

Guidelines for services of healing, spiritual exercises, retreats and missionary activities

The first part of the guidelines "Guidelines relating to prayers for healing through God in the liturgy and in private gatherings" is aimed at providing assistance in the theological classification of liturgical and non-liturgical healing events. The second part governs the holding of spiritual exercises by foreign priests, members of religious orders and lay people.

Guidelines relating to prayers for healing through God in the liturgy and in private gatherings

I. Introduction

Ever more people are rediscovering their religious home as a place of salvation and healing. Wellbeing should be experienced holistically and the desire for it is coupled with the plea to God for physical or spiritual healing. The demand for Roman-Catholic healing and blessing offerings is growing. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the actual places where salvation can be experienced are the sacraments of the church. They enable a very special encounter of God and man in the form of Jesus Christ. The sacrament received devoutly also combines our own corporeality with experiences of transcendence. The sacraments are God's gift through his

church that constantly make clear that redemption und salvation cannot be accomplished by man. This belief is strikingly expressed in many of the church's prayers, particularly the Psalms, in which the supplicants feel entirely directed to God, especially in sickness and suffering.

These guidelines are intended to be of assistance in the theological classification and communication and a guiding framework for liturgical and non-liturgical healing events. They focus on people who organise or are responsible for services of healing, services of blessing, spiritual exercises, retreats and other out of the ordinary spiritual offerings. The basis is the instruction of the congregation for the doctrine "Instruktion über die Gebete um Heilung durch Gott" [*Instruction on the prayers for healing through God*] dated 14 September 2000.

II. Help in understanding and for communication

What shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:35). St. Paul's response is unambiguous: even committed Christians experience anguish and illness in their lives. Illness is not a sign of a disturbed relationship with God. The spirit of God is there to help people whatever their need. The sick and the healthy, the despairing and the confident can experience salvation at any time through this belief in God. A sick person experiences salvation as the preservation of the dignity of his life through Christ differently to a healthy person. Justice and compassion, gifts of the Holy Spirit, also have an effect on the life of the sufferer here and now and not only in heavenly fulfilment, as St. Paul assures us. As a general rule, God does not intervene in the world through a miracle to effect salvation. Because the creation is based on its own laws that also entail suffering for mankind. However, the Christian message promises that this suffering will be transformed when we come to God. Jesus of Nazareth himself announced the Kingdom of God as a renewal and transformation of all creation, already begun with his coming. This good news promises the salvation of the world, something which is not generally evident from the laws of nature, but is demonstrated by the incarnation of God, who as a human being accepted the laws of his creation and shared the destiny of mankind.

Since God himself shared human destiny in Jesus Christ, there is no need for the believer to point out his anguish to God and to demand direct physical and visible healing. Such expectations generally lead to disappointment. Like Christ on the Mount of Olives, he will instead request the ability to accept and bear his anguish and suffering in the trust of God's love – how and whether his anguish may be turned around. In this way, the request for a healthy relationship to God, to the world and between people in a stressful situation may make God's healing experienceable in the sense of St. Paul. In this holistic sense, the church has always encouraged prayer for healing, for example in the communion song based on Thomas Aquinas in the verse:

*I come here as a sick man who despairs of life;
I wail about my weakness; you can give me strength.
You are the doctor who gives help: Heal my wounds,
Give me new vigour, let me recover.*

Gotteslob 878,4

III Substantive provisions

A) General

1. According to biblical testimony, the charisms of healing are not restricted to any special group of Christians. The focal point of the celebrations and prayers is not by any means the preacher or a particular group, but the gift of mercy in the form of attention and a promise to be healed that only God can effect, in order to reveal the mercy of the resurrected in the Holy Spirit.

2. Illness and healing should be mentioned in the gatherings within the horizon of the economy of salvation in line with the intention of Instruction I.1. This refers in particular to a sermon at a liturgical celebration or a catechetical impulse at a non-liturgical celebration. Accordingly, a limitation of the statements in relation to a possible healing event is to be avoided in the sermon or impulse.

3.1 No general relationship between personal fault and physical, psychological or mental illness is to be created within the framework of the celebration as a whole.

3.2 There must be no promise of healing, especially when associated with a prior spiritual, psychological or other commitment.

3.3 Any statement implying a connection between a sincere belief in healing and a rejection of medical, therapeutic or psychiatric assistance is also to be refrained from.

4.1 The service of exorcism is subject to the instructions of the diocesan bishop.

4.2 Neither exorcism from the *Rituale Romanum* nor parts thereof or any direct addressing and driving out of demons (which also applies to the corresponding elements of the so-called deliverance prayer) is permitted in connection with healing celebrations.

B) Concerning the liturgical healing prayers

1.1 The only healing prayers to be used are those contained in the approved liturgical books.¹

1.2 Rites and liturgical vestments are governed by the liturgical books *Die Feier der Krankensakramente*, *Benediktionale* and *Die Feier der Buße*.²

1.3 The place for liturgical healing services is the sacred place.

2.1 Neither a liturgical nor a free healing prayer, other than the prescribed liturgical forms may be inserted in the liturgy of the church, the celebration of the sacraments or the canonical prayers.

2.2 At the celebrations, it is desirable to pray for the sick in the intercessions.

C) Concerning non-liturgical healing prayers

1. If a free form of healing prayer is used as part of congregational prayer and scripture reading, great care is to be taken to avoid confusion with the liturgical healing prayers.

¹ Special mention should be made of:

- Die Feier der Krankensakramente [*The celebration of the sacrament of anointing the sick*]. Freiburg² 1994, including Annex II for the anointing of the sick during the Mass.
- Benediktionale. Freiburg 1978, nn. 6, 19, 53, 56.
- Die Feier der Buße [*The celebration of repentance*]. Freiburg 1974, nn. 54, 89, 205/2, Annex II, Chapter VI, in particular n. 65.
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² See *Rituale Romanum*, De Benedictionibus, nn. 290 -320.

2. The accompanying symbolic actions must be conducted in such a way that the faithful are able to perceive a difference to the symbolic actions at the administration of the sacrament of anointing the sick.

D) Concerning the scope of the healing service or the gathering

1. Services of healing and blessing should accompany long-term pastoral offerings for the sick, afflicted and sufferers.

2.1 The liturgical celebrations or private gatherings themselves are required to bring the message of healing, not the exceptional event of a healing.

2.2 During and after the celebration, the faithful need access to qualified, psychologically trained and sensitive responsible persons to provide them with pastoral care. This is intended to avoid sensationalism taking centre stage and the occurrence of unwanted reactions instead of joy and devotion: Both the dashed hopes of healing and the personal prayer of blessing and physical contact can evoke profoundly dramatic utterances.

2.3 The faithful decide for themselves whether to receive the blessing alone, together, standing or kneeling.

IV. Instructions for the holding of liturgical and non-liturgical healing celebrations

1.1 **Responsibility** for liturgical and non-liturgical healing celebrations, in particular for their conduct and adherence to the instruction, is borne by the rector ecclesiae.

1.2 Only the rector ecclesiae himself can inform the bishop regarding services for the sick or the non-liturgical celebration. No exception is made for foreign bishops and cardinals.

1.3 The directors of the celebration are to receive these guidelines and a form from the rector ecclesiae, to be completed personally by the directors and returned to the rector ecclesiae. By means of this form, they advise the rector ecclesiae regarding:

-place and time

-participating pastoral worker

-content, procedure, tradition

-special features

The relevant form is available from the Bischöflichen Ordinariat, Hauptabteilung VII - Glaubensfragen und Ökumene, Postfach 9, 72101 Rottenburg, Telephone 07472/169-234, Fax: 07472/169-609.

2. **Sale and free distribution of printed matter and materials** not previously authorised by the rector ecclesiae in advance of the celebration, are forbidden at liturgical and non-liturgical healing celebrations.

3. If a **collection** is taken, a designated purpose for a work of evangelization, piety or Caritas is to be given. If no designated purpose is given, the collection goes automatically to the parish. All incomes from spiritual events must be correctly recorded via the parish authority and remitted from there to an official account of the director (head of the order or diocese).

4. Where **foreign guests** are concerned, care is to be taken to ensure adherence to the provisions concerning entry and departure and insurance matters such as health, public liability and accident insurance.

5. **Media recordings and broadcasts** of the service are not generally permitted.

6. Should any **serious questions and reservations** arise relating to events, the bishop may, after examining the facts of the matter, impose restrictions up to and including a prohibition of similar events within the diocese.

Invitations to foreign priests, members of religious orders or lay people to parish spiritual exercises or missionary activities in the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart

In future, the responsible parish priest is required to comply with the following directives from the Episcopal Ordinary:

1. The director of the spiritual exercises must demonstrate that he is holding the event with the approval of his competent authority (head of order or bishop).
2. He must demonstrate that the financial process is properly regulated with his competent authority.
3. The parish priest extending the invitation is responsible to the diocese in respect of the presentations, services and action of the guest. In this respect, he shall take care to ensure adherence to the relevant provisions of ecclesiastical law (especially the “Richtlinien zum Gebet um Heilung durch Gott in der Liturgie und in privaten Versammlungen” [*Guidelines relating to prayer for healing through God in the liturgy and in private gatherings*]“ for the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart) as well as the compatibility with diocesan guidelines (especially the principles contained in “Pastoralen Perspektiven für die Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart“) [*Pastoral perspectives for the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart*] and reports to his competent main department of the Episcopal Ordinary on completion of the action.
4. The director of the spiritual exercises must be able to communicate in German.

A form on which to furnish the relevant proof in German or in English if need be is available by post or e-mail from Ms.Thekla Pfeifer, HA IV – Pastorale Konzeption, Postfach 9, 72101 Rottenburg; TPfeifer@bo.drs.de

On behalf of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart

Rottenburg, 29 September 2011,

on the Feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Rafael

Bishop Dr. Gebhard Fürst