

HEALING POWERS

The faithful believe they see miracles

By KAREN HAYMON LONG
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TAMPA — Catherine May believes with all her heart that prayer saved her life 11 years ago.

Her doctor, who describes hers as "an astounding case," thinks so, too.

May was 60 when three doctors told her there was no hope, that the cancer attacking her ovaries would kill her.

But she tried one more doctor, Tampa surgeon William Standish Reed, who, she knew, believed in prayer power.

"I remember lying in Dr. Reed's office. On the ceiling were the words, 'Jesus loves you.' He prayed with me — and took a biopsy. That was two days before Christmas. The report came back in January negative. ... The cancer was gone," recalls May, who says she has been cancer-free since.

Reed confirmed that he prayed for her, took a biopsy, and discovered the cancer was gone when the biopsy report came back.

WHO THE HEALERS ARE

A list of some of the more famous faith healers/ 3-1

May, who lives in Orlando, says she didn't feel anything physically when Reed prayed for her, but she felt peace. She felt unburdened.

She says her life has become much more spiritual since her recovery.

"Before, I didn't know Jesus could heal today like he did in the Bible," she says. "Now, I am a turned-on Christian. I'm ready to tell everybody about my miracle."

From Jesus to crystals

Belief in faith healing probably has existed as long as people have been sick.

Pre-literate people combined faith with medicinal use of herbs and poultices. Two kinds of faith healing have reoccurred in the history of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Greek religion and Christianity: healing practiced by authorized priests or sacred organizations, and healing mediated by individuals or small groups who claim direct access to the divine.

Christian belief in faith healing is rooted in the Gospels, which chronicle about 40 examples of Jesus healing.

But faith healing is not always thought of in the same way. It takes many forms in the Bay area.

While Mormon priests quietly visit homes, anointing the sick and praying for God to cure them, Roman Catholic and Episcopal priests, charismatic ministers and others lead faith-healing Masses and services.

Living Waters Church, a charismatic church in a storefront off Fowler Avenue in Tampa, has healing services every Friday



Faith-healing services take many forms

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night.

Other long-established churches in mainline denominations — St. John's Episcopal in Tampa's Hyde Park among them — offer faith-healing services, too.

At solemn weekly services at St. John's, a priest puts his hands on the heads of those who attend, anoints them with oil, serves them Communion and prays for them or their loved ones to be healed.

The Rev. John Peterson, the church rector, says some who have attended have been healed spiritually and physically.

Ideas about faith healing vary. Members of the Christian Science Church believe disease has no real existence because it is not created by God. They cite Scripture as evidence that a true understanding of God can heal sickness.

Church members called "practitioners" provide the public healing ministry of the church.

Some Bay area residents say they use crystals to cure everything, from headaches to cancer, while others say they evoke spirits to channel through them to cure the sick. Some channelers say the spirits were skilled surgeons in past lives.

Many people who believe in faith healing credit God with healing and say they are just the instruments through which God heals.

Rector Peterson and May's doctor, Reed, among many others, stress that prayer should supplement standard medical treatment and that God empowers doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians and others to do their jobs.

Sometimes, faith healing can conflict with the law, as when parents withhold medical treatment from their sick children, opting to wait for a miracle.

Reed is critical of people who call themselves faith healers and take credit for healings.

He says he gives all the credit to God, and even goes so far as to say that a spiritual person would heal faster than would an atheist.

He adds that several of his patients have had remarkable cures after prayer. One patient, the Rev. James Lennard of Tampa, had melanoma (a severe form of skin cancer) that had spread to his lymph nodes in 1968.

"We prayed for him, and I oper-

ated on him and took the tumor out," he recalls. Against the odds, 20 years later, Lennard is cancer-free.

Lennard's daughter, Mary Lennard Dunger, agrees that prayer saved her father.

She recalls that when her father recovered, "they attributed it to faith healing. Dr. Reed calls my father his miracle patient. Yes, he was healed through prayer. I believe that with all my heart. He was terminal."

Spiritual healing

Bishop W. Thomas Larkin of the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg says he believes people can be cured physically and spiritually through faith healing.

Several churches in his diocese have healing Masses.

Larkin says he is sure some people have been cured through faith healing, and he points as an example to the famous healing shrine Lourdes in France, where more than 60 faith-healing cures have been documented by the Catholic church.

"Miracles happen," Larkin says. "We believe that miracles happen now, just as they did 2,000 years ago with the Lord. I'm sure there are physical cures."

Peterson, rector of one of several Bay area Episcopal churches that offer healing services, says he believes that when people are sick it is important to treat not just their bodies, but their minds and spirits as well.

He says he thinks everyone potentially has the gift of healing. And he puts healing into three categories: the healing of the spirit, the healing of memories and the healing of the body.

Many illnesses are caused or made worse by such things as hatred, stress, anger and bitterness, he says. And he adds that services such as those at his church that stress love and forgiveness can help relieve people of those negative feelings.

"We see healing coming from inside out," he says, explaining that love and good self-esteem can do wonders for people.

He says he has seen many people at his church healed of bad memories, unhappy childhoods and poor attitudes that have caused them problems.

"I have also seen people recover from physical ailments after confessing," he says.

And, like many others who be-

lieve in faith healing, he says he thinks people are more likely to be healed if they believe they will be.

He says he once saw a woman recover the use of her withered arm after someone prayed with her and told her she was going to be able to use it.

"There are beautiful things that happen," Peterson says. "It is all within God's system."

He says that people who have attended healing services at his church have had tumors disappear, and others have given up addictions to alcohol and drugs.

"Often, we don't see results," because people don't give the church an update, he says. "Or we will hear about something that was diagnosed that isn't there" anymore.

David Campbell of Tampa, an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, says that Mormons also believe in faith healing.

"To us, faith healing is not like a charismatic tent revival. It is usually a very private event. Usually, a person is visited by two or more men of the priesthood who lay hands on his head, anoint him and bless him."

Campbell says he has witnessed healings during such anointings. Some have been spontaneous. Others take awhile.

He recalls once seeing a woman's asthma cease immediately after she was anointed.

"It still makes the hair on my arms rise thinking about it, and that was 11 years ago," he says, pointing to goose bumps on his arms.

Skeptics question cures

Many people who believe in faith healing are quick to point out that not all so-called faith healers are alike.

They say some pretend to heal, while preying on the sick to benefit themselves financially.

Some people discount faith healing and credit "cures" to spontaneous remission of a disease or condition.

James Randi, a magician and author of "The Faith Healers," an indictment of much that goes on in faith healing, is one of the most outspoken critics of some people involved in the practice.

Investigations documented in his book indicate that some so-called faith healers use ringers — people who are not sick but rather fake an illness or condition and its subsequent healing.

Radios, over which someone

feeds information about people in the audience that the "healers" pretend was given to them by the Holy Spirit, also were discovered.

And his book says that some people also use gimmicks, such as one that seems to make a person's short leg grow to match the normal one.

St. Petersburg internist Dr. Gary Posner, (president) of Tampa Bay Skeptics, a non-profit scientific and educational organization, is offering \$1,000 to anyone who can prove the validity of faith healing and other paranormal phenomena, such as astrology, UFOs and extrasensory perception.

"I don't deny the possibility that miraculous things could happen," Posner says of faith healing. "To be a scientist is to be open-minded."

But, he adds, he never has seen documented proof that anyone has been healed by faith.

Posner, a member of the Faith Healing Investigation Project of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion, says that doesn't mean faith healing is impossible or that it is rubbish. He would just like to see proof.

"My prime concern," he says, "is with people who have true organic diseases who are led to believe that prayer might heal them and therefore forsake conventional medical treatment."

Posner's advice to consumers: "Use the brain God gave you, or the one you got through natural selection. ... Usually, if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

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