


making
your
church
a house
of healing

Workbook

Based on the book
Making Your Church a House of Healing
by Michael Gemignani
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The questions provided in this workbook are intended both for private reflection and for use in small groups that choose to study *Making Your Church a House of Healing* by Michael Gemignani (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2008). The questions are listed under the chapters and subheadings of the book.

CHAPTER 1

What Is Spiritual Healing?

1. Three possible definitions of spiritual healing are given in the first paragraph. Which do you consider most important in your own faith practice? Why?
2. Surveys indicate that a great majority of Americans consider themselves Christian, but most define what it means to be Christian in terms of living a good or moral life. That is, I am a Christian if I obey the Ten Commandments or try to live according to what I understand to be Christ's moral teachings. How compatible is this attitude with the author's view that spiritual healing can only come about through the action of God, not from our own actions or abilities? Explain your answer.
3. What does it mean to you to be Christian? On what do you base your conviction?

Spiritual healing and love

4. Love is inherently directed outward, but Scripture connects love of neighbor with love of self (see Matthew 22:36-39). What does it mean to love yourself?
5. How do you think love of self is related to God's love for us? How is it related to love of neighbor?
6. What is the connection between spiritual healing and these loves of God, neighbor, and self?

Spiritual healing and physical healing

7. Describe a situation in which you yourself or someone you know was seriously ill, but in which the serious illness became a source of grace in spite of the physical pain it brought.
8. When have you, or someone you know, been brought to a deeper relationship with God through suffering or trials? Tell the story.

The local congregation and spiritual healing

9. Do you look at your local church as the embodiment of the church universal? Why or why not? In what ways is your church living into this embodiment? In what ways might improvement be needed?
10. The author has stated that spiritual healing is the primary mission of the church. Do you agree? If not, then what do you see as the church's primary mission? To what extent is spiritual healing an important component of the mission you have defined? Why?

CHAPTER 2

The Mystery of Suffering

The church and a local church must address suffering

1. Compose a short sermon or meditation on suffering from a Christian perspective. Deliver it to your small group and talk about it.
2. In what ways does your local church address the suffering of its members, of the wider community, and of the world?
3. Do you believe it is possible for the world to be completely free of suffering—even without factoring in human sin? Explain your answer.

Healing: An integral part of Jesus' ministry

4. Why do you believe Jesus made healing the sick such a central part of his ministry?
5. Jesus told some people not to tell anyone about their healing. Why might Jesus not have wanted his miracles to be widely publicized?

Physical suffering is not essentially evil

6. Pain is, in fact, a two-edged sword. It can strengthen spiritually, or it can bring a sense of futility and despair. When have you, or someone you know, suffered from what you considered to be “senseless” pain? How might you as a Christian try to relate to someone who experiences such pain?
7. Have you ever wished that you could assume the suffering of someone you love so that they could find relief? Do you think Jesus suffered for us in this way? Why or why not?

The church must help us with our pain

8. What does it mean to grasp the presence of God “only in the darkness of faith” (p. 10)? When have you felt the divine presence through faith alone, because intellectually and emotionally, God seemed to have abandoned you? How did you pray in that circumstance?
9. How does your church help you grow into greater spiritual maturity? How might your church improve in this area? What have you done personally to enable your church to help its members grow?

Can I be spiritual healthy yet physically ill?

- 10.** Read about the life of Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Dorothy Day, or some other person of great faith. Use Wikipedia.com as a source if you have nowhere else to turn.
- 11.** What role did suffering (either their own or that of others) play in their faith journey?
- 12.** How does what you learned apply in your own life?

CHAPTER 3

Some Accounts of Healing in Scripture

Raising two dead sons of widows

1. Imagine that you have just performed a great miracle of healing, such as raising a child to life. What might the child's family be saying to you? How would you respond?
2. How would you feel about participating in such a miracle? How would your life be changed by that event? What would be the spiritual temptations, and how would you handle them?

Other examples of healing in the New Testament

3. Consider this: Would you have been willing to be crucified so that Hitler could be spiritually healed? Who else might you consider unworthy of spiritual healing? Why?
4. Note from the examples given that faith is not necessary for Jesus to heal someone. Do you find this surprising or offensive? Why or why not?
5. How would you respond to Jesus if he were to stand here now and ask what *you* wanted him to do for you? What is it that you most want to be healed?

What must a church believe if it is to be a house of healing?

6. Do you know of any healing miracles that have already taken place in your church? If so, describe one example.
7. Do you truly believe that Jesus can use you as an instrument of his healing? If not, what obstacles prevent this from happening? How can these obstacles be removed?
8. When have you witnessed devout men and women praying for the physical healing of someone of deep faith, yet the healing did not take place? What were the reactions when the person did not get well despite the continuing prayer? How do you feel about such a situation?

What must a church do to become a house of healing?

9. What framework for growing spiritually does your church present to its members? Is the emphasis on challenging church members to grow or on making members feel satisfied with where they happen to be? Why?
10. When have you hesitated to share an important spiritual experience with your pastor or with other members of your church? What was the experience and why did you hesitate?
11. When have you been hurt by an experience at a church? How did you handle it? How do you think you might handle it differently now?

CHAPTER 4

God's Role in Our Healing

An example from a pastor

1. Describe an incident that you witnessed and considered to be a miracle. Why did you think it was miraculous?
2. Have you or someone you know experienced spiritual healing? Describe your experience. What effect did it have on your life?

Does God always heal?

3. When have you been uncertain about how to pray for someone who was ill? When, if ever, might it be proper to pray for a peaceful death rather than for a physical cure? Why?
4. What gifts would you like God to give you? What gifts do you think are necessary to be spiritually healed? Must a person be aware of such gifts? Why or why not?

Only God can heal us spiritually

5. Describe a circumstance that you are certain was an experience of God. What effect, if any, did it have on your spiritual life?
6. Do you believe that spiritual healing is always miraculous? Why or why not?
7. How does your church help members discern and respond faithfully to God's actions in their lives? Consider what program your church might initiate that would help in this regard and discuss it with your pastor.

CHAPTER 5

Some of God's Gifts to the Church

The gift of Scripture

1. What is your personal approach to Scripture? How do you understand it to be authoritative?
2. How might a Bible passage still inspire even if it is not meant to be taken literally? Give an example.
3. How are you feeling right now? Glance through Psalms to find one that expresses your mood or physical condition. Read it aloud as if you were speaking personally with God.
4. Create your own "psalm" that expresses one of your emotions toward God: love, anger, yearning, etc. Read your psalm aloud to God.
5. In what way does God speak to you through the Bible? Describe a time when you received a special insight or solved a problem while reading Scripture.

The power of the Incarnation

6. How does it make you feel to realize that Jesus was, and still is, a human being who has experienced the full range of human emotions? Why?
7. Do you feel comfortable being an "embodied" creature, or do you think you would be better off as a "pure spirit"? Why? Why do you think God made you with a body as well as a spirit?

The power of the Holy Spirit

8. How does it make you feel to realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit dwells in you in a real, though mysterious way? What implications does this have for your spiritual life?
9. Have you ever sensed the Holy Spirit acting in, or through, you in a special way? Describe the experience.

CHAPTER 6

The Individual's Role in Healing

Do you want to be healed?

1. Imagine yourself as the paralyzed man, waiting by the Pool of Bethesda, hoping to be healed. Those who are well pass by with hardly a glance. What are your emotions?
2. In what ways are you crippled in your own life? How are you dependent on others for your well being? Do you want to be healed? Why or why not?
3. Why would Jesus heal someone who did not know him, who had no faith in him, and who had not asked to be healed? What does this story teach us about Jesus?

Obstacles to being healed

4. What obstacles to healing do you observe in your own life? What other obstacles might there be that you are currently unconscious of?
5. Have you known anyone who seemed to take pleasure in being physically or spiritually sick? What do you think were the person's motives in that case?
6. Name the possible "benefits" of remaining physically diseased. Now substitute "spiritually" for "physically" and create another list. What adjustments would someone have to make in order to surrender each of those benefits?
7. What does it mean to forgive someone? Discuss the difference between being unable (or unwilling) to forgive someone, which is an act of will, and feeling anger at someone, which is a product of our emotions.
8. Who in your own life have you been unable to forgive? Pray for that person's welfare daily. After two weeks, see if you can now fully forgive that person.
9. Why is indifference an obstacle to spiritual healing?
10. What strategies can you suggest for motivating someone to engage in spiritual healing; that is, to want to grow more and more into the love and life of God?

Responsibilities that come with being healed

11. In your ministry, how are you choosing your own ways to serve God? How are you trying to discern God's will for service? What steps can you take to better discern God's will? How might you learn to discern whether a particular call comes from God or from your own desires?
12. Why would someone be hesitant to turn over complete control of his or her life to God? Imagine that God has asked you for total possession of your heart, mind, and spirit. What emotions would you feel? How would you respond and why?

CHAPTER 7

Sin and the Need for Repentance

Conversion of life

1. What does “conversion of life” mean to you? How does it differ from “being saved”?
2. What are the signs that a genuine conversion of life has taken place? What are the implications for your own life?

Rituals of repentance and forgiveness

3. Conduct the sample service of reconciliation provided in Appendix A (p. 142). You need not name any sins out loud, but you should set them before God silently. Do you sincerely believe that God forgives those sins? Why or why not? Assuming that you accept God’s forgiveness, how willing are you to forgive yourself and move beyond your past?
4. What does repentance mean to you? What are the implications of repentance for your life, and for your spiritual health?

A practical exercise to make people more sensitive to sin

5. Answer the pairs of questions in the text set out under each of the traditionally named “7 deadly sins”: anger (p. 47), envy (p. 48), gluttony (p. 48-49), greed (p. 49), lust (p. 50), pride (p. 51), sloth (p. 51).

CHAPTER 8

The Role of the Community in Healing

All Christians are one in Christ

1. What does the unity of the Body of Christ mean to you? What does it imply in terms of the way you relate to other Christians?
2. When have you been envious because you felt that someone in your church had received an honor or position that you wanted for yourself? What have you done to try to heal your feeling of envy?
3. In what ministries are you currently serving that you believe God has truly called you? If there are none, why? What is holding you back?

Implications for spiritual healing

4. How does your congregational life function to encourage spiritual growth? What changes would you recommend to improve matters? Are you willing to talk to your pastor about your ideas? Why or why not?
5. How does your church encourage members to make the best use of their individual gifts? What program(s) help members discern the ministries to which God is calling them? If no such program exists, what discernment process would you like to see put in place?
6. Describe any training programs or strategies available through your church that assist members in gaining the skills they need to carry out their ministries. How willing are you to support or establish such a program?
7. When have you experienced a situation (at church or elsewhere) in which you were sure disharmony was caused by dis-eased individuals? Describe the situation and what kind of dis-eases you perceived. What, if anything, was done to create a healthier situation?
8. When have you observed that someone who tried to suggest changes or volunteered personal involvement was brushed off or treated disrespectfully? How would you have handled the situation?

Churches are organic bodies like human bodies

9. The author cites Paul's depiction of the church as Christ's body (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-26). How does this image of the church suggest that we need other Christians around to help us grow spiritually? What benefits have you found that others bring to your spiritual journey?

CHAPTER 9

More on the Church as the Body of Christ

Members, one yet individual

1. In a spirit of honoring diversity, identify the many different personality types in your small group, in your congregation, and finally in your family?
2. Who in your church do you feel a particular natural antipathy toward? Imagine yourself meeting that person in heaven and embracing him or her in the love of Christ. What would it take for you to offer that embrace here on earth?

Human experiences, both good and bad, in the church

3. When have you visited a church and felt neglected or unwelcome? What made you feel that way? How can you prevent that sense of alienation for visitors in your own church?
4. When have you or a loved one experienced a need that your church failed to support? How did you handle the situation? What program(s) does your church have to identify and respond to members with specific or special needs?
5. How would you describe your relationships with the other members of your congregation? How do those human relationships strengthen or obstruct your relationship with Christ?
6. To what degree is your congregation homogenous in its beliefs about God and Scripture? How much diversity in beliefs do you think is healthy for a congregation? Why?
7. What are your church's expectations about its members' beliefs? What statement of faith, confession, or creed (if any) are individuals expected to affirm in order to be "members in good standing" in your local church?

Symbols of faith and spiritual healing

8. What symbols does your church use in its worship? What realities do those symbols convey? What additional symbols do you use in your own life to express your relationship with God?
9. Use the healing service found in Appendix A (pp. 135–41), or compose one in keeping with your own denomination's style of worship. Afterward, discuss what you experienced during the service.

- 10.** On a small piece of paper, write something for which you would like forgiveness. (Keep this private.) Now, offer a prayer in which you (and others in the group) express sorrow for the sin and ask God for forgiveness through the merits of Christ. Finally burn the slips of paper as a sign that the sins have been forgiven.
- 11.** Host a simple agape meal with your small group or with your family. Pay special attention to the unseen, but real, presence of Christ in your midst and in those present.
- 12.** How do you feel about the exchange of the peace? Why? How might the exchange of the peace affect your relationship with someone who has hurt you or offended you?

CHAPTER 10

A Church's Role in Dis-ease

Even a hospital can be a dangerous place

1. What system does your church have in place to try to identify and address congregational or pastoral dysfunctions? How might this system be improved?

Congregational dysfunctions

2. Mobs (or crowds) are notorious for inspiring human beings to do things they would never dream of doing as individuals. What are some examples? When have you yourself ever been influenced by a crowd mentality?
3. The author lists suggestions for how a congregation might become more welcoming to visitors (see p. 74–75). Which of these strategies does your church employ? What else does your church do to welcome and follow up with visitors?
4. What symptoms of exclusivity or inflexibility does your church reveal? How open are your church leaders to conversations about change or innovation? Why? How might increased flexibility and inclusion be accomplished?
5. Suppose your congregation is having financial problems and slowly losing members. Your denominational executive has proposed yoking your congregation with a nearby congregation with similar worship and theological views. What will be your church's response? Why?
6. How does your church make key decisions? Are the processes handled in open discussions, closed meetings, or top-down decisions? Are you more comfortable with a democratic form of decision-making or a process wherein those in authority make the decisions for the group? Why?
7. What theological and behavioral boundaries does your denomination set for someone to be a member in good standing? What are the boundaries for your local church? What is your church's mission statement, and how does it relate to these boundaries?
8. How has your church handled traumatic events in its history—such as a church split or a pastor in crisis? Was the event confronted for the sake of resolution and healing, or was it denied or ignored? To what extent has healing taken place? What process, if any, led to that measure of healing?

The church as an unsafe place

9. What mechanism in your church enables members to share their stories at a deeper level (e.g., small groups)? To what extent are you participating in that program? What benefits have you gained from it? Have you ever felt threatened by your involvement? If so, why?
10. What does it mean to you for your church to be a “safe place”? Is your church a safe place? Why or why not? How might it be made safer?

A failure to acknowledge healing as a principal mission of the church

11. What does your mission statement establish as the central purpose of your church? To what extent is healing a part of your church’s mission? How can you help bring about increased affirmation of and nurturing of spiritual healing as part of your congregation’s ministry?

CHAPTER 11

The Congregation's Role in Healing Itself and Others

Acknowledging the dis-ease in self and others

1. Identify a situation in which there was a serious breach of trust at church (your own or another) that was swept under the rug; that is, the congregation refused to discuss it or deal with it. What consequences did this refusal have? How might the situation have been handled differently?
2. What role has denial played in your spiritual health? When might it be a useful defense mechanism? When is it a serious dysfunction that endangers the health of an individual or community?

Means to identify spiritual dis-eases

3. How does your church evaluate its pastor? What is the process, and how often is the evaluation conducted? How would you design a mechanism that might be an improvement?
4. Consider the preceding questions in relation to your church's lay leadership board.
5. What steps can be taken to prevent a small group from falling into one of the following traps: (a) superficial social club, (b) elite or exclusive clique, or (c) fan club dominated by one or two members?
6. How does your church ensure that those in need of prayer can make their requests heard? How might the existing system be improved? For example, is there a way to submit anonymous or unspecified requests for prayer? Why or why not?
7. Choose someone in your group to be your prayer partner for a month. Check in with each other on a daily basis and pray for each other's needs. Evaluate your experience at the end of the month.
6. Describe the compassion ministries of your church, including the training offered to equip participants. What are the dangers in not providing adequate training? What other compassion ministry might be useful that is not currently being offered? What is needed to establish and sustain the new ministry?

CHAPTER 12

Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Companionship

Soul friends

1. What characteristics do you believe are most important in a soul friend? Why?
2. Have you had, or do you have now, someone you consider a soul friend as described in the text? What effect has he or she had on your spiritual growth?

Spouses, pastors, and prayer partners as soul friends

3. Your spouse may (and should!) be your *best* friend, but do you also consider your spouse to be a *soul* friend in the sense used in the text? Why or why not?

Spiritual direction

4. Have you ever had a spiritual director in the sense used in the text? If so, why did you choose that person? If not, what characteristics would you look for in someone who might become your spiritual director?
5. What might prevent your spouse or pastor from being a suitable spiritual director for you?

Possible pitfalls in the path of spiritual direction

6. What questions would you ask someone you were considering as a possible spiritual director? To what extent do you believe that completing a training program would make someone a good spiritual director? Why?
7. What personality or temperament would you like to see in your spiritual director? What are some traits that would disqualify a potential candidate for the role? Would you prefer a spiritual director who is more directive or more non-directive? Why?

Issues for churches related to spiritual direction

8. Most churches have liability insurance in case someone sues the ordained leadership for malfeasance, such as defamation, invasion of privacy, or alienation of affection. Find out if your church's policy covers lay and volunteer staff as well. Would you recommend adding a spiritual director to the staff if he or she was not covered by insurance? Why or why not?
9. What is the attitude of your pastor toward spiritual direction for members? Why?

CHAPTER 13

Steps toward Healing

Education concerning, and commitment to, the importance of healing

1. How do you feel when you hear that you must die to self so that Christ can live more fully in and through you? What does it mean to you to die to self?
2. How committed is your pastor to healing ministry? In what ways does this commitment express itself? What strategies might you adopt to try to promote healing ministry with your pastor and your congregation?

Overcoming congregational obstacles to the healing ministry

3. What types of people do you assume would not want to come to your church? Why? What could be done to make your church a more welcoming place for such people?
4. What specific activities do you have in place to make visitors feel welcome? Consider following up with a one-time visitor to ask why he or she has not returned. What responses might you get?
5. Which of the steps suggested by the author (pp. 109-10) does your church have in place to try to avoid inflexibility? What other steps do (or could) you take?
6. Describe an instance where you felt the leadership of your church was too inflexible. Now describe an instance where they may have been too flexible. What were the effects of these contrasting decisions?
7. Where is control centered in your congregation? Why? If it resides with just a few individuals or families, how has this hurt or helped your congregation to grow numerically and spiritually?
8. What mechanisms does your congregation have in place to encourage broad participation in the church's ministry and decision making?
9. How does the lay leadership of your congregation function (e.g., by election, appointment, volunteers; in rotation or terms, or until death or burnout)? How are the leaders evaluated for effectiveness and accountability? How might the current system be improved?
10. What is your pastor's leadership style? How does he or she relate to the church's lay leadership in big-picture planning, program implementation, and day-to-day operations? What changes would you like to see in such leadership relations?

CHAPTER 14

Addressing Other Obstacles to Healing

Addressing not wanting to be healed

1. What are some reasons why someone would choose a partial truth over the fullness of the truth? How might the truth make us uncomfortable? From what might that discomfort stem?
2. How would you try to convince someone that he or she should want genuine spiritual healing?

Addressing an inability to forgive

3. Envision a person that you are having trouble forgiving. Pray each day for two weeks for that person, asking God to bless him or her. After two weeks, evaluate how that daily prayer has affected your thoughts and feelings toward that person. Are you any closer to forgiveness? Why or why not?

Addressing sin

4. Each morning for a week, say the prayer provided on page 116 of the book. At the end of the week, examine the effects saying the prayer has had on your life.
5. What would you resist giving up, even if that person, habit, or thing interfered with your spiritual growth? Offer that thing to God and ask God for the grace to become less attached to it. (Remember, even those whom we love are better loved in Christ. Offering something to God in love does not necessarily mean you will lose it. You may regain it in a purer form.)

Addressing indifference

6. The author asserts that the Christian life is more than moral living—that is, it is more than living according to the moral teachings of Christ or the Ten Commandments. What does the Christian life mean to you? Why?
7. Who do you believe is closer to God: a Buddhist who lives her faith with total commitment or a Christian who is indifferent to his faith? Why? Do you believe Christ can act in those who are not expressly committed to him but who are devoutly seeking truth as best as they understand it? Why or why not?

Assistance from healing services and rituals

8. What makes you hesitant about asking others to pray for your healing?
9. How do you try to exercise a healing ministry toward others?

CHAPTER 15

Healing Prayer Teams

Healing prayer teams

1. Does your church or denomination have an organization or group dedicated to healing or prayers for healing? If so, what effect does the organization have in the life of the church? If not, consider initiating the formation of such a group. How might it be beneficial in the spiritual life of your church?

My experience at St. Paul's revisited

2. When have you experienced a sermon series, workshop, or seminar series about healing? Was the teaching a one-time event or is it ongoing? What did you learn from it? How might your church make teaching about healing a more integrated part of its ministry? How can you make it a more central part of your own life?

Potential pitfalls for prayer teams

3. The author asserts that a prayer team should “First, do no harm.” What does that principle mean to you? When have you experienced prayer that made you uncomfortable and why? What changes could have been made in the prayers so that would have put you more at ease?

Boundary issues

4. What physical boundary issues do you have (e.g., space, touch)? When have you felt your boundaries were violated (in a church setting)? How did you respond and why?
5. Many Christians affirm the value of physical contact in prayer, whether it is holding hands in a circle, laying on of hands in healing, or anointing with oil. What might physical touch add to the experience of prayer? Why?
6. When have you felt that your psychological boundaries were violated at church? How did you respond? What might have been done to make you feel more comfortable?
7. How comfortable do you feel asking a prayer team for healing prayer? Why? (Remember that you do not have to express your specific need when asking for prayer.)

Theological issues

8. Summarize your own view of what spiritual healing involves. Does your church have a stated position on spiritual healing? If so, how does it compare with your own?

Forms of prayer for healing to avoid

9. What are some of your psychological or spiritual dis-eases that hinder your spiritual growth? How might some of these “demons” actually goad you on toward a deeper relationship with God? (See 2 Corinthians 12:6-10.)
10. Why might God choose not to heal a physical ailment? If you had to choose between physical cure and spiritual healing, which would you choose? Why?

Still other issues

11. In what ways might a person’s attempt to exercise a “gift of the Spirit” (e.g., prophecy) be inappropriate and even harmful in healing ministry?
12. Paul told the early Christians, “Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). How have you witnessed the use of spiritual gifts in the building up of your local congregation?
13. What rituals does your church use in its healing services? How might specific actions (e.g., anointing) be powerful spiritual aids, even if they are not recognized formally by your tradition as “sacramental”? If you do not have a formal ritual, consider creating one for use in your small group or individual practice.

Conclusion

1. How have your views on spiritual healing been affected by reading this book?
2. What are you doing differently now because you have read this book?