever know with absolute certainty whether these accounts of Jesus healing people, and later the stories of his disciples healing, are historical fact or simply myth? I think not. What I believe is, whether these stories are myth or history, something profound and out of the ordinary occurred. These healing stories that make up "one fifth of the narrative portions of the gospels,"⁵³ were events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth that would help to propel Christianity into one of the world's great religions.

There are many ways that healing occurred in the New Testament. Some of these are "prayer, the faith of friends, and sacraments among others."⁵⁴ The two most common gestures associated with healing in the New Testament are touch and laying-on of hands.⁵⁵

Healing in the New Testament covers a broad scope of emotional, physical, mental and spiritual conditions. Flora Litt, writing in *Healing From the Heart* lists several kinds of healings in Acts and the Gospels ranging from Peter's mother-in-law's fever (Matthew 8: 4-15) to the raising of Lazarus who was not only dead but buried (John 11: 38-44). She lists some of the causes of human suffering as accidents, wounding, distress of heart or mind and

⁵² Ibid., 58.

⁵³ Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 9.

⁵⁴ Thomas, 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

demonic possession. Litt notes that most of the healings attributed to Jesus were brought about by some form of touch but cites four occasions where Jesus healed someone over distance.⁵⁶

I believe that the reason Jesus healed gives us insight about the attraction today of Healing Touch. As Jesus was filled with compassion for humankind, so too are those who are Healing Pathway practitioners. Kelsey tells us “The most important reason that Jesus healed was that he cared about people and suffered when they did. The root meaning of compassion is just this: to know suffering together. . . . He was opposed to sickness because it caused needless suffering.”⁵⁷

Healing in the Early Church

Paul recounts numerous healings that occur during his ministry. What I find remarkable is that, for the most part, he does not describe them in a manner suggestive of someone trying to prove that these healings took place. He is writing to early church communities and it appears that these communities simply accept them as fact. Harpur writes that:

The early witness of Paul, then, is that God, described as an active or energizing spirit, the same Spirit by whom Jesus healed the sick during his ministry, endowed various members of the fledgling churches with healing powers. . . . He knows that the recipients of his letter at Corinth are fully aware that some of their numbers are being used to heal other people. The healings are not in any way at issue. They are a commonly accepted fact.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Graham, Litt, and Irwin, *Healing From the Heart*, 32.

⁵⁷ Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 70.

⁵⁸ Harpur, *The Uncommon Touch*, 61.

Zach observes that for early Christians healing was already more about becoming whole or complete as humans rather than just the seeking of a physical cure to a specific ailment. This journey to wholeness occurs in the context of community. He observes that

For early Christians . . . sickness represented the ever-present spectre of death. In that context, healing touch functioned as much to encourage faith in Christ's victory . . . as it did to channel healing energies for specific ills. As a result of healing touch, the first Christians expected "not simply bodily healing but a deeper wholeness: strength, forgiveness of sins, vivification, protection of body, mind, and spirit." Thus, from the beginning, healing touch was not essentially a private moment but was shaped by the church's effort to encourage wholeness and community in the midst of life's harsh realities.⁵⁹

John Pilch, in his book *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles*, writes about how people would come from great distances just for the chance that Peter might offer them healing. He says:

People brought the sick even from towns neighbouring Jerusalem so that they might at least be touched by the shadow of Peter as walked by. This reminds a reader of the power attributed to the hem of Jesus garment (Luke 8:44). . . . In antiquity, the shadow was considered to be a person's or animal's soul, life force, *doppelganger*, or alter ego.⁶⁰

In the Healing Pathway, we speak of people being surrounded by their energy field. The size of that field depends on whether it is the physical, spiritual or emotional energy field, but what is important is that we see ourselves as more than our physical body. In this passage about people wishing to be in Peter's shadow we can see the similarity, even though the language is different. People perceive Peter's energy radiating out beyond the limits of his body, perhaps to about where his shadow ends. Similarly, in the Pathway, we do not view ourselves as healers but rather as channels for God's healing energy. Pilch observes that

⁵⁹ Thomas, *Healing Touch: The Churches Forgotten Language*, 4.

⁶⁰ Pilch, *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles*, 50.

“Peter insists it is not he, but Jesus who heals. Jesus is the patron. Peter is but Jesus’ broker.”⁶¹

Many of us wonder why the church was called to practice a healing ministry. One reason is that Jesus commissioned the disciples to go out into the world to heal as well as to teach and pray. Jesus also told us that not only can we do the same works as he did but we can do even greater things than he did (John 14:12-14). Early Christian leaders thought that “for all practical purposes the aim in founding the church was to make it possible to carry on the ministry of Christ while they waited for the coming of the kingdom.”⁶²

Healing ministries in the church are not perceived as a priestly function today; nor were they in the church’s beginning. Clair Woodbury, in *Meeting Jesus in Everyday Life*, explains that spiritual healing has a place in the church today in part because of what we know from James’ instructions to the early church. “Are there any of you who are sick?” asks James. “They should send for the church elders, who will pray for them and rub olive oil on them in the name of God. This prayer, made in faith, will heal the sick.” (James 5:14-16)⁶³

Woodbury makes a number of observations about healing and its connection to community, forgiveness, touch and prayer:

Healing like illness is apparently not a private matter. . . . The elders stand for others. . . . [T]he relationship between you and God needs to be right, but also the relationship between you and your neighbour. The passage from James emphasizes that physical contact is important for healing. . . . Healing is closely connected with forgiveness. The process of receiving forgiveness is the same process required for healing: reestablishment of one’s relationship with God.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., 83.

⁶² Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 81.

⁶³ Clair Woodbury. *Meeting Jesus in Everyday Life* (Ottawa: Novalis/Woodlake Books, 1989), 49.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 49-50.

What happened to this ministry of healing that was begun by Jesus and carried out by the early church? The answer is complex and multifaceted. There is much speculation about what happened. I believe the single biggest factor was the influence of Greek dualist thinking that understood body and spirit as distinct. This is in direct opposition to Jewish thinking in which humans are “dirt people,” material bodies of earthly substance into which God breathed the spirit of life (Genesis 2: 7); body, spirit and emotional life are interconnected and interdependent. These differences in understandings became even more acute in the Age of Enlightenment, and this understanding of interdependence was almost lost with the advent of modern medicine.

The book, *Healing from the Heart*, summarizes helpfully the demise of healing ministry in the church by illustrating differences between Greek and Christian thought. They write:

St Jerome said, “Plato located the soul of man in the head; Christ located it in the heart.”

All through the second and third centuries, the Christian community practiced and taught healing. Most writers of this time attest to healings, often leading to conversion.

But early in the second century, the philosophy of Plato underwent a revival. . . . (it) taught that a person had a higher nature consisting of soul, intellect, and will; and a lower nature of body, emotions and appetites.

Eventually, the church began to be influenced by the secular thought of the time. No longer did it minister to the whole person, but only to the spirit.

In popular thinking, the power of healing gradually passed from the people themselves, to priests, to monarchs. . . . In 313 CE, Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. As worship became more structured, the exercise of charismatic gifts including healing declined. Augustine explained this reversal by teaching that the supernatural gifts had been for establishing of the church and were now no longer needed. . . .

In the centuries following, the church continued to care for the sick. Monasteries were centers of medical care and learning during the Middle Ages. The monks were instructed that since medicine had been created by

God, and since it is God who gives health and restores life, they should turn to God, the creator, for healing.

But in 1123, the Catholic Church's Lateran Council issued an edict that forbade the clergy to care for the sick -- except as spiritual directors. . . . By the 13th century, the practice of prayer and anointing with oil for healing had become last rites for the dying. . . .

During the Protestant Reformation, Calvin and Luther maintained this concern for the soul rather than the body. . . .

Through the Middle Ages, both church and culture grew preoccupied with levels of authority. . . . In this period, healing touch disappeared among the laity. It became what Zach Thomas in *Healing Touch* calls "power touch," exercised only by religious and political authorities.

Later, with the birth of science in the 16th and 17th centuries, scientists were so enamoured of the powers of the mind that they had little regard for the body. Both "healing touch" and "Power touch" were considered superstitions of the past. . . .

There were exceptions to this progressive decline. . . . (including) John Wesley. . . .

Still, by the beginning of the 20th century, no major Christian church had a theology of prayer for the healing intervention of God through gifts of the Spirit.

The mainline church has for the most part limited laying on of hands to baptism, confirmation, and ordination. It has not been associated with healing -- though healing has continued to happen through participation in the Eucharist, counselling, etc...

In spite of the trends, the church's healing ministry never did disappear entirely. . . . Today the blessing, loving, healing touch is being reclaimed in the church once more as the Spirit guides the unfolding of the ministry of prayer for healing in the name of Jesus.⁶⁵

The Healing Pathway is administered by a learning institute of the United Church of Canada but is ecumenical in nature. The work and ministry of the Pathway is rooted and grounded in Christian scripture, is a continuation of the healing ministry initiated by Jesus of Nazareth, and has deep roots in the history of the Christian church.

⁶⁵ Graham, Litt and Irwin,, *Healing From the Heart*, 42-45.

Rationale for Healing Touch

The purpose of this paper is not to “prove” that Healing Touch works. The purpose is to reflect upon people’s experience of Healing Touch. It is, however, possible to understand why touch is effective at bringing about healing as defined by this paper and there is some scientific evidence to suggest that the process by which Healing Touch occurs can be measured. I do not intend to debate the validity of this rationale or these scientific studies. I only offer them for you to consider, and you may judge them for yourself based on their merit.

Gabor Maté, in his book, *When the Body Says No*, offers this insight into the value of the human experience as compared to scientific evidence:

Only an intellectual Luddite would deny the enormous benefits that have accrued to humankind from the scrupulous application of scientific methods. But not all essential information can be confirmed in the laboratory or by statistical analysis. Not all aspects of illness can be reduced to facts verified by double-blind studies and by the strictest scientific techniques. ‘Medicine tells us as much about the meaningful performance of healing, suffering and dying as chemical analysis tells us about the aesthetic value of pottery,’ Ivan Ilyich wrote in *Limits to Medicine*. We confine ourselves to a narrow realm indeed if we exclude from accepted knowledge the contributions of human experience and insight.⁶⁶

Touch is a basic human need. As a minister, I witness the lack of touch in this day and age. I know widows who have not experienced touch for many years, people who choose to live alone and have no support system through which to access touch and most devastatingly, people who are in relationship and who have stopped sharing touch with one another years ago. Even much of what we once considered normal human interaction is missing today. In theory, people may slide their bankcards into a machine, travel to the gas

⁶⁶ Gabor Maté. *When the Body Says No* (Toronto: Random House, 2004), 5.

station and fill up the car by swiping their gas cards, and then continue to the grocery store, scan their own items, and pay for them with their bankcards without interacting directly with another human person. Thomas shares with us that:

One cannot live without touch. The same cannot be said of any of the other senses. Touch can be considered as one of the basics to survival, along with food, water, oxygen, rest and movement, elimination, and sensitivity to danger and pain. Studies . . . show that neither can survive long without external stimulation. . . . A 1998 *New York Times* article reported that premature infants massaged fifteen minutes daily “gained weight 47% faster than others who were left alone in their incubators . . . showed signs that the nervous system was maturing more rapidly . . . and were discharged from the hospital an average of six days earlier. . . . The grim other side of the coin is a 1915 research project in orphanages where infant mortality within one year of admission was between 90 and 99 percent. The study showed that the deaths were caused by inadequate sensory stimulation.⁶⁷

Dr. Gabor Maté is not involved in energy work. He is a doctor on the east side of Vancouver who works with drug addicts and he has a history of doing palliative work. He explains how the hormonal, emotional, and physical parts of our being are interconnected. In particular he studies how hidden stress, which may be triggered by events as early as the first week of life, affects the hormonal system thus affecting the physical body which then manifests itself as disease in later life. He even claims that prenatal absorption of a mother’s stress can also affect development. One of his more interesting hypotheses is that ALS disease (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) is caused by repressed emotions, especially anger.⁶⁸

He explains his theory on the link between stress and disease quite succinctly:

Stress is a complicated cascade of physical and biochemical responses to powerful emotional stimuli. Physiologically, emotions are themselves electrical, chemical and hormonal discharges of the human nervous system. Emotions influence – and are influenced by the functioning of our major organs, the integrity of our immune defences and the workings of the many

⁶⁷ Thomas, *Healing Touch: The Church’s Forgotten Language*, 16-17.

⁶⁸ Maté, *When the Body Says No*, 57.

circulating biological substances that help govern the body's physical states. When emotions are repressed, this inhibition disarms the body's defences against illness. Repression – dissociating emotions from awareness and relegating them to the unconscious realm – disorganizes and confuses our physiological defences so that in some people these defences go awry, becoming the destroyers of health rather than its protectors.⁶⁹

The reason I include some of Maté's work is twofold. First, he validates the links between the body's systems. No one system operates independently of another and even though Maté does not name the spirit as one of those systems, I believe spirit to be as integrated into a person's wholeness as the emotional, hormonal and physical systems.

Secondly, Maté not only quantifies the link between stress and illness, but he also identifies the causes of stress, especially of hidden stress. He tells us:

The research literature has identified three factors that universally lead to stress: *uncertainty, the lack of information and the loss of control*. All three are present in the lives of individuals with chronic illness. Many people may have the illusion that they are in control, only to find later that forces unknown to them were driving their decisions and behaviours.⁷⁰

Those who suffer chronic illness can begin to identify its root causes through Maté's work and one way in which they can begin to release repressed emotions in a healthy way is by participating in Healing Touch.

One of the earliest scientific reviews to measure the affects of spiritual healing was conducted by Daniel J. Benor. Larry Dossey, in *Healing Words*, explains that "Scientific evidence supporting spiritual healing is considerable. In . . . 131 controlled experiments on prayer-based, 'spiritual,' 'psychic,' or 'psi' healings reviewed by Benor, over half . . . showed statistically significant results."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁷¹ Larry Dossey. *Healing Words* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 200.

A research project Harpur discusses is work done by a Canadian, Bernard Grad who studied Oskar Estebany “who did healing by laying-on of hands.”⁷² “Grad describes himself as a ‘ferocious experimentalist . . . [who] has little patience with those who attempt to mysticize non-medical healing.’”⁷³ In Estebany’s experiments, there were two groups of mice, a control group and a group in a container small enough that Estebany could “lay-on hands.” Each mouse had a wound created on its back and the rate of healing was measured over time. The difference between the rate of healing in the control group and quicker healing rate in the mice in the second group was “observable and statistically significant.”⁷⁴

Harpur also discusses some of the scientific study done by Dolores Krieger, a founder of Therapeutic Touch (TT). She was not only a healer herself but also developed a system to train practitioners to deliver TT to clients. The study Harpur writes about is intriguing because it tries to measure not the affects of TT but the brain waves of practitioners and clients.

Krieger documents the results of experiments proving that during TT . . . there were changes in the brainwaves both of the healer and the healee. The encephalographic readings show that the patients being treated went immediately into a low amplitude alpha state – “state of calmness and well-being” – and stayed there throughout the treatment. The healer registered a high amplitude beta brainwave state “indicative of a state of deep concentration similar to those occurring in mature meditators.” Krieger says even sceptics willing to be observers of these experiments were able to discern objective, outward signs of this “relaxation response.”⁷⁵

This study does not prove that healing is taking place but it does indicate that something measurable is taking place in the practitioner and in the client.

⁷²Harpur, *The Uncommon Touch*, 106.

⁷³Ibid., 100.

⁷⁴Ibid., 109.

⁷⁵Ibid., 141.

I believe that energy work will be the new frontier for medicine. The medical profession is beginning to understand that they are treating the physiological symptoms manifested by a body in need of healing. When people's emotional and spiritual lives are healthy, their physical bodies will be healthy too. There is a mounting body of evidence to support that the body's spiritual, emotional, hormonal and physical systems are linked, that the affects of spiritual healing when measured are statistically significant, and that the brain waves of healees and healers involved in energy work change during a session.

Modern Healing Ministries

Agnes/John Sanford

Although formal healing ministries had been lost to mainline churches for the most part, it was never completely lost and began a renaissance in the 1940's through the work of Agnes Sanford and the publication of her book, *The Healing Light*.

This is one of the first books written on energy healing, particularly on the power of touch and on people becoming a channel for that energy. Sanford discussed love and energy as a vibration and how the intensity of that vibration is effected by any number of things such as the practitioner, the environment, or having to overcome negative vibration in the sense of healing the world.

Much of the energy work done after Sanford, such as Therapeutic Touch and Healing Touch International, use similar techniques to those developed by Sanford and simply name

that vibration as energy. Harpur shares with us that “Sanford’s approach is, of course, wholly in terms of her own Christian faith.” She understood the energy as coming from God.⁷⁶

Her interpretation is quite different from mine. She compares people to appliances and the energy to electricity. She would tell you that the energy is always there and if a healing does not take place it is not the fault of the energy, but because the appliance (the person) is faulty. My understanding is that we do healing work for the highest good of others, and only God knows what their highest good is. I believe we act as channels for God’s love and energy and we trust that energy goes where it needs to go, working for a person’s highest good, whatever that may be.

Sanford, like many of us, came to be aware of energy or healing work with a bit of scepticism. Early in her book, she shares this story on how, even though she thought it would make no difference, a visiting minister healed her son’s infected ears:

My baby had been ill for six weeks with abscessed ears. I prayed desperately that God would heal the child. . . . He sent me one of his own ministers. . . . ‘I’ll go up and have a prayer with him,’ he said. ‘I don’t think that would do any good,’ I replied. . . . The minister placed his hands upon the baby’s ears and said, ‘Now close your eyes and go to sleep. I’m going to ask God to come into your ears and make them well, and when you wake up you’ll be all right.’ . . . The fever-flush died out of the baby’s face immediately. He turned very pale, closed his eyes and slept, when he woke, he was swell. And he never again has had abscessed ears.⁷⁷

This incident marked the beginning of her interest and her work with energy. Her work did not include the specific treatments that most energy work entails today. Rather, her technique consisted of laying her hands wherever she felt called to place them, praying Jesus

⁷⁶ Harpur, *The Uncommon Touch*, 140.

⁷⁷ Agnes Sanford. *The Healing Light* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 2-3.

or God to enter her and use her as a channel for healing. She also often used images in her mind of the “diseased” part being healed.

Her son, John Sanford, continued her work, and its theological implications, by exploring the meaning of illness in the gospels in comparison to psychotherapy and some of Jung’s work. In *Healing Body and Soul*, he sees energy work as a way of moving towards Individuation. This is a specific type of healing that Sanford sees illustrated by the story of the haemorrhaging woman (Mark 5: 25-29) because through this healing, the woman is able to become what she was meant to be. He describes Individuation as:

This movement away from our eccentricity and toward the larger, God—given, creative life of the Self. . . . Individuation means becoming what we are meant to become. Everything alive in this world works to become what it is meant to be: the acorn strives to develop into the oak tree, and the seed into the wheat.”⁷⁸

Later, he explores the meaning of faith and how we speak of having faith, but in the New Testament, faith is used as a preposition; meaning we must put our faith into someone or something. “This means that faith must have a place in which to be invested for it to live and grow.”⁷⁹ He also discusses how we can be healed through faith even in the midst of illness and suffering because, “the ultimate foundation of faith is not that everything will be all right but that the soul can be sustained whether things are all right or not. From this comes the strength to endure things as they are and grow stronger in the process.”⁸⁰

For the Healing Pathway this means that we put our faith in the energy that comes from God. We believe that energy is always working for our highest good, even in the midst of physical and emotional suffering as we move towards all that we are meant to be. I believe

⁷⁸ John A. Sanford. *Healing Body and Soul: The Meaning of Illness in the New Testament and Psychotherapy* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 51

⁸⁰ Ibid., 60.

that God envisions a life for all of us where we achieve our full potential as a human; that is our greatness.

Therapeutic/Healing Touch

The history of Therapeutic Touch began with Dolores Krieger who “is one of the contemporary pioneers in integrating the spiritual dimension of healing with mainstream professional nursing practices.”⁸¹ In the 1970s, Krieger and Doris Kuntz developed Therapeutic Touch (TT) as a way for health professionals to integrate spiritual healing as part of their practice. They describe TT as “a creative interpretation of several ancient healing practices that deal with such concepts as the ‘laying-on’ of hands, ‘energy transfer,’ and the ‘inner healer.’”⁸² TT differs from some of the other energy based healing systems in that it is always done “hands-off,” working with the energy fields without actually touching the body.

TT, although spiritually based, was not grounded in Christian faith. Krieger describes the energy being accessed in TT as, “the universal energies that are the backdrop to all living events and within which both healer and healee are figures sharing a unitary nature.”⁸³

The history of Healing Touch International (HT) began in 1989 when Janet Mentgen, Susan Morales, and Dorteia Hover-Kramer formed Healing Touch that would later be known by that name. They continued to build upon the work that Krieger and Kuntz had begun, adding hands-on treatments (touch) and offering HT as a Continuing Education course through the American Holistic Nurses Association.⁸⁴

Right from its early history, Healing Touch International has been defined as:

⁸¹ Dolores Krieger. *Accepting Your Power to Heal* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1993), xv.

⁸² *Ibid.*, xv.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁴ Hover-Kramer, *Healing Touch*, 4.

a program of study of various energy-linked healing approaches, including the many full body and more localized techniques . . . which provides multidimensional healing to restore balance in the dynamic human being. In addition, HT is a program that recognizes practitioners who have completed the course of study and committed to their ongoing personal development. Since its inception, the HT organization has held the goal of acknowledging practitioners through certification.⁸⁵

Hover-Kramer, in *Healing Touch*, explains the operation of energy in the human body in this way:

The term “subtle energy” was first used by . . . Albert Einstein to describe the minute, ongoing interrelationships between subatomic particles. . . . [H]e posited that there is interaction between matter and energy: . . . (the famous formula is $E=mc^2$). Translated into human terms, it appears that our vital force, *Qi* or *prana* is the very stuff of the universe. This energy is in continuous interaction with matter, as exemplified by our physical bodies, and the speed of our thoughts augmented by our emotions and sensitivity to our highest potential. . . . [W]e are beginning to have scientific evidence to support the presence of the subtle human energy system. . . . “Our bodies act like the hardware of a computer and our haemoglobin and clay-based cells may act as our electromagnetic core. Chakras act like the software, the biofield stores the data and the meridians act as if they carry data and provide the electrical power to control the system.”. . . [T]his three-fold subtle energy system is continuously interactive within itself and with all other human informational systems. . . . It is helpful, then, to think of each whole human being as a vast network of vibrational interrelationships supported by the complex, subtle circuitry suggested – it is, indeed, a vibrational matrix. This vibrational matrix, in our present knowledge, consists of three major aspects—the biofield, the chakras, and the meridians.⁸⁶

Healing Touch operates on the principle that, by affecting a change in a person’s energy system through working on the biofield or the chakras, a person may be healed.

Hover-Kramer notes that “another important implication of energy theory for the healer is alignment with our Higher Power as we may sense the unlimited supply of order and flow within nature. . . . [as the healer] is a conduit for universal life energy, the Source, or Higher

⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 63-65.

Power.”⁸⁷ To summarize how Healing Touch affects a change in clients, Hover-Kramer tells us that, “there is a flow of energy from the Universal Energy Field through the healer to the client.”⁸⁸

Although Healing Touch practitioners do not deal directly with meridians which are “the energy flow lines coursing through the physical body,”⁸⁹ “the premise that we are working with the subtle interactions of the human energy system is strong.”⁹⁰ A type of meridian work that many of us are familiar with is acupuncture, which has been practiced in China for over 5000 years. The emerging field of energy psychology makes extensive use of meridians.⁹¹

“It is not so much that we *have* an energy field but rather that we *are* an energy matrix of which the physical body is the most visible and dense.”⁹² The energy field of a human projects past their physical body. Some people claim to be able to see that energy field and it is called an *aura*; often seen as varying colours. Today, the human bioelectrical field can be measured. Dora Kuntz who co-developed TT identified and named the four major layers of the energy field. The first is the vital layer that is most closely associated with the physical body and extends 2-12 inches from the body. It is the layer that Healing Touch Practitioners work with the most. The second is the emotional layer, then the mental layer and finally the intuitive or spiritual layer.⁹³

⁸⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁹¹ Ibid., 66-67.

⁹² Ibid., 68.

⁹³ Ibid., 68-69.

In Healing Touch, we work with seven major chakras that are located up the centre of the body plus numerous minor chakras.

The word *chakra* means “wheel” or “vortex” in Sanskrit, suggesting a whirling center of human *Qi*. . . . The chakras seem to act like an energy transfer station. That is they allow the inflow of *Qi* from the unlimited supply of energy in the Universe to enter to the human organism; they allow this *Qi* to be dispersed throughout the individual’s system; and they permit release, or outflow of excessive, unneeded, energy.⁹⁴

W. Brugh Joy, in his book *Joy’s Way*, suspects “that the chakra system is a mechanism that interrelates the gross physical body and the subtle or etheric bodies [energy field].”⁹⁵ He names the forty classic chakra areas, though many of them are not used commonly in Healing Touch. The areas where the energy is the strongest are the transpersonal point, crown center, brow, throat, upper mid-chest [High heart], heart, solar-plexus, spleen, sexual center, root, hip, knee, foot, shoulder, elbow and hand.⁹⁶

There are two main ways in which HT affects a change in the energy flow or the chakras of someone seeking healing. The first is very similar to techniques used by TT and is unruffling or smoothing the energy field by placing both the hands just above the body and brushing or smoothing down the entire body or a particular problem area.⁹⁷ The second is by placing hands directly on or slightly above the area (chakra) where one wishes to affect the energy field.

The goal is to bring balance and harmony to the areas of the field that have been blocked or congested. The technique involves simply resting the hands on the specific area of the body and holding them in place for a period of time, usually 3 to 5 minutes. The hands may be kept in place until the healer feels a

⁹⁴ Ibid., 65-66.

⁹⁵ W. Brugh Joy, *Joy’s Way: A Map for the Transformational Journey* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons: 1979), 163.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 165-6.

⁹⁷ Hover-Kramer, *Healing Touch*, 111.

change, such as fullness or warmth, which is a clue that the energy has shifted.⁹⁸

Prior to Therapeutic Touch and Healing Touch International, energy healing was done mostly by people who discovered they had a gift for it. They used some form of laying-on of hands but basically developed a system that seemed to work for them. TT and HT developed techniques that standardized how people could be treated to affect a change on their energy fields. Most importantly, they discovered that healing was not a gift that just some “special people” had but was something that could be taught to anyone who wanted to invest the time and energy to develop their connection to a universal energy and develop their technique.

Healing Pathway

The Healing Pathway is a program of the Naramata Centre. “The pathway trains and mentors individuals who wish to develop their healing gifts and skills within the Christian tradition. The pathway also supports individuals on their spiritual journeys and assists congregations and communities to develop healing ministries.”⁹⁹

The history of the Healing Pathway began in 1992 when a Healing Touch International instructor, Rochelle Graham, came to Naramata Centre to give a presentation on Healing Touch. The next year she began teaching Healing Touch at Naramata Centre and offering the course to various congregations throughout British Columbia and Alberta.

The work grew quickly and in 1996, Graham and the Naramata Centre created the Healing Pathway that was grounded in the United Church and included an advisory team that

⁹⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁹⁹ Mary Trainer. *The edge of the centre*, (Kelowna, BC: Woodlake Books, 2009), 83.

created values, guidelines and a code of ethics for the Pathway. “In 1998, the curriculum [developed by the advisory team] was reviewed and adopted as the Naramata Centre Healing Pathway. The Healing House (then held in Lyall House) originally opened for two weeks as a pilot project.”¹⁰⁰

The Pathway began as an offshoot of Healing Touch International and its curriculum was the medical/nursing model, which defined the energy in scientific terms. The Pathway felt challenged to define itself in terms of its Christian faith and this move to become “God centered” is what would differentiate it from other energy work in the years to come. In an e-mail to me, Julie Gerhardt, Director of the Healing Pathway, quotes Graham as she describes what brought about that change:

I [Rochelle Graham] was the Director of Mission Effectiveness at St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver. The mission statement spoke about carrying on the healing mission of Jesus. The work evolved by living the question, what does it mean to carry on the healing mission of Jesus? I remember the first class I taught when I asked the participants to ask God to work through their hands (in comparison to simply the intent to help). It was as though someone had turned on one hundred light bulbs in the room. I began to experience the theology of ‘I am the light of the world.’ I was continually amazed at how the curriculum was led by God and my job was to listen and respond.¹⁰¹

In 2002, the Blue House at the Naramata Centre was renovated and dedicated as the Healing House. During summer sessions at the Centre, the Healing House is a place where both staff and participants can go to receive a HT treatment. In other times of the year, it is used to facilitate the training of practitioners in the Pathway.

Much of the credit for developing the pathway goes to Catherine Awai.

[She] was Director of the Pathway from 2000 to 2007. She was central to the development of this educational program, overseeing instructor training

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰¹ Julie Gerhardt, e-mail message to author, February 22, 2009.

processes, documentation, and ongoing curriculum changes, as well as providing support for community and congregational practice groups. Awai held the vision that Graham had for the Healing Pathway, and it continues to evolve.¹⁰²

In 1998, just two years after the founding of the Healing Pathway Advisory Team, the initiator of teaching Healing Touch at Naramata Centre, Rochelle Graham, in collaboration with Flora Litt and Wayne Irwin published a book on healing entitled, *Healing from the Heart*. This book is the unofficial handbook of the Healing Pathway and discusses the history and rationale for Christian healing through touch and prayer. It also looks at scientific evidence to support energy healing and offers meditations, healing services, liturgy and detailed instruction on how to offer Healing Touch.¹⁰³ The Healing Pathway has evolved since then and is now in the process of developing a handbook for practitioners. It is my hope that the handbook will articulate the mission and theology of the Pathway and include its history as well as describe treatments endorsed by the Healing Pathway.

Julie Gerhardt makes the observation that, “While it is important to honour the Pathway’s history in that it developed from the foundation of Healing Touch International, there are many unique aspects about the Pathway, including techniques and how the energy is held.”¹⁰⁴

Today, much of the advanced training is completed at the Centre but the first two levels are taught in congregational settings across Canada. Since 2001, about 3,720 people across the country have completed at least one Healing Pathway workshop. At present, there are over 20 instructors and instructors-in-training.¹⁰⁵ Although the Pathway has its roots in a

¹⁰² Mary Trainer. *The edge of the centre*, (Kelowna, BC: Woodlake Books, 2009), 85.

¹⁰³ Graham, Litt, and Irwin, *Healing From the Heart*.

¹⁰⁴ Trainer, *The edge of the centre*, 85.

¹⁰⁵ Julie Gerhardt, e-mail message to author, February 22, 2009.

United Church learning and retreat centre, its influence is ecumenical in nature. A typical weekend workshop would include participants from many diverse faith communities, including people who would identify themselves as “spiritual” but not necessarily “religious.” This ministry continues to grow and has been taught at other United Church learning institutions such as the Tatamagouche Centre in Nova Scotia and the Calling Lakes Centre in Saskatchewan.

Even if people understand the theology and theory behind Healing Touch, they still wonder what a treatment might look like. There are a number of books that give detailed, step-by-step instructions. I recommend *Healing from the Heart*, or *Accepting Your Power to Heal* or *Healing Touch: A Guidebook for Practitioners*. I have been a practitioner since 2003, trained through the Healing Pathway and most treatments follow a similar pattern.

The practitioner(s) will be centered meaning, “fully present with the person who is the focus of this session [and i]t means clearing yourself of any distracting thoughts, feelings and external noises. . . . Being centered means feeling peaceful, aware that your breath is deep and even, you are grounded in your body, connected to a higher source of power.”¹⁰⁶ They will also set their intent, usually to be an instrument of healing for the highest good of the client.¹⁰⁷

The client is usually asked to lie down on a massage table but treatments can be given in a variety of positions. The practitioner will do an assessment by asking the client about their expectations and by using their hands, or a pendulum, to assess the energy fields, normally starting at the head and ending at the feet. They will ask the client to state their

¹⁰⁶ Graham, Litt, and Irwin, *Healing From the Heart*, 90-1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

intent to be a receiver of God's healing energy or light and love of God. They might offer a prayer at that time. The practitioner will decide what treatment would be appropriate. There are a number of treatments but most are a variation or combination of three main treatments: Magnetic Clearing, Full Body Balance and the Sacred Chakra.

Magnetic Clearing is done without bodily contact. Practitioners use their hands like a rake, 6-12 inches from the client's body, beginning behind the head and moving down the full length of the body. They will continue this until the energy field feels smooth with no blockages, usually about 15 minutes.

The Full Body Balance uses the chakras to balance the energy field, sometimes filling with energy, sometimes relieving congestion, but always encouraging the energy or Qi to flow. Practitioners start by holding the client's feet in order to "ground" him or her and then, starting with one hand on the foot chakra and the other on the ankle, hold their hands in that position until the energy feels balanced and flowing. Then they move to ankle/knee, continuing up the body, connecting with all the major chakras, always waiting for the energy to feel balanced and flowing before moving on. Although usually done with hand contact, it can also be done without bodily contact. Many other treatments use this principle and the hands move in specific patterns, according to the treatment.

The Sacred Chakra is not used as often as other treatments but is a powerful form of prayer used for people trying to discern a new path in life, or having undergone a major transition or sorrow. It can be helpful in assisting a dying person. If a client is able to do so, she or he will tell the practitioner what prayer or blessing to say over them. The practitioner will ground and then connect with and open the flow of energy with the client by holding each of their hands and feet in turn. Then beginning at the head, they will lift their hands up

and over the client, envisioning a stream of light and love coming down, and as they move their hands down they silently say the blessing or prayer, spreading their hands and the light and love of Christ or God across the client's body and energy field. This is repeated three times over each chakra and the entire cycle is repeated three times. Between each cycle, excess energy is "pulled" off the lower legs and the treatment ends with connecting to the client's heart chakra.

All treatments end with conversation about what the client experienced and how his or her body feels. A prayer is often offered, releasing the person into God's care and asking that whatever healing has begun, will continue.

For the purposes of this paper, the reader does not need to know how to give a Healing Touch treatment but will find it helpful to appreciate the type of work that the interviewees are involved in. Participants in a Healing Pathway workshop learn to give and receive treatments, participate in meditations to help them be grounded and connected to God, learn about the theology of the Healing Pathway, explore the importance of self-care, and discuss ways to encourage this ministry in local congregations.¹⁰⁸

Summary

The Healing Pathway is a continuation of the healing ministry of Jesus. It is grounded in Scripture, and in healing practices that were central to the early church. Healing was not seen as the work of the church for many years, but the church continued to provide healing through the laying on of hands and in its liturgies. A resurgence of spiritual healing began

¹⁰⁸ Naramata Centre, *Healing Pathway Curriculum*. <http://www.naramatacentre.net/programs-healing-curr.asp> (Accessed September 11, 2009).

with Agnes Sanford in the 1940s, which melded with the energy/medical healing work that was being done through Therapeutic Touch and Healing Touch International. The systems they designed to formalize treatment protocols and train practitioners to do energy work in a scientific/medical model allowed the church to claim this healing ministry by rationalizing what was previously seen by Christians influenced by the Enlightenment as superstition and fictitious accounts of healing.

The Healing Pathway is not the only legitimate energy based healing work being done. Ancient societies had shamans who were aware of energy fields. In the Far East, acupuncture has been used for thousands of years. In India, tantric yoga is used to affect a change in one's energy field. Reiki from Japan is a popular way of doing energy work in the secular world. Medical doctors like Larry Dossey recognize the power of prayer in healing, and doctors like Gabor Maté are beginning to document the interconnectedness of all the body systems. These forms of energy work are the tip of an iceberg and they will revolutionize the way we think about the human body, spirit, and God in the years to come.

Chapter 5

Sacred Stories

The Importance of Stories

The stories that I heard from the people I interviewed were powerful. They tell of unique experiences that give testimony to changed lives, encounters with the holy, and of community. I am honoured not only to have heard these persons' stories but I am also privileged to have been trusted to hold them. The time we spent together as storytellers and interviewer felt sacred, perhaps because these are stories of God and the Spirit, or perhaps because they are so intensely personal. In more than one instance, I had the feeling that there was a third presence in the room and that this was truly holy time.

As a society, we do not value storytelling. Our stories have power to heal by enabling us to see a new richness and fullness to life and to find new priorities and appreciation for the life we are living. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, in her book *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, gives us a sense of that power when she tells us:

Stories set the inner life in motion, and this is particularly important where the inner life is frightened, wedged or cornered. Story greases the hoists and pulleys, it causes adrenaline to surge, shows us the way out, down, or up, and for our trouble, cuts for us fine wide doors in previously blank walls. Openings that lead to the dreamland, that lead to love and learning, that lead us back to our own real lives.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Clarissa Pinkola Estes. *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 1.

Fran Hare, an instructor of Story Theology, at St. Stephen's College shared with me that stories also have a destructive power. Part of psycho-therapy often involves undoing the power of destructive stories, whether they stem from unhealthy relationships or are self-induced stories. Some stories, such as the ones that Jesus shared, are open-ended, allowing hearers to finish it for themselves.¹¹⁰

Stories affect our spiritual, emotional and psychological self like no other form of communication. Estes adds:

The spoken story touches the auditory nerve, which runs across the floor of the skull into the brainstem just below the Pons. There, auditory impulses are relayed up to the consciousness or else, it is said, to the soul . . . depending on the attitude with which one listens. Ancient dissectionists spoke of the auditory nerve being divided into three or more pathways deep into the brain. They surmised that the ear was meant, therefore, to hear at three different levels. One pathway was said to hear the mundane conversations of the world. A second pathway apprehended learning and art. And the third pathway existed so that the soul itself might hear guidance and gain knowledge while here on earth. Listen then with soul-hearing now, for that is the mission of story.¹¹¹

The stories people shared with me were not simply stories; they were a theological reflection done in a specific manner (see Methodology for an outline of the process). Killen and DeBeer tell us in their book, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, that “God cannot speak to us if we refuse to be present—not judgmentally aware and attentive—to our experience.”¹¹² I believe it is because we were fully present, nonjudgmental, and attentive to each other that this time together had a sense of the sacred.

Essential for effective theological reflection is that people feel they can share their stories safely. The reason for that, Killen and DeBeer tell us is, “that conversation can only

¹¹⁰ Fran Hare, conversation with author, Red Deer, AB, 2009.

¹¹¹ Estes, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, 26.

¹¹² Killen and DeBeer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 25.

take place when we allow the questions to assume primacy and set aside our fears.”¹¹³ One way to attain the safety to share personal stories is for storyteller and listener to explore the story as equals, trying to find truth, rather than using a hierarchal model of interviewing. In this way, “As explorers, we enter our experience not knowing the hidden thoughts we will discover, the feelings that will arise, the images we will encounter, the questions we will endure, or the insights that will guide us. . . . to allow the thoughts, feelings, images, and insights . . . to be in genuine conversation.”¹¹⁴ Not only did I gain insights into people’s Healing Touch experiences but they too gained insights into their own experience. When we tell our story to another, it allows us to hear it with new ears.¹¹⁵ This makes for a rich exchange of thoughts and ideas.

I share these stories with you, as a testimony to their experience. I do not necessarily tell these stories in the same order that we answered the interview questions, but in a shortened version and in a style that allows the story to flow. The stories, written in the first person in order to use the participants’ own words where possible, thoughts, and feelings reflect accurately what I heard in the interviews and were validated by having the interviewees read their stories and comment back on them (see Methodology).

Bob’s Story

I’ve been involved with the Healing Pathway for a number of years. I’ve participated in Phase I plus both Phase 2 workshops. I was involved in a small healing ministry that has a

¹¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁵ Fran Hare, conversation with author, Red Deer, AB, 2009.

certain ebb and flow to it. I was encouraged to get involved in the Pathway because I was having some health problems and was trying to deal with them in a holistic manner.

The treatment I'd like to share was one that happened in the hospital, just a relatively short time ago. My health problems had returned and I required major invasive surgery. I used some of the Pathway techniques and resources to prepare myself for the surgery and had also arranged for someone to give me a treatment in the hospital following surgery.

I remember this treatment vividly because I was being monitored by medical staff and, once they had gotten out of the way, there was space for a healing touch person to come in and do their thing. There was such a deep sense of being grounded, of feeling the spirit literally pulsing through my body in an alignment that I had never felt before.

Thinking back, I remember how very wonderful the conversation was prior to the healing touch treatment. We set our intent to begin the treatment and as soon as the practitioner began to hold my feet and make a connection, the groundedness began. It's really hard to describe the sensation, but you need to know that I had been opened up from my chest bone to my pubic bone so the whole center of my body was in trauma. Have you ever seen the magic trick or illusion where the person gets into a box with two separate compartments and the magician pulls them apart, like he'd cut them in half? That's how I felt before the treatment, disjointed, off. As the treatment progressed, I could literally feel myself coming back into alignment. It was as I began to come into alignment that the pulsing began. I don't usually see colours but I did feel a warmth and as the pulsing increased, so too did the warmth. I didn't become totally aligned, with just one treatment, but the movement had been so far that it was profound.

The ironic part is that when we talked, before the treatment, the practitioner encouraged me to image my backbone going down to the center of the earth connecting with that energy, the molten energy that is in the earth. As I imagined it, the sensation began--the warmth, the pulse. It was like I was aligned to the heartbeat of God.

As we moved towards the end of the treatment, I experienced just a deep sense of being grounded, feeling like I was surrounded by love. It was such a unique context; modern medicine meeting complementary medicine and there was such a synergy of healing that quite bluntly, the doctors were stunned at how quickly I recovered. There also was a huge reduction in pain. I had treatments on day two, three and four and by day five, they took my pain pump away because I did not need it anymore.

When I relive that experience today, it's hard to describe the feeling, other than to say the pulsing felt like the heartbeat of God. It's actually a sense of awe transcending time, a deep sense that I was being held in God's care and in God's love. My life has not been the same since. Because of the healing that has gone on in my body, mind and spirit, there has been an incredible peace in my life.

I don't still pulse with that same intenseness or profoundness as I did that day, but when I am not feeling that pulsing, then I need to meditate, to reflect, to allow myself the opportunity to get back into that alignment.

The story in scripture that I identify with the most is that of Moses standing on the bank of the Jordan gazing at the Promised Land. Scripture describes him as healthy and vibrant, yet he knows he is going to die and he will never cross over to that Promised Land. It's a paradox and often our human experience is a paradox as well.

I wasn't sure that I would ever see the Promised Land but there was this overwhelming sense that I was vital and healed with a very uncertain future. I realized that our earthly journey is just that, uncertain, but our ability to connect with that heartbeat of God is really what this journey is about. It really doesn't matter what the future entails; we can live very vital lives and not necessarily have longevity. They're not necessarily linked.

My story is different from Moses' story though because I don't think my story is going to end in the desert. I think I am already living in the Promised Land. My crossing the Jordan was the surgery. It was a turning point because they didn't know if I would make it or not. I did make it, but who I was before the surgery is not who I am today. The Healing Touch experience solidified that new person.

Feeling that connection brought me to a place of healing, that allowed me to be totally alive in the moment. Even though I just completed five hours of surgery, I was profoundly well. I don't know how else to say it but "the glow was on." I felt totally embraced by God and felt that God's grace was working in me and through me. I was totally present.

It defies words because it is about awe, but at the same time it was so tangible that you could taste it. It's hard to explain to someone who hasn't experienced it. When you share the experience with someone in the Pathway, it's like you have a kindred spirit who understands what you're saying on a heart level. I mean heart in the broadest sense of the word, as the healers understand, where wholeness meets wholeness.

So the symbol of my life today is the surgery because once you've crossed the River Jordan, you can never go back.

I think my participation in the Healing Pathway has changed the way that I relate to God and the world but, at the same time, it matches the way I was in the world before. So, for

me, the Healing Pathway has given me a vehicle, a structure that's allowed me to allow spirit to dwell. I think about God in a more intimate and personal way than I did before, because it feels more tangible now.

Healing Touch had some affect on my life prior to the surgery, but it has had a profound affect since then. I feel like I'm being recreated; it's like I'm sort of newly invented. In my life now, the embodiment of God, the transforming nature of God is at work. There is a synergy that is happening between God and me. There is this interplay to understand that I am a conduit of God's love and our spirits and when they are able to interact and come together there's a significant movement in terms of transformation and love and really, the kingdom of God is coming alive for me

The one thing that I have discovered about myself is that I need to have a community of people who are going to be travellers on the journey with me. It becomes more obvious when you have had a profound experience like this and you are trying to integrate it into your life and not everyone understands so it's important to have those travellers to talk to and to experience that with you. My challenge in the future is to find that community.

Maureen's Story

I've heard about Healing Touch for quite some time. A friend of mine was very interested in it but it seemed I never had the time or it never fit into my schedule to attend a workshop. Then I had a chance to experience a "Taste of Healing Touch" which was a guided meditation followed by the Soaking Prayer. After talking to my friend about Healing Touch, I thought it was an interesting theory, but after this one experience I was really

intrigued. Not long afterwards, I noticed that there was going to be a Phase I workshop offered not too far away, so I made the commitment and went.

Before I tell you about that weekend, I need to share with you an experience that I had many years ago. It was pivotal experience for me and changed the way I thought about God, myself, and the way we interact.

We lived on a farm then and I was standing at the sink washing dishes, looking out the window. I was upset and crying. I don't cry quietly on the inside; I sob gut-wrenching sobs. And right in the middle of this, came this feeling, right in the middle of my solar plexus. I wondered if I was having a heart attack, but no, I felt fine and was breathing okay. I wondered what this feeling was and I grabbed the front of the sink. I felt warm, all down the front of me so I looked to see if I had spilt dishwater, but no I was dry.

I lost all sense of time and had no idea how long the experience lasted but it seemed like it was a long time. It felt like I was travelling on something very fast and the blue sky outside the window was coming towards me really, really, fast. It was the brightest blue that you can imagine. It was this really bright colour that could never be duplicated by any paint that is here on earth. It just felt so vibrant. And through it all, I was just experiencing the most wonderful joy that you can imagine. When it was over, I felt like climbing to the top of a mountain and shouting for joy.

So, the story in scripture that I identify with, that really resonates with me, ever since that day, is the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. I've experienced the same joy that Paul experienced. This has opened new possibilities for me, new understanding as to how God is present in the world. I read scripture differently now, I am much more aware. It is hard to describe, but now when I talk to people about scripture, I have my

experience to draw on. That experience has entwined itself into what I do, and who I am, and what I think and how I act; I guess you could say it was a life-changing event.

My story is different from Paul's because Paul was with a friend and then they took him to Damascus until his sight came back. I was all alone. My husband was out in the field, the kids were away, the minister was gone. I didn't have anyone that I could share my experience with.

This experience changed my life because, now, I can experience joy every day of my life and it is wonderful. Even in the midst of grief, I have that joy and it's something that nobody can take away from me. It's my experience and I belong to God; it's no fly-by-night thing. It means I am more open to prayer and I have this feeling of love for people that can't be explained. For example, I go to visit seniors at the local lodge every week and I love those people so much that it almost makes my heart burst from my body. It gives me a sense that I am living in the most wonderful of times.

When I think back on that weekend of the Healing Touch, there is not one particular moment or treatment that stands apart, but many little things that I experienced over the weekend. My Damascus Road experience was so big for me that, in terms of my spiritual life, everything else seems minor. That one experience of mine just overshadows everything else.

The first thing that kind of sticks out is when we were doing the Tree of Life Meditation, I began to see colours. First, there was this blue; the brightest blue you can imagine, like the sky on a clear day when it hurts your eyes to look at it. And then there was a wash of another colour coming across; it was a green that seemed like it was almost alive.

Later, I was struggling when we were trying to sense energy. Then when we were trying to sense if someone was in our energy field with our eyes shut, I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I was amazed at how far my partner was away from me and how large my energy field was.

On the last day, we began with a meditation and scripture reading. We were then checking in with each other as to what thoughts and images had presented themselves. There was a woman there who began sharing how she had been lonely and unhappy for a number of years after leaving an abusive relationship. She shared how she always prayed to God that she would meet someone kind and caring, someone who would accompany her on her faith journey and how a couple of years ago, she had met that man. She was in the midst of describing how thankful and joy filled she was, when I began to have an emotional release. I told you before, I don't cry quietly on the inside. I was so overcome with wracking sobs that I had to leave the room. I'm not sure why it happened, maybe it was her words, but they caught me off guard, and I just dissolved.

Not long after, we began to practice the Sacred Chakra. When it was my turn to get on the table I was feeling very tense and having trouble concentrating. They asked me what I needed and I told them, peace. I really had a hard time keeping my mind on things that day but slowly, I began to relax. Their hands were gentle like a feather, a floating feather and I began to breathe deeply--you know, I had just been breathing shallowly before. And then there was a calmness that came over me.

I would like to be at peace but it's a little bit difficult sometimes. I think I generally have peace, because every morning I pray for strength and courage to make it through the day. I'm not sure that has anything to do with Healing Touch but yet, when I was working on

another participant, it felt like prayer. Every time my hands moved across her body, I prayed for the gift that she had asked to receive.

I am still not sure why I dissolved the way I did. I don't think it had anything to do with Healing Touch, I think it had to do with the woman's words or with my grief. I don't want to tell you about my grief, but I suffered a trauma this fall and I have been grieving ever since. Maybe it's because I am sensitive to people's feelings. I go by feelings rather than what people say. I grew up in a house amongst adults who spoke a foreign language so I sensed their mood from the way they spoke because I had no idea what the words meant.

Even today, I am having trouble focusing; my mind wants to wander. It's hard to remember everything that happened that weekend. I'm still very intrigued and want to learn more. I would like to practice what I've learnt and experienced but I'm the only one here. It's something where I need somebody else with me, a pair of people working together rather than in solitary. I'll just have to see what happens. When one door closes, another door opens. I've experienced that in some other ways. There have been things that have changed in my life before but it's opened other possibilities. People are wonderful, they're just coming out of the woodwork at me, and I just feel so blessed.

Shirley's Story

I got involved in the Healing Pathway by meeting with a practice-healing group in my local congregation. I went in to receive a treatment and was soon giving as well as receiving. I had been interested in energy work for some time but when I took courses in Reiki and Reconnection, I could see reactions from people that I didn't understand. I wasn't comfortable in the setting, but I think the Pathway has a feeling of safety. I think it comes

from being comfortable within the community. I find this aspect of God's healing and importance in the universe to be fascinating. Furthermore, when I received a treatment, it really helped. So when I had an opportunity to take a weekend workshop, I went.

When I arrived at the workshop, I'd been feeling so confused and frustrated, everything was going in different directions for me, but by the end of the weekend I felt more balanced, calmer, more at ease.

There are a couple of moments in the weekend that I would like to focus on. The first is during the Sacred Chakra. This incredible calmness came over me. I just felt calm, relaxed and safe. I just felt that everything was going to be okay. I hadn't felt like that for a long time.

The other experience was during the Full Body Balance. I just felt so anchored. My left hand, was just sitting open, lying there. But my right hand, it was like it was holding onto something, something was holding it out, it was like it was anchored to something solid. The image or feeling that resonates with me the most about that weekend is that feeling of being anchored. It gave me a feeling of being safe. When I saw that or felt that anchoring in my hand, it didn't feel uncomfortable at all. I just knew that it was okay and this was the path that I should be on.

This whole safety feature was a comfortable fit for me. There was a connection there that I haven't felt before this time. I just moved back to this area after being gone a long time. My family lives in this area and I feel it's a change that I am supposed to make. But it's not easy because I have issues to deal with. My sense is that the Healing Pathway is going to help me get through some tough times.

I never felt part of my family or that I was loved by them, growing up. I didn't feel close to either one of my parents and sometimes I wondered if I had been adopted or something. It was a large family but I think what made it so difficult, is that I was sexually abused by my older brothers. I just never felt safe.

Then I ended up in a bad marriage. After we divorced, I was still working at a place where some of my ex-partner's friends worked as well. They harangued me to the point where I considered getting a lawyer. It's really hard when you don't even feel safe at work and back here, a couple of my sisters take everything I say and turn it around to make me look like a bad person. It was tough emotionally, especially how my sister would make me look bad and herself like such a great person. It kept me away for a long time.

I think the story or person in scripture that I identify with the most at this point in my life would be the person of Jesus. People were against him and yet, he still had to deal with them. It's easy to deal with people who like you, and believe in you, and follow you. The ones that are tough to deal with are those who are trying to put you down, or don't want you around, or are trying to get rid of you.

My story is different from Jesus' though. There were large crowds gathering around him to hear him preach and teach and heal. I'm an introvert and very quiet. I don't like big groups at all.

Jesus and I are both on a healing journey. My journey started over twenty years ago. I've read books, taken courses, but I don't have the strong belief that God loves me, like Jesus did. I'm looking for that love. Jesus believed and because he believed, he could help people, heal them. I don't always believe that about me. I experienced some of those feelings of love during the Sacred Chakra but not to the extent that Jesus did.

The Pathway has changed my relationship with God. I still have a long way to go, but my relationship with God has gotten a lot stronger. I know that God is there for me. That changes the way I think about myself too. Now, sometimes I treat myself and take time for myself. I never did that before. Most importantly, it gives me the courage to renew relationships. I'm developing some really good relationships with my nieces and nephews. I know that's possible because God is there for me. I can talk to God now, and I just have to ask God for help, and I get it. God keeps me on a straight path to continue my journey.

The more I learn about the kind of energy that we acknowledge in the Healing Pathway, the more I find I have a greater kindness to people and am more tolerable of times when I may not agree with them. It makes me a more accepting person. It gives me a better understanding that all living things have a right to be here and at one with the Universe. We all have to do our part to protect it. Life used to be pretty black and white for me; now there are a lot of grey areas. I feel like I'm more willing to get involved in things now. I can take a stand if I have to, but the most important thing is I take part in life now. I'm not just a bystander anymore.

One thing that has really changed is that as I have become more open, people have begun to sense that. Sometimes now, I'll just be sitting some place and people will come up and talk to me. It's like you are just supposed to be there for other people. I find that I have value as a human being now. I never had that before.

I really wish that more people could experience Healing Touch. If we can just convince people to get up on the table, we can do something for them. I believe that our positive energy has an effect on people, just from being around it. I'm sure that the people

who live next to where we practice Healing Touch have a good feeling. Our vibrations and positive energy have an effect on people, even if we are just walking by them.

I don't see other people's energy fields but I am learning to sense energy, and more importantly, trust what I feel. Sometimes you can just feel negative energy coming off someone.

I want to continue on this path because this path is about God. God has always been part of my life but because of my involvement in the Healing Pathway, it has become stronger. I'm receiving healing and that makes me feel calmer, more at ease and more grounded.

The healing community is so important to me. I look forward to Tuesday nights and afterwards, it keeps me going for the next two weeks. We all came to the workshop looking for what we needed. Some people might have come as sceptics, but they took the challenge and came. I think they went away with a lot more than they thought they would. Healing Touch is a wonderful feeling. It's a feeling of being loved.

Louise's Story

The Healing Pathway wasn't something I went looking for. I'd been involved with the church for a number of years but was becoming increasingly restless. I felt like something was missing but couldn't really articulate what that was. I was surfing the internet one evening when I came across a notice of an upcoming Healing Pathway workshop, Phase I. I thought, "That's interesting," and thought no more about it, but when something occurred later in the week that brought it back into my consciousness I thought, "I'd better pay attention to that!" I registered for the course but it was already full. A spot become available

the day before the workshop so I was able to participate in it. I didn't know about things like synchronicity or providence then; I just remember being very excited.

I've been involved with the Pathway now for several years. My first "aha" moment was when I was a practitioner at that Phase I workshop and I've had many wonderful experiences since then, but the one I would like to share with you was a Chelation treatment I received during a Healing Pathway workshop entitled, Communion of Saints.

During the workshop, I remember that for one particular afternoon session, I really didn't want to go. I had this feeling that something "big" was going to happen and I wasn't ready for it. Some of my co-participants convinced me to come. They told me, "You're here for a reason, just ask for what you need and you'll be fine." So I went. As soon as I lay down on the table, I felt very loved and cared for. The practitioners that were working with me were very heart-centered and I could feel their compassion. I think it was their compassion that allowed me to relax and be vulnerable.

I felt very comfortable and I could feel my feet being held and I could feel a gentle rocking. In Chelation, the practitioners are actually spinning with their hips and legs, like with a hula-hoop, and as they spin faster, it raises the vibration so that the healing goes deeper. We are working with God and with angels. It was very gentle and it felt like I was being rocked and being held. As their hands moved up my body it still felt like someone was still holding my feet. I knew there was no one there in physical form but I had to open my eyes to sneak a peek, and sure enough, there was no one there. I lost track of where their hands were because all I could feel was the rocking and my mind went to a place where there was no time. In my mind's eye, I saw a very bright light with colourful patterns, which

reminded me of looking through a kaleidoscope that I had as a child. The patterns of light were continually shifting, but they were very bright and very lovely.

Sometime during the treatment, I began to hear a high pitched sound, perhaps like a harp and that sound is often still with me today. I actually can hear it now.

Eventually I felt like I was back on the table and experienced this feeling of deep heaviness. It felt like I couldn't move and had someone yelled, "fire," I don't think I could have got up off the table to run. They finished the Chelation treatment by drawing a "Golden Net" through my energy field, similar to Magnetic Clearing. All the "stuff" that has been shaken out during the treatment is in an etheric field below you and around you. The Net clears that all away. Afterwards I felt so good, so light; not floaty light but just like it was good to receive and know that everything was okay. I didn't feel any trepidation afterwards. I felt like the weight of the world had come off my shoulders and off my lower back. I felt strong, I felt alert, I felt very right, like I was a child of the universe and I was meant to be there.

I knew afterwards that I had been crying. I could feel the wetness and the tears. The practitioners who were working on me also had tears, so I don't know who started who off, but it was very beautiful.

The one sensation that resonates with me today, when I think back to that time is the heaviness, the weight. I had never experienced anything like that before. I'm surprised that I just couldn't move.

The feelings I get when I remember that sensation are very much ones of belonging, and acceptance which are very important to me. I feel accepted for who I am, that I am not

being judged; feeling welcome, feeling pleasure, of being pleased, happy, joyful, and a deep sense of peace.

I also remember the sensation of the sound. I think it is a divine sound. Obviously, I don't know what makes up this divine energy that surrounds us, so part of me, in order to rationalize it into something that I understand thinks of it as my angels. I mean it is the sound of the angels just being with me. Actually as I am saying that now, the sound increases. I have some interesting thoughts and theories as to what these angels might be or what they are about, but the most important thing to me, is that they are here to help support me through things.

This image of belonging and connectedness relates to what is going on in my life significantly, because it was life changing for me. And I will always be grateful to the Healing Pathway for giving me the tools to deal with this sense of not belonging.

As a small child, I think I was happy but as time went by I grew unhappier, so by the time I was an early teen, I think I would consider myself unhappy. I felt like I was imperfect and unworthy. I had lots of reminders of my imperfections and I couldn't get away from that environment. I didn't feel accepted and had to work very hard to earn people's love and respect.

I believe I had those feelings because of my family situation. In hindsight, I am sure it was because my mother had abandonment issues and never felt she belonged. Both my brother and I were victims of my Mother's unhappiness. She would make hurtful statements in front of us to other people. I remember people giving me gifts and she would say things like, "She doesn't deserve that" or "Why would you give her something so lovely?" No matter how good my schoolwork was, it seemed she was always critical.

I felt lonely as a child. We immigrated to Canada when I was a pre-teen and my dad was soon unemployed. I was painfully shy and it was a horrible culture shock. I was teased and bullied at school. My parents were struggling with their failing marriage and their own feelings and they just weren't emotionally available.

And now because of this wonderful feeling of belonging to this cosmic oneness, there are no mistakes, there are no errors, it's all learning and we can choose to learn from it if we're ready, and sometimes we have to repeat the lesson many, many times, I have children who are having to learn lessons, many, many, times. We've had some struggles with them over the years, and I've learned to put some of my own feelings to rest, to let go of expectations I had for them, let go of guilt, and learn forgiveness. This feeling I now have of connectedness has really changed how I look at things. I don't look at anyone as being broken anymore; wounded, yes, but not broken. And we can heal. We are how we are. I believe that we all have a divine purpose.

When I first started with the Pathway, if something 'big' happened it was scary for me. As I began to feel connected, I got to the point where I began to feel supported. I started feeling very close to Jesus and I very much feel it's okay, anything that happens, it's okay. Fear was something that was very present in my life for a very, very long time, but not anymore.

This feeling of belonging, I wish everybody could experience this lovely feeling. When I look back, I think there's a reason I've experienced this. I can relate to people's pain on a number of different levels. I believe that is what part of my learning was about, and even though there was a time that I was angry and disappointed with my parents, I now believe my upbringing was a gift. I can help people now, even my mom. I'm finally at a place of

understanding, and I like me now, and I do feel very well supported, and I love that I feel that Jesus is so accepting. That was a big thing for me. Jesus accepts everybody as they are. That was very, very, profound for me. If Jesus accepts everybody, who am I to say you can't do enough or you're unworthy? Those are horrible ways for people to feel. Now I'm in a better position to help someone, even if they've irritated the snot out of me.

The other image that comes to me is that of an anchor. The church is the one stable thing in my life, yet there was a time, during a time of change at the church I attended, I saw people scurrying around and there was a lot of fear and a lot of blaming. In the midst of this, I felt very much like an observer. All these people were upset and I just felt very strong and very rooted, and very permanent. I felt that this is okay; God knows this is happening and instead of being scared, just look forward to the next chapter. It was nice to be in that place of deep quiet and stillness and to be strong in the middle of the storm.

There are a number of scripture passages that come to mind, but I think the person in scripture that I identify with the most at this time in my life would have to be Peter. Partly because I love the fact that he was so politically incorrect in his day and time and so much like "regular" people, but mostly, because of the time he stepped out of the boat during a frightening storm and walked on water. What an incredible act of faith that was! He must have been so scared. I've had a couple of very strong dreams about water that I can remember to this day because I was very afraid of water and what lies beneath; the unseen.

Peter looked at Jesus with such delight and then just started walking towards him. When he took his eyes off Jesus for a moment he began to sink, but Jesus called out to him and he reconnected with Jesus and continued walking towards him.

I remember when I first started with the Pathway how far out of my comfort zone I was. It didn't fit into the mould I'd been brought up in at all, but I was so excited when I discovered that this is what it's all about. The stories in the bible suddenly spoke to me at a different level. And the hymns started to make sense. I would tear up thinking of what must have gone on in someone's life for them to write these words of faith.

The other reason I identify with Peter is he kept making mistake after mistake and yet Jesus still knew he would be the one who would walk the talk. When I remember Peter and compare his journey to mine, I hope that I can spread some good news as well.

When I think about where my story is different from Peter's, I think about the Garden of Gethsemane where no one stayed awake. I would like to think that at that hour when Jesus really needed his friends, that I would be there for him. Of course, our vision is always perfect in hindsight. I wonder did the disciples know what was going to happen; did they really, really know? I feel compassion for them and hopefully, that compassion is a reflection of how I act in other parts of my life.

My participation in the Pathway has completely and absolutely changed my relationship with the world, with God and with myself. I realize that that even though I'm totally not worthy of the grace that God offers, I am as worthy as any other person on this planet. No one person is better and not one person is worse. We are all loved in God's eye in a huge amount.

In terms of God, I feel a deep connection and that there is a divine plan and we all have a part to play in it. I don't believe we are like puppets being manipulated but that we are moving towards something that is so big we just can't grasp it. I want to try to intellectualize

it and put things in their little places but it's a place that's too big. I used to be afraid of God, and so I did things out of fear, instead of out of love.

I was brought up Anglican, which is an intellectual kind of worship. There was a lot of ritual but no "love" connection to God. I had quite a profound experience in my Phase I workshop. I had never had that feeling before. It was visceral and scary and intense--it was the experience of being unconditionally loved. When I figured out that this is what God is about and this is what Jesus is trying to say to us, it was huge, absolutely huge for me. Since then, when I feel the Divine getting in touch with me, it's not been a big, loud fanfare. It's been quiet and subtle. Sometimes it is so subtle that I miss it, but it will always come back, because if there is one thing I have come to believe about God, it is that God is persistent. It's like I was telling you about that first workshop, God was prodding me; guiding me home.

I also feel more connected to the world. Through the Pathway I have begun to appreciate that we are all energetic beings. These insights have affected the way I think and act. At one time, if something went wrong, I would assume that it was my fault. Now, I realize that when people say something, it's not always about me. They are just expressing a thought or feeling that they're having and it's not up to me, to run in and fix it. I'm not responsible for them. Everyone has their own story.

It's made me a better listener because I realize, "It's not about me!" I'm more relaxed. I speak up more often because I am no longer afraid to upset things. Sometimes when I'm speaking now, I don't believe it's me speaking. I'm just a vehicle for the words.

I'm glad that the word is getting out about the Healing Pathway and how we are all energetic beings, connected to God. We are not separate little individuals; we are all part of a bigger picture.

Healing Stories

Common to all who shared their stories for this project is that they are each on a healing journey. Sharing our stories is healing in itself, so I hope that these opportunities to share their stories with me contributed to their journeys. Henri Nouwen, in a poem from his book, *Reaching Out*, beautifully describes the ability of stories to promote healing:

*Healing means
first of all, the creation
of an empty but friendly space
where those who suffer can tell their story
to someone who can listen with real attention...
As healers we have to receive the story
of our fellow human beings with a compassionate heart,
a heart that does not judge or condemn
but recognizes how the stranger's story
connects with our own. We have to offer
safe boundaries within which
the often painful past can be revealed
and the search for a new life can find a start.*

*Our most important question as healers is not,
What to say or do?
But, how to develop enough inner space
where the story can be received?
Healing is
the humble but also very demanding task
of creating and offering a very friendly empty space
where strangers can reflect
on their pain and suffering without fear,
and find the confidence
that makes them look
for new ways
right in the center
of their confusion.¹¹⁶*

¹¹⁶ Henri Nouwen. *Reaching Out* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 72.

Chapter 6

Reflections on the Stories

Some Observations

Each of the stories in the last chapter is unique to the person telling it and his or her context. This means the interviewees use language related to their own lives and experiences. For example, Bob said, “The kingdom of God is coming alive” for him, and Louise said, “Jesus accepts everyone as they are.” Louise’s phrase is different from Bob’s but she uses language that one associates with the kingdom. Although people may describe their experiences in various ways, when I perceive the theology or meaning behind the phrase is similar, I understand they are having related experiences and I apply comparable categories of meaning to those experiences.

The interviewees recall events that may have happened in the past. They remembered what was important to them at the time. This means that some details may be left out. Bob does not mention having an emotional release. Although he may have had one, he does not see it as central to his story. The account of an experience may not be factually complete or exact, but it is a retelling of the person’s perception of what occurred.

Of the four stories, only one discusses a physical healing while the other three speak of an emotional or spiritual healing. We do not give more weight to the story of a physical healing. Emotional and spiritual healing contributes to a person’s wholeness as much as

physical healing. Although it would be difficult to measure, spiritual and emotional health could help prevent a future illness.

Maureen's story differs from the others because, on the surface, it seems less transformative. In part, this is because Maureen does not make any connections between what is happening to her and her Healing Touch experience. Healing does not always occur during a treatment; it sometimes happens slowly over time or at a later date. It often takes time to integrate the experience. In addition, when participating in a Healing Pathway workshop, the vibration is quite high during the entire weekend, so events that lead to healing can happen at any time.

I will illustrate this with a personal story. I was attending a Phase II workshop, Healing from the Heart, and was on the table receiving a treatment. The instructor, Wilma Giesbrecht, began assisting the practitioners by working on my heart chakra. My eyes were closed and I was in a deep state of relaxation when suddenly it felt as though something was being ripped out of my chest. It was painful, almost as if something had actually been physically torn from my heart, and my eyes flew open. I asked Wilma what she had taken out of me. She answered, "I don't know, but it's not something that you weren't ready to let go of."¹¹⁷ I had no idea what it was, but about a month later, as I was driving down the highway, I suddenly understood. Wilma had been right; without being aware of it at the time, I had been ready to let that piece of my life go!

I was present at the workshop that Maureen describes. The story that triggered her emotional release is not something that would normally trigger that kind of reaction. Even though Maureen does not see a connection, it is possible that the combination of treatments

¹¹⁷ Wima Giesbrecht, Healing Pathway, Phase II workshop, Lacombe, AB, 2004.

the previous day, the morning's meditation, and the high vibration of the workshop may have triggered this release. Later in her story she talks about being calm, restful and at peace; this is healing that could be as a result of letting go of the emotion combined with her treatment on the table, and in conjunction with other contributing events. That people do not always make connections themselves does not mean healing is not occurring.

Maureen's recollection of the weekend is typical of some participants. It was pleasant and relaxing; she would like to learn and experience more about the Pathway but is not convinced that she is being healed by the experience. It is hard to know exactly what is going on with her because she chose not to discuss her grief. Also, as I will describe in greater detail in my conclusion, Healing Touch is about experiencing the immanent nature of God. Maureen had already experienced the immanent nature of God during her "Damascus Road" encounter. What is interesting is that her reflections on that experience are similar to observations the others make about their Healing Touch experiences, and some of her experiences that weekend, such as visioning a brilliant blue, are reminiscent of her "Damascus" encounter.

The Reflections

I read the transcripts several times to identify themes that were contained within each participant's story. These were then placed on a chart which was later cut into pieces so that the common themes could be grouped together. The themes that I chose to reflect on for this study and that revealed themselves to be important to the interviewees, sharing a commonality are: Community, Being Grounded, Peace, Emotional Release, Colours, Presence of God and/or Love, Receiving What You Need and Transformation.

Community

“Where two or three are gathered in my name,” Jesus said, “I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). Community is at the heart of Christian experience. Even when a person is not part of a healing group, but comes in for a one-time treatment, the practitioner(s), and the client form community for that short time. This, for me, is most evident at the Healing House in Naramata. Often, people come in for a treatment and during that one hour an intense Christian community is formed through prayer, the sharing of story, the giving and receiving of a treatment, and most importantly, through compassion.

In three of the four stories, people became involved with the Pathway because someone encouraged them to participate, or invited them to join an existing group. Shirley was invited by a member of her local group to come in for a treatment, Maureen was anxious to experience Healing Touch because a friend shared with her how much she had benefitted from it, and Bob was ill when a member of the Pathway encouraged him to come for a treatment. His story is not unlike mine, where the invitation itself is an act of compassion. Louise became involved by a different route but when she was afraid to accept a treatment, it was her Pathway friends who encouraged her to trust and reminded her of the group’s compassion.

The importance of having a community, in which to practice and share Healing Touch, is stressed by all the interviewees. Fran Hare tells us that a community becomes the container and interpreter for experiences that could otherwise be frightening. The expectations, previous experiences and ethos of the group also increase the likelihood of

some healing or transformative experience taking place.¹¹⁸ Maureen wishes she had a group in her town. Without one, she does not envision doing this work. Shirley tells us that the safety within her healing community is something that nourishes her soul. Attending a healing group every other Tuesday helps her “make it through the next two weeks.” Louise does not speak directly of the importance of her healing community, but we can infer that importance in her continuing involvement and because commitment to community is required to become an instructor. Bob shares that it is important to have a “kindred spirit” to share the journey with and to help integrate his healing with the rest of his life. The healing journey is so “outside the box” that only people with similar experiences can truly understand of what we speak. Bob has set his intent to find such a community.

In the church today, we are discovering how important it is to belong to a community where we are known.¹¹⁹ The best place for this to happen is in a small group. As the Congregational Life Centre points out, loneliness and isolation are cultural realities. People need a safe community where they can openly explore their faith. “You don’t have to know everybody, but everybody has to know someone.”¹²⁰ In a further newsletter, they discuss how a life-giving small group ministry is one where you can feel confident about sharing your deepest thoughts. They indentify three key elements to successful small groups: belonging, a place to be truly oneself, and becoming everything God intends.¹²¹ Whether experienced as part of an ongoing healing ministry, a weekend Pathway workshop, or just for the hour you are receiving a treatment, the Healing Pathway meets these criteria.

¹¹⁸ Fran Hare, conversation with author, Red Deer AB, 2009.

¹¹⁹ See my discussion of Borg’s definition in chapter 1.

¹²⁰ Congregational News, *Willow Creek & Small Ministry*, Vol. 13 No. 3 (February 2007).
<http://www.congregationallife.com/> (Accessed August 7, 2009).

¹²¹ Congregational News, *Small Groups – Circles of Friends*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (February 2006).
<http://www.congregationallife.com/> (Accessed August 7, 2009).

Being Grounded

Being grounded is not only a common experience, but also one that is highly desirable when doing energy work or receiving healing. Dorothea Hover-Kramer in the glossary of her book, *Healing Touch*, defines grounding as, “[c]onnecting to the earth and earth’s energy field to calm the mind and balance the entire energy system.”¹²² The writers of *Healing from the Heart* discuss earth energy as something always known to humans. North American Indians “understand all creation to contain a spirit, a life force; they experience Mother Earth as a living, sensitive breathing organism. . . . Native healers believe the earth has what we might define today as an electromagnetic vibration helpful for removing imbalanced energy.”¹²³ This understanding of humans being connected energetically to the earth is affirmed in scripture: “then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7).

Language about God is always metaphorical, because it describes a reality outside ordinary human experience. Bob provides us with an awesome metaphor for being grounded when he tells us, “[I] imagine[d] my backbone going down to the center of the earth connecting with that energy, the molten energy that is in the earth. As I imagined it, the sensation began – the warmth, the pulse. It was like I was aligned to the heartbeat of God.”

Louise speaks of the sensation of someone holding her feet even though there was no one there. This is a way of describing how she felt grounded throughout her treatment. For her, the connection was so strong that it probably caused her to feel the sensation of heaviness, of not being able to move off the table even if someone had yelled fire.

¹²² Hover-Kramer, *Healing Touch*, 242.

¹²³ Graham, Litt, and Irwin, *Healing From the Heart*, 47-8.

Shirley, too, uses a metaphor to describe her experience, that of being anchored. Even though there was nothing in her hand, she felt she was holding onto something very solid and hanging on gave her a sense of safety. My sense is that Shirley is not normally grounded, that is, she is usually disconnected from earth energy so when she did connect she hung on because that connection made her feel safe and secure (in the arms of mother-earth?).

For me, when I am properly grounded, I feel solid, connected to God and operating out of my heart. If I am not grounded, I am working out of my head and tend to feel scattered, nervous and unfocused. If I am leading worship or doing pastoral care it is important that I make sure I am grounded first.

Deepak Chopra, in his book *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Medicine*, also uses metaphor and describes the ancient human connection to earth almost poetically. He says:

If I find a green meadow splashed with daises and sit down beside a clear-running brook, I have found medicine. It soothes my hurts as well as when I sat in my mother's lap in infancy, because the Earth really is my mother, and the green meadow is her lap. You and I are strangers, but the internal rhythm of our bodies listens to the same ocean tides that cradled us in a time beyond memory. Nature is man's [sic] healer, because Nature is man. [sic] When Ayurveda says that the sun is our right eye and the moon our left eye, we mustn't sneer. By bathing us in the moon, the sun, and the sea, Nature fashioned the bodies we inhabit. These were the ingredients that provided us each with our piece of Nature – a shelter, life-support system, intimate companion, and home for seven decades or more.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Chopra, *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind/Body Science*, 107-8.

Peace

We know from the research work of Dolores Krieger¹²⁵ that a deep sense of relaxation is a universal response to anyone receiving Therapeutic Touch. We also know that *shalom* or peace and healing are interconnected.¹²⁶ Most of the literature on Healing Touch discusses recipients having a feeling of deep peace but do not define what this feeling is. F. Mardi, writing for Press TV, in an article entitled *Give me a piece of peace* presents this definition:

Peace is a state of harmony. Peace describes a relationship between parties characterized by respect, justice and goodwill. Peace can concern an individual relative to his or her environment. Peaceful can be characterized as calmness, serenity, and silence. This understanding of peace can also pertain to an individual's sense of himself or herself. To be 'at peace' with one's self would indicate the same serenity, calm, and equilibrium with oneself. . . .Mahatma Gandhi . . . suggested that if an oppressive society lacks violence, the society is nonetheless not peaceful, because of the injustice of the oppression. Gandhi articulated a vision of peace in which justice is a necessary aspect; such a peace requires not only the absence of violence, but also more importantly, the presence of justice.¹²⁷

Gandhi was referring to nations or societies, but I suggest this principle also applies to personal relationships. When people are engaged in a non-violent relationship but perceive themselves to be abused, neglected or oppressed, then they cannot be at peace because the relationship is not rooted in justice. This is most evident in the stories of two interviewees, Shirley and Louise.

Shirley talks about how, by the end of weekend, she felt "balanced, calmer, [and] more at ease." During the treatment, she speaks of a powerful calmness coming over her. She felt everything would be all right and, more importantly, identified that she had not

¹²⁵ See chapter 4.

¹²⁶ See my definition in Chapter 1.

¹²⁷ F. Mardi. Press TV, *Give me a piece of peace* (August 7, 2009).
<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=102789§ionid=3510304/> (Accessed August 8, 2009).

experienced such peace for a long time. Louise identifies a similar feeling that everything would be all right. She also shares with us that she experienced a deep sense of peace combined with feelings of being relaxed and vulnerable. Maureen says that, during the Sacred Chakra, the blessing she requested was to be at peace and, later in the treatment, she describes how she was relaxed, breathing deeply and how a calmness came over her. These are all sensations congruent with our definition of peace. Bob shares how his treatment gave him a “sense of awe transcending time” we might call serenity. He also experienced a calm equilibrium, feeling that he was “being held in God’s care and love,” and since then he has experienced “incredible peace” in his life.

As a person who has used Healing Touch as a discernment tool, I can share that one of the reasons that deep peace comes over people is from the resolving of their inner conflict. Life’s decisions include an internal conflict as we struggle with “should I do this?” or “should I do that?”. With the help of Healing Touch, there becomes not only a clarity of decision but also a feeling that the decision is the right one.

Whether they were looking for physical well-being, or for relief from emotional stress, or whether they were just curious about experiencing Healing Touch, the four interviewees in this study all experienced this sense of peace, calmness, relaxation, or resolution of conflict.

Emotional Release

Gabor Maté’s work on the correlation between stress and disease reveals that repressing emotions contributes significantly to stress. Often, during Healing Touch treatments, clients cry silent tears, sometimes without being aware of doing so. These tears indicate the client is

releasing emotions. Releasing emotions, especially repressed emotions, is part of the healing process.

Of the three interviewees who reported a release, Maureen had the most dramatic. She describes her releases as typically, “gut-wrenching” sobs. This is congruent with what I observed at the workshop. Even though this was a dramatic release, to the point where she felt she had to leave the room; she says, “I’m not sure why that happened.” Louise describes being aware after the treatment had ended that she had been crying. She says, “I could feel the wetness and the tears. The practitioners who were working on me also had tears, so I don’t know who started who off, but it was very beautiful.” Shirley does not even mention that she had an emotional release, yet I observed her practitioners comforting her and helping her dry tears at the end of her treatment.

This is not something that happens every time someone receives a treatment, but it is not uncommon, and it is a healthy reaction. I spent one week working with Dr. Rhea Plouffe, who teaches a course at St. Stephen’s College called “Journeying with the Dying,” and is also the Coordinator of Spiritual Care at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, Alberta. One of her duties is to facilitate a grief support group. Grief counselling is part of my work in pastoral ministry so I was interested in how she has helped people through that process. She told me, “The only way to get through grief is to cry it out. The only choice people have in the matter is whether they want to do it now or do it later, but at some point they have to do it.”¹²⁸ Later we had a discussion on how much energy it takes to repress emotions and how often palliative people no longer have the energy to do it. It is at the end of life they deal with

¹²⁸ Rhea Plouffe, conversation with author, Edmonton, AB, August, 2005.

repressed emotions so they can die healthy. How sad it is when we fail to deal with our repressed emotions, missing the chance to live healthy.¹²⁹

Colours

Seeing auras and/or colours when receiving a treatment is a topic too large for this paper. I note it because it is a phenomenon that often occurs. Some people, rather than sensing energy through warmth or vibration, see auras. Each colour has its own properties and significance. Each chakra also has a corresponding colour. It is not uncommon for people to see colours when receiving a treatment.

Louise saw a number of colours and commented on how bright and vibrant they were. This brightness and vibrancy is typical of an emotion that Bob experienced of being “alive in the moment.” When Maureen experienced the presence of God in her kitchen during her “Damascus Road” experience, she saw blue sky coming towards her really, really fast; she describes it as the brightest blue she could imagine. At the Healing Pathway weekend, she recalled that, during a meditation to help “ground” participants called the Tree of Life, she again experienced such a vivid blue.

An on-line Reiki site, *reiki-for-holistic-health.com*, describes bright royal blue as indicative of someone who is “[c]lairvoyant; highly spiritual nature; generous; on the right path; [for whom] new opportunities are coming.”¹³⁰ When we listen to Maureen speak of the home she grew up in and how she had to interpret what people were saying by feelings because of the language barrier, and her “Damascus Road” experience, this description of what blue might mean is congruent.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Reiki-for-holistic-health.com, *Aura Color Meanings*, <http://www.reiki-for-holistic-health.com/auracolormeanings.html> (accessed August 9, 2009)

Presence of God and/or Love

“The power of love to change bodies is legendary, built into folk-lore, common sense, and everyday experience. Love moves the flesh, it pushes matter around – as the blushing and palpitations experienced by lovers attest. Throughout history ‘tender loving care’ has uniformly been recognized as a valuable element in healing.”¹³¹ In one study done on heart disease, it was discovered that men who perceived their spouse to be loving had less than half the angina pain than men who did not. There is a direct correlation between health and love.¹³²

There is also a correlation between love and God. Many people would say, “God is love.” Experiencing that love, or the presence of God, in real and tangible ways is a common experience to both practitioners and those receiving a treatment. Rochelle Graham describes this relationship in *Healing from the Heart*:

When entering into either the role of healer (the one being the instrument of God’s grace or healee (the one receiving), the divine mystery is experienced in concrete ways, the experience may be common to all participating in the healings session, or it may be unique to each individual. Through the healing experience, people develop a personal relationship with the divine. They often have a particular face of God that speaks to them. For example, some people experience profound light and love, others may feel or see the hands of Jesus, still others may experience qualities best described as ‘mother.’¹³³

Three out of the four interviewees describe some of these sensations while undergoing a treatment. It is interesting to note that the fourth interviewee, Maureen, describing her “Damascus Road” experience, identifies this feeling of love and her perception of the presence of God. Bob speaks of being “aligned with the heartbeat of God”

¹³¹ Dossey, *Healing Words*, 109.

¹³² Ibid., 109.

¹³³ Graham, Litt, and Irwin, *Healing From the Heart*, 87.

and of being surrounded by love during his treatment. Connected with this emotion is a sensation he describes as a “pulsing.” Months after the treatment, he knows he is still “aligned with the heartbeat of God” by the presence of that pulse. Even though he does not articulate it, there is a sense that he feels the compassion from his practitioners when he reminisces about the conversation prior to the treatment.

The “group cry” is tangible evidence of the compassion of the healers for the healee in Louise’s experience. Louise tells us how they are working with angels and God during her treatment and she has a sensation of being held (by God?). She speaks of a divine presence made known through a high-pitched sound, not unlike that of a harp. Louise still hears that harp-like sound whenever she senses she is in the presence of the divine. She does not say she felt loved, but the words she uses are words of love: “I feel accepted for who I am, that I am not being judged; feeling welcome, feeling pleasure, feelings of being pleased, happy, joyful and a deep sense of peace.”

Shirley shares that during the Sacred Chakra she felt God’s love as Jesus must have felt. When I watched the healers comforting her after the treatment, one could witness the compassion present in the group at that table.

There are two things going on here. The first is the compassion/love that the healers have for the healee. Maureen tells us that when working on someone it “feels like prayer.” Compassion is often defined as having sympathy for a person. I define compassion as experiencing the same emotion as the person you care for. When they feel joy you feel joy, when they feel sorrow you feel sorrow. We see this evidenced in the sharing of tears as Louise was receiving her treatment. We do not know if they are tears of sorrow or joy; we only know that the emotion was experienced by all present.

This love, prayer, compassion, and concern that a practitioner has for the client is perceived by the client and allows him or her to experience God's presence and feel surrounded by love. It is in this cocoon of love, that clients can feel safe (Shirley), accepted (Louise), healed/aligned (Bob), or at peace (Maureen).

Dossey tells us that "[d]uring attempts at healing, healers generally feel infused by love and transformed by caring. This feeling is so pronounced that they typically describe 'becoming one' with the person being prayed for."¹³⁴ He also quotes Lawrence LeShan, author of *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist*, and whom Dossey considers the "greatest living authority"¹³⁵ on psychic healing. LeShan made these observations about some of the great healers of our time:

In Agnes Sanford's words, 'Only love can generate the healing fire.' Ambrose and Olga Worrall have said, 'We must care. We must care for others deeply and urgently, wholly and immediately; our minds, our spirits must reach out to them.' Stewart Grayson, a serious healer from the First Church of Religious Science, said, 'If this understanding is just mental it is empty and sterile' and 'the feeling is the fuel behind the healing.' Sanford wrote: 'When we pray in accordance with the law of love, we pray in accordance with the will of God.'¹³⁶

While doing Healing Touch work the practitioners become God incarnate by allowing themselves to be a channel of God's energy and the client experiences the immanent nature and love of God by receiving that energy. "Paracelus (1493-1541) [tells us t]he main reason for healing is love."¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Dossey, *Healing Words*, 111.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

Receiving What You Need

An interesting observation is that all of the interviewees received what they needed, even if they did not know what that was. This is a common phenomenon that most advanced Healing Pathway practitioners are familiar with. In my own incident, I knew that I needed to be free from fear if I was to do the work I needed to do; if I was going to begin a new life and embark on a journey of healing. I knew what I needed and I received it through participating in Healing Touch.

Shirley too knows what she needs. She needs to feel safe. She has been exposed to abuse as a child, as an adult sibling, as a spouse and as an employee. She now feels safe, particularly within the Healing Pathway group but outside the group as well. Because she feels safe, she has been able to move back to where her family lives, re-establish former relationships, and develop new ones in a healthy manner. It also gives her courage to function in society in other healthy ways.

Louise does not know what she needs or what she is looking for, but only that she is looking for “something.” Her first involvement with the Pathway was a Phase I workshop at which she felt an unconditional love for the first time in her life. As she continues on her journey, she comes to an understanding of being accepted for who she is, of not being judged, of always learning rather than being wrong or making mistakes.

Maureen tells us that she generally has peace in her life because she prays for it every morning. We do not pray for what we already have. Maureen thinks she is at peace, but her words and body language, makes me believe she longs for peace, which is different from being at peace. The words she uses to describe her treatment are words associated with

peace: relaxed, breathing deeply and calmness. It is likely that her feeling of peace did not stay with her long. One treatment is probably not enough to fulfill her longing. As it did for Louise, Maureen's healing will come through prolonged work in the Pathway. My sense is that the cause of her non-peace is repressed emotions. What that emotion is we do not know but, because it is so deeply repressed, she does not have the self-awareness to articulate what it is but does get temporary relief through releasing it. She thinks she is at peace when the evidence suggests otherwise and she is unable, or unwilling, to explore her grief even though she is aware that Healing Touch is one way to work through grief. But on the table, and for a short time afterward, she receives all those feelings associated with peace.

Bob's case is probably the most interesting because on the surface it appears that he knew what he wanted and he received it. His body was traumatized from chest to pubic bone, his energy was scattered and he felt like the person in a magic show who has been cut in half. During the treatment, his body and energy come back together; they are aligned. His pain is much reduced and he heals so quickly he can go home sooner than his doctors had predicted. He had wanted physical healing and that is what he received.

Indirectly, he shares that, because of his surgery, he believes his future to be uncertain but for now he is healthy and vital. Because of the healing that has gone on in his body, mind, and spirit there is incredible peace in his life. He goes on to say that he wasn't sure he would ever see the Promised Land. He realizes that our earthly journey is uncertain, but our ability to connect with that heartbeat of God is really what this journey is about. It does not matter what the future entails; we can live vital lives and not necessarily have longevity. They are not linked. What Bob really needed was the ability to live abundantly while coping with the tension of an uncertain future. He received that.

To me, this is one of the amazing things about Healing Touch; even if we do not know what we need, God knows what we need. Whatever we need to live healthy lives, we receive from God through the gift of Healing Touch.

Transformation

Just as each human and their healing story is unique, so too is their transformation. The way they think, act or feel has changed for all of the interviewees but in a different way for each person. Three of the four interviewees can articulate how their lives were transformed by Healing Touch. The fourth, Maureen, shared how she was transformed by her “Damascus Road” experience. Whenever we experience God, we are changed.

Maureen shares with us how this one experience overpowers all her other spiritual experiences. She struggles to make the connections between that experience and the sense of peace that she acquired through Healing Touch. If she continues with her work and is able to sustain those feelings of peace, they will contribute in a positive way to the transformation she already has undergone as a result of encountering God “in her kitchen.” Maureen tells us that she experiences a wonderful joy, even in the midst of grieving, because of her encounter. She now interprets scripture and hymns differently. She is more open to prayer and loves people in a way that she cannot explain. She is open to change in her life and feels blessed. The similarities between her story of transformation and the other stories are so uncanny that it bears noticing.

Shirley tells that as she experiences and learns about energy, life for her is not so black and white. She’s kinder to people, more accepting and understands that all living things have a right to be here; we are one with the universe. She is involved with life today; she is

not just a bystander anymore. She believes that our positive energy and vibration affects other people, the community and even the world. It has changed her relationship with God; it is stronger and that means she likes herself now so she cares for herself better than she did before. She has developed trust and because she is no longer afraid, believes that no matter what the future holds life will be okay. I think the most important way that Shirley has changed is that her strengthened relationship with God has given her the courage to re-establish old relationships and begin new ones. When you see the glow that Shirley has when she talks about the relationships she is developing with her nieces and nephews, it is apparent how life giving they are. She articulates how her relationship with God has changed – God is there for me, I can talk to God now, I just have to ask God for help and I will receive it, God helps me continue my journey.

Bob not only tells us he is transformed, but he also says he is recreated; he is a new person. The surgery and intervening Healing Touch treatment was Bob's "River Jordan"; he has crossed over to the Promised Land. He shares that the Kingdom of God has come alive for him, exemplified by being able to live in the present, and by the synergy between himself and God. He perceives his life as an embodiment of God and his relationship with God has become more intimate and tangible. This way of looking at and interacting with God and the world is congruent with the way Bob was before but the Pathway gave him a structure where his spirit may dwell. The pulsing that he first encountered when receiving a treatment stays with him and is a tool he uses to measure the strength of his connection to God. Bob also believes that through him, the transforming nature of God is at work because he is a conduit of God's love.

Louise always worshipped God in an intellectual manner, until her first Healing Pathway workshop, where she connected with God and experienced unconditional love for the first time. So she thinks about God in a different manner now, even believing that God was prodding her and guiding her to that first workshop. She hears a harp like sound that reminds her that the divine is always present. Because of her belief that we are all energetic beings and children of the universe, she feels more connected to the world and that results in thinking and acting differently about herself and others. It has changed her feelings of self-worth. As a child she did not feel worthy. Today, however, she realizes there are no mistakes; it is all learning. Jesus accepts and loves all of us, so not only is she worthy of God's love, but so also are all humans. This makes her more loving, less judgmental and more accepting of other people. She believes that none of us are broken anymore and we all have a divine purpose on this earth. That in turn improves the way she relates to other people; it changes relationships. Because she now feels loved, connected, and deserving it has been life changing for Louise. "I am no longer afraid," she says.

Maureen did receive some healing but does not believe she was transformed by the Healing Touch experience.

When I look at the other three interviewees and consider my own experience, I see some general themes. People understand and relate to God differently after they have connected to God or experienced the unconditional love of God through Healing Touch. This experience allows them to think about themselves in new ways, often removing barriers to healthy living such as fear and a sense of unworthiness. It creates an understanding of other humans so they feel compelled to treat them with more love, compassion, and understanding. Knowing that God and humans are interconnected with the same healing energy changes our

perception of how the world operates. When our thought processes and relationships change, we act differently in the world. Healing Touch changes relationships with oneself, one's neighbours, and with God.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

A Theological Reflection

Healing is not a onetime occurrence; it is a journey unique to each person. It is a journey that people must be ready for and embark upon of their own free will and it is a journey that others may invite us to accompany them on. Peter Downie, in *Healers at Work*, examines a number of healing modalities and makes these observations about the healing journey:

[A]s we started to probe more deeply the healing process, I came to understand just how much they all have in common. It's ironic that while 'process' is the best word to describe how each approaches healing . . . it is precisely that 'process' which makes every healing journey unique and personal. We all must find our own way of reaching answers that make sense. As much as we might like it to be so, healing can't be bought for any amount of money. There are no shortcuts or tricks or deals to be made. It doesn't wear a white coat and we can't make a yearly appointment to heal. If we reach a point in our lives when it becomes important to heal, we must accept that the 'process' simply isn't possible without our careful and constant involvement. There are other words you notice that are common to . . . healers: respect, energy, integrity, safety, community, loving, caring, sharing, intention, hope, justice, and honesty. These are a far cry from 'extra billing, user fees, federal/provincial jurisdiction, transfer payments, opting in, opting out' – the usual language dominating Canada's continuing health care debate. But then, healing has little to do with the billions we spend on drugs every year. . . . We pay a steep price for getting ahead of our hearts and I think I've learned that the heart is where any healing process truly begins.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Peter Downie. *Healers At Work* (Kelowna: Northstone, 1996), 10-11.

The heart is quite different from the mind. We may know cognitively that we are safe, smart, and attractive and that we function well in society. If, however, we feel we are in danger, ugly, unintelligent and not accepted, these emotions shape the metaphors that control our lives. If our mind knows one thing and our heart believes another, how is the heart changed? It is changed through heart-to-heart connection, through love and by the grace of God, for healing only happens in the midst of compassion. This is because our emotions have a greater impact on the way we live than what we know in our mind.

Marcus Borg, in *The God We Never Knew*, brings to light many of the heart metaphors used in scripture. He explains that “[f]or the ancient Hebrews, the heart was not simply associated with feelings of courage or love, as in common modern usage. Rather, the heart was associated with the totality of the human psyche: not only emotion but also intellect, volition, and even perception.”¹³⁹ Borg ascertains that to “know” God, we must have an open heart. He tells us that “Jeremiah spoke of ‘a new covenant’ to be ‘written on the heart’ and consisting of knowing God”¹⁴⁰ and further explains that “[n]ew heart, new spirit, and knowing the sacred go together.”¹⁴¹

This concept is central to the Healing Touch experience. A heart connection is made between the healer and the person seeking healing. The “open” or compassionate heart of the healer allows the love and energy of God to flow through her or him and into those who want healing, opening their hearts and allowing them to receive the love and light (energy) of God. When our hearts are open, energy can go where the body needs it. Energy centres that are blocked or congested from stress, emotions, and unhealthy metaphors begin to open,

¹³⁹ Borg, *The God We Never Knew*, 113.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 114.

allowing the energy to flow. The connections between stress, emotions, hormones and the physical body that Gabor Maté recognizes in the chronically ill, then begin to heal themselves contributing to the health and wholeness of the individual.

As earlier defined, some of the traits of healing are wholeness, balance, harmony, being loved and being in good relationship or *shalom*.¹⁴² The interviewees reported experiencing a number of these benefits from their Healing Touch experience. When people experience a compassionate presence through Healing Touch, they encounter God, and through this experience, healing occurs.

Having both given and received healing, I find many healing stories in the Bible resonate with me, but the one that came to mind as I wrote this paper is one in Mark's Gospel about a haemorrhaging woman, a story repeated by Matthew and Luke.

Now, there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him . . . Mark 5:25-30¹⁴³

Why is this story significant to me? It speaks to the human desire to move towards wholeness, which John Sanford refers to as Individuation.¹⁴⁴ This is a woman who had been sick for twelve years, had been to every doctor that would see her, had exhausted all of her financial resources and still, her drive to wholeness propels her to seek healing from someone she has only heard about. She has never witnessed Jesus heal, has no proof that he can help her, yet in the midst of a world where logic suggests there is no hope, she searches for

¹⁴² See my definition in Chapter 1.

¹⁴³ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (NY, Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁴ See my discussion of Sanford's definition in Chapter 4.

healing and wholeness. Every journey begins with a first step and the healing journey begins with our readiness to find healing.

This is something common to my story and to the stories we heard from the interviewees. Even though I felt broken and alone and scared, I had an inner urge, which I cannot explain, to move into wholeness. I did not know where to look but when the invitation came, I was ready to receive it. Bob was receiving excellent medical care and even though his physical body was being cured, he needed to know that he could live abundantly in the face of an uncertain future. Maureen was grieving and was not yet ready to confront that grief but she had already begun to search for a path to healing. Shirley had suffered for many years and had explored many methods of healing, never giving up, so when she was invited to experience Healing Touch she went. Louise was not even able to articulate that she is broken. She spoke of this inner drive to wholeness as, “I felt something was missing.” We can only imagine how strong this urge to find healing was, because she discovered the Healing Pathway on the Internet. Just as the haemorrhaging woman was ready to be healed and her inner drive to wholeness drove her to seek out Jesus, so too did the interviewees have that drive and sense of readiness. Even God cannot heal people if they choose to stay broken. When we are ready, healing is a choice we make.

As a villager affected by the purity law, there is a presumption that the haemorrhaging woman had an awareness of Jewish law and therefore knew of God, and probably knew the Jewish stories of how they, as a people, related to God. The interviewees are connected to a faith community. They have learnt about God, they attend worship and they profess a belief in God. Healing for the haemorrhaging woman does not come from knowledge; it comes from the experiential event of actually touching God through the person

of Jesus. It was the same for all of the interviewees. Maureen experienced deep calmness (peace), Bob became aligned (balance), my fear dissipated (peace and harmony), Louise experienced unconditional love and acceptance, and Shirley had feelings of safety (good relationship) and being anchored (harmony). It was in the experiencing of God, through Healing Touch for the interviewees, that healing begins.

Earlier, I referred to some of the different modalities that Jesus used for healing. The story of the haemorrhaging woman refers to the “power,” or energy that had gone forth from Jesus. As healers we talk about being channels, allowing the energy to flow through us. As people who experience healing, we talk about being filled with energy or having that energy balanced, or flowing.

Sometimes what a story does not say is as important as what it does say. In this instance, we know that the woman had been excluded from family, worship, and community life for twelve years. It does not tell what happened when the woman went home and her family had to relate to her in a new way, or of the first time when she showed up at the synagogue, or what happened when she expected to be included in the life of the community. When the blood flow ceased and she became “clean” it was not a onetime healing event; it was the beginning of a journey that would change the way she thought about herself – as “clean” and worthy. It would change all of her familial and community relationships and certainly, after experiencing the unconditional love and healing of Jesus, it would change the way she thought about and related to God. These are the things that affect how she was transformed by the healing. Scripture only tells us of the healing; it does not tell us how she was transformed and how that transformation contributed to her ongoing healing or how that challenged those around her. Those challenges would most likely make her aware of other

ways that her relationships are broken, such as not being valued as a human, and where they are in need of healing. Life is not static and as we heal, we change or are transformed and that transformation makes us aware of other parts of our life in need of healing, moving us ever closer to that state of wholeness that we are inwardly driven to seek.

Much of my fear stemmed from a twenty year relationship in which what I did was never good enough, I was not worthy of respect, and was relegated to the barn as a means of being ostracised from family events. After healing, I expected my relationship with my children to be based on respect and justice and it was not. My expectation that our relationship would change challenged what my children thought about me, resulting in relationships that, although stressful, move towards healing. Louise shares how she now relates differently to her parents and children among others because she feels differently about herself, God and others. Bob did not talk about his stresses but he shared how the kingdom of God had come alive for him, and because the kingdom is at odds with the society in which we live, we know that his transformation is not without challenges. Shirley has moved back to where much of her abuse took place and is now transformed into a person who thinks differently about herself, and her family. After many years of her being absent, her family must now deal with a person who refuses to be a victim any longer.

Just like the haemorrhaging woman, when we are ready to choose healing and seek to experience the presence and unconditional love of God in a real and tangible way we embark on a life long journey of healing, moving ever closer to a sense of wholeness, balance, harmony, being loved and being in good relationship or *shalom*.

Transformation

For the purposes of this paper, transformation is defined as a life-changing change of heart. It results in a new perception of oneself, the world and God, and has the ability to change relationships. This change of heart gives new meaning to people's lives and manifests itself as a new way of thinking or acting in the world which may be internalized or may be externally exhibited.¹⁴⁵

Three of the four interviewees were able to identify ways in which they have been transformed.¹⁴⁶ Shirley relates to herself, to others, to the world and to God differently because of her Healing Touch experience. This results in her thinking and acting in new and healthy ways. Bob said he has been recreated; his life is an embodiment of God, and he thinks and acts differently in the world because he is now a conduit of God's love. Louise's relationship with God has become more intimate and that means she thinks of herself and others in a different light which has changed the way she relates to herself, God and others.

I observed that many people understand and relate to God differently after they have connected to God or experienced the unconditional love of God through Healing Touch. This experience allows them to think about themselves in new ways, often removing barriers to healthy living such as fear and a sense of unworthiness. It creates an understanding of other humans so they feel compelled to treat them with more love, compassion, and understanding. Knowing that God and humans are interconnected with the same healing energy changes our perception of how the world operates. When our thought processes and relationships change,

¹⁴⁵ See my definition in Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁶ See chapter 6.

we act differently in the world. Healing Touch changes relationships with oneself, one's neighbours, and with God.¹⁴⁷

When I heard people's stories and when I think of my own story, I realized that none of us really thinks of ourselves as fully healed. We talk about and relate to healing as an ongoing process – as a journey into wholeness. Because true wholeness is never obtainable, we move towards healing and wholeness in a circular form rather than a linear. We can enter the circle from many different points and as we heal that part of our life, we become aware of other aspects of our life in need of healing and move around the circle. As each of part of us heals, we move closer to God and to wholeness (the centre of the circle) achieving a spiritual growth and increased insights into our lives.

We are all at different places in our journey; ranging from Maureen who is still searching, to Bob who feels the synergy between himself and God, and believes that the kingdom is alive for him. Just as we are not healed, we are not transformed; we are in a process of transformation. Each time we heal a part of ourselves we are transformed into a new way of being. Healing and transformation is not a destination; it is a process. Bob spoke to the synergy between himself and God. Louise explained how there is a synchronicity and providence of events in her life. Shirley talked about how her move home and her involvement in the Pathway are linked and I understand how my Healing Touch experience had a role in my call to ministry.

Once we are ready to heal and we become open to experience God or as Borg would say, "our hearts are open to God," we begin to move towards that sense of wholeness and healing that all humans have an inner drive to attain. Healing Touch does not cause

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

transformation by itself. Healing Touch, in conjunction with other life events can play a major role in the ongoing process of transforming people's lives if they are open to God and ready to heal. If we accept that to be true what are the ramifications for the church, today?

Implications of a Healing Ministry in the Church

What is the role of the church today? C. Kirk Hadaway, in *Behold I Do a New Thing*, defines religious institutions as those “that connect or relate the everyday world (the immanent) to a reality that is behind, beyond, or subsumes our world (the transcendent). Religious institutions allow the individual to experience transcendent reality in the midst of everyday existence.”¹⁴⁸ Hadaway argues that if we hold up churches in the western world to the immanent/transcendent definition most of them would fail. This failure arises, he maintains, when churches try to serve people rather than transform their lives. Many of the church's admirable functions can be better performed by secular organizations. Hadaway believes the reason the church exists is to change people's lives. He suggests that for churches to do this, they must become incarnational communities, which he defines as a community that “seeks to embody Christ's mission by proclaiming the Realm of God is here – and by *living in it*. We are to incarnate, enflesh, and embody Christ and Christ's message. To do this we must grow as his disciples and in order to grow we must be open to change, to transformation.”¹⁴⁹

Diana Butler Bass, in *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, studied mainline churches that are thriving. These churches are engaged in what she refers to as “emerging Christianity, [or]

¹⁴⁸ Hadaway, *Behold I Do a New Thing*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

of a ‘new paradigm’ faith that is adapting to changes in a pluralist, post-Christian world [or] transformational Christianity.”¹⁵⁰ She identified these thriving churches as ones “where people were growing deeper and experiencing a new sense of identity by intentionally engaging Christian practices.”¹⁵¹

One of the practices common to a number of these thriving churches was a ministry of healing, and one of the pastors, Graham Standish,

preaches harmony – “Christ’s vision was one of spiritual, mental, physical, and relational balance, integration and wholeness. . . . [believing] that this sort of integration leads to healthier living and healing, [arguing] that ‘imbalance’ is one of the central problems of our time. . . . Calvin Church has come to believe that healing is the work of God, based in the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and that we open ourselves to it.”¹⁵²

They practice a healing ministry through prayer, liturgy, labyrinths, prayer shawl knitting, and Reiki (a form of energy work).

Previously, I discussed how the United Church of Canada does a good job of teaching people about the transcendent and immanent nature of God, but does not always provide adequate opportunities to experience God.¹⁵³ Hadaway tells us that when churches provide opportunities for people to experience God, rather than the knowing of God, they are providing what Sallie McFague calls “an embodied form of knowing.”¹⁵⁴ Embodied knowing can be experienced through meaningful liturgy, music, other art forms, the spoken word and Healing Touch. Interviewee, Maureen, was able to articulate how she was transformed after her Damascus Road experience.¹⁵⁵ The other interviewees told how they were changed by

¹⁵⁰ Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, 4.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁴ Hadaway, *Behold I Do a New Thing*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter 6.

their Healing Touch experience. People are transformed whenever they experience God in a real and tangible way and Healing Touch is one way that happens.

If we take the work of Hadaway and Butler Bass seriously, and if a mainline congregation is going to thrive in the future, as part of the emerging Christian movement, it must become an incarnational community whose goal is to transform people's lives by providing opportunities for members to experience an embodied form of knowing God and Christ by encouraging members to engage in Christian practices. The Healing Pathway is not the only way to attain those goals but it can play an important role in achieving them because through the Pathway, some people are healed by encountering the presence and love of God and are transformed by that experience.

By exercising a healing ministry we are carrying on the ministry of Jesus. Because clients experience God through this ministry, we become Christ incarnate. Hadaway would tell us that is one of the identifying characteristics of an incarnational community.

There are a number of ways that churches can encourage a Healing Pathway ministry. They can provide accountability and authenticity by including it in the governance of their church. They can provide opportunities for practitioners to be involved in the liturgy of the church by for an example, offering a soaking prayer to congregants after communion, or by sponsoring regular healing services. They can provide a dedicated space that is a private and safe for practitioners and clients. They can embrace the ministry through its preaching. Finally, it can provide finances for equipment and training.

Areas for Further Study

There are a number of areas that would be exciting to research in energy work. I looked at the similarities of the Healing Pathway to other forms of energy work such as Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch International, and Reiki. It would be interesting to find out what the differences are.

The work that Gabor Maté is doing fascinates me. Although he does not specifically look at spiritual issues, he is starting to scientifically document the connections between emotions, stress, hormones, and the physical body. I think in the near future we will begin to see a synergy between conventional medicine, the scientific community and energy work. Any research in this area that supports these connections will be of great benefit to everyone.

The participants in this study had a broad range of experience. It would be interesting to study people whose experience was limited to one treatment.

Most cultures practice some form of energetic or spiritual healing. Exploring how those practices are similar to and different from the Pathway would be of benefit to healers in all cultural contexts. Of particular interest would be Canadian First Nations people and some of their practices around smudging and sweat lodges.

Closing Remarks

From my own experience, I knew that Healing Touch could be transformative. I knew that for many, experiencing Healing Touch for the first time was the first time we felt the presence of God and were healed by that presence. I was honoured to hear other people's

stories and was moved by the depth of their experience and awed by the extent of their transformation.

The United Church of Canada is struggling, in this time of declining membership, and must find new ways of doing things in the future. Many of our congregations, if they are to thrive, will choose to embrace emerging Christianity. Theologians such as Marcus Borg provide us with the theological framework to justify how emerging Christianity is relevant to people living in a post-Christendom society. The challenge for many congregations will be in offering embodied ways of knowing Christ. Healing Touch is one such way.

I wanted to explore the phenomenon of Healing Touch because I know what a difference it made to my life and I have witnessed how experiencing Healing Touch has allowed other people to think of God and the love of God in a new way. Fear is no longer part of my life. I know that God is always with me. I know that energetically, I am of the same essence as God; that I am created energetically in the image of God, so all that I am and all that I do is rooted in God. I know that God's love as experienced through Healing Touch has the power to transform lives.

That knowledge and experience strengthens me as a person and as a minister. It allows me to "meet" people where they are in their life journey because I have come to an understanding that because we are all the same energetically, the sum of our sameness is much greater than the sum of our differences. It brings me to an understanding that people are not changed through judgement and punishment but through compassion, which is the message that Jesus shared with us. Compassion has the power to transform us as individuals, communities and the world.

To me, the core story of Christianity is the Easter story. I believe that we are a broken people living in a broken world. This is the wilderness or Lenten experience. If we choose, we can stay there. God invites us out of the wilderness and into new life, the Easter experience. When we experience the love of God (compassion) through Healing Touch it allows us to move from the wilderness into Easter. It is a choice we make, to accept the invitation, but once we do, new life is possible. It is not a onetime occurrence; Lent is a metaphor for the human existence. Throughout our lives, we continually return to the wilderness and God continually invites us back into new life.

Healing is not a destination; it is a journey. We have this inner drive to move towards God, and wholeness and harmony with all of creation – to be transformed. The Healing Pathway, as part of our faith experience, has an important role to play in that journey of transformation.

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Appendix One

Sample Contact Letter

February __, 2009

Dear _____

Further to our recent conversation, thank-you for willingness to consider participating in the thesis project which I am doing to fulfill the requirements for a Master of Theological Studies degree. The goal of my project is to better understand the phenomena of *Healing Touch*, an energy based healing system taught by the *Healing Pathways*, an education program of Naramata Center.

I will be interviewing up to six people who have participated in one or more *Healing Touch* workshops. I believe you to be such a person. The interview will take the form of a theological reflection. The reflection will be audio taped. I would ask you to decide the location of the interview and to set aside up to two hours.

I realize that this interview may trigger strong emotions. I encourage you to have supports in place in case you find them necessary and to plan time after the theological reflection for such debriefing. You are free to end the reflection at any time if you so wish. I will make all attempts possible to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

I appreciate your willingness to contemplate being part of this resource project. I will be in touch with you the week of February 3, 2009 to determine your decision and, if affirmative, to set up an interview time and place.

Enclosed is a Consent Form which I would ask you to bring with you to the interview, should you agree to be part of this project.

Thanks again.

Yours sincerely,

Wayne Hughes
c/o Knox United Church
Box 12, Killam, AB

Appendix Two

CONSENT FORM

In signing this document, I am giving my consent to be interviewed by Wayne Hughes, a student in the Masters of Theological Studies program of St. Stephens College, Edmonton, Alberta. I understand that this interview is a theological reflection focusing on the phenomena of *Healing Touch*, an energy based healing system taught by the *Healing Pathways*, an education program of Naramata Center. I further understand that this study will form the basis of a research thesis for his Masters of Theological Studies degree.

I understand that I will be interviewed at a place of my choice, at my convenience; that I will be asked questions about my experiences of *Healing Touch* and that the theological reflection will take one to two hours. Reflections will be audiotape recorded and transcribed by a legal secretary whose terms of employment include an oath of confidentiality. The contents of the interview will be analyzed and the results documented in a thesis. A pseudonym will be used in the written document and my identity will in no way be included on the transcripts or in the final written report of the study. Every attempt will be made to maintain confidentiality.

I understand that I have been selected to participate in this study because I have participated in a *Healing Touch* workshop. I agree to be part of this research project voluntarily and I understand that I can refuse to answer any specific question or can terminate the interview at any point. I also understand that my answers to questions will not be given to anyone else.

I will receive no direct benefits as a result of my participation in this study. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review the findings of the project prior to the submission of the final report. I understand that if I have any questions about the conduct of the researcher or procedures, I may contact St. Stephen's College (780-439-7311) and ask for the Academic Dean or the Coordinator of the Master of Theological Studies Program or contact the Thesis Supervisor, Rev. Dr. Fran Hare (403-347-2244)

My signature on this form does not waive my legal rights nor release the investigator or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

.....
Participant and date

.....
Researcher and date

.....
Witness if available and date

Appendix Three

Interview Process

Welcome

Introduce self and topic.

Permission to tape. Agreement of confidentiality, informed consent read out loud and signed. They may go off the record at any time, with tape off.

Agreement as to the approximate length of the interview.

Participants begin to tell story

Can you tell me why you chose to participate in a *Healing Touch* workshop?

Of the treatments you received, was there one that resulted in a particularly profound physical or emotional experience?

Without trying to interpret the experience in any way, can you describe the treatment from beginning to end, remembering any emotional or physical sensations, images or colors that you experienced?

Was there one sensation, image or feeling that resonates with you more deeply than the others?

When you relive that experience today, what feelings or images arise?

How does that relate to what is going on in your life? Or does it?

Can you think of a story or a character in scripture that has a commonality to your story?

What are the similarities or differences?

As a result of your participation in *Healing Touch*, do you perceive your relationship to yourself, to the world or to God, to be any different than it was before?

Has that resulted in a changed way that you think or act in the world?

Appendix Four

Sample Follow-up Letter

Dear Participant:

A personal introductory paragraph.

It took longer to do some of the preliminary work than I thought but the project is well underway. I am attaching your story to this e-mail as it will appear in the thesis by using “cut and paste” so I will be sure that you receive it. If you feel strongly we need to meet again, contact me and I will arrange a meeting for us. Please read your story over and comment on the following:

- Is this what you said? Did I hear you correctly?
- Did I forget to mention something important to your story?
- Is there anything else you would like to add to your story?

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Peace,

Wayne Hughes