

## **CATHOLIC REIKI MASTERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE DOCUMENT: GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING REIKI AS AN ALTERNATIVE THERAPY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On March 25, 2009 the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the document *Guidelines for Evaluating Reiki as an Alternative Therapy*. In this document the bishops conclude that Reiki is superstitious and dangerous and therefore inappropriate for Catholic institutions and chaplains. In preparing their document the bishops did not consult any Catholic Reiki practitioners, but instead based their evaluation purely on research from books and the internet.<sup>1</sup> There are a wide variety of Reiki beliefs and practices. Many Catholics who use and practice Reiki find it to compliment their Catholic spirituality not contradict it. This working document, by and for Catholics who use and practice Reiki, seeks to give a perspective lacking from the Bishops' document.

### **HEALING BY DIVINE GRACE AND HEALING BY NATURAL POWERS**

The bishops state that the church recognizes two kinds of healing: healing by divine grace and healing that utilize the powers of nature; it is appropriate for Catholics to seek to be healed by divine power as well as to take recourse to natural means of healing. The bishops argue that one cannot view Reiki as a natural means of healing because of a lack of scientific evidence supporting Reiki (making Reiki 'superstitious') nor can one view Reiki as a divine means of healing, because Reiki does not fit with the beliefs about access to divine healing in the Christian Tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> *National Catholic Reporter*. "Reiki: good health, spirituality - or only superstition?" Apr. 16, 2009. accessed online: <http://ncronline.org/news/spirituality/reiki-good-health-spirituality-or-only-superstition>

While the bishops do say, “the two kinds of healing are not mutually exclusive,” the bishop do not seem to be open to the possibility that divine healing and natural healing can work together. Catholic Reiki Masters’ experience indicates over and over again that healing is quite regularly the result of both natural means and divine grace. Spiritual practices and medicine together provide the best prescription for recovery. Prayer might help one to find the right doctor or treatment plan. While it may appear that the natural means of healing, i.e., the doctor or treatment plan, is the cause of health in the individual this natural treatment came as a result of divine grace.

Most Catholic Reiki parishioners believe that Reiki works on all levels of a person – mind, body, emotions and soul. Reiki can help eliminate physical pain, just as much as it can help one find spiritual meaning and peace around suffering.

#### **CATHOLIC THEOLOGY AND EASTERN PHILOSOPHY REGARDING A WORLDVIEW FOR REIKI**

Catholic theology as it is done by the bishops is almost exclusively based on a western philosophy of the world. This is largely based on the classical Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. This provides a framework for Catholic theology and influences concepts about the way the world works and the role and power of humans. In this worldview there is no concept of “universal life energy.”

Eastern philosophy has a very different view of the world and humanity. The concept of a basic energy force (*chi*) that is responsible for the health and welling being of all living things is an ancient idea that originated in China over 5,000 years ago. In Japan this concept is called *Ki*. This energy is manifest in everything: humans, animals, plants, water, the light from the sun, air, and even the earth. *Ki* is described differently

depending on its type and what it does. In Japanese there are many words and phrases to describe the various types of *ki*. For example, a person in good health has *genki* whereas someone with health problems has *byōki*. *Ki ga shimazu* describes disappointment and *ki no hayai* describes an excitable person. Someone who is feeling depressed is *ki ga omoi*. Someone with a large *ki* is a very generous person – *ki no okii*.

Coming from a completely different worldview it is easy to see why the bishops fail to understand the basic premise of Reiki.

### **USES OF REIKI & REIKI RESEARCH**

The bishops boldly proclaim, “Reiki lacks scientific credibility. It has not been accepted by the scientific and medical communities as an effective therapy.” They do not support this statement with any evidence. The document is not short on footnotes but they do not cite a study that shows Reiki as ineffective.

In 2002 The International Association for Reiki Professionals surveyed “America’s Best Hospitals,” as ranked by U.S. News and World Report, to discover that 60% of them currently had a hospital-based Reiki program in place. Of those that did not, 50% reported that they would consider it.

The website Reiki in Hospitals ([www.reikiinhospitals.org](http://www.reikiinhospitals.org)) “promotes the availability of Reiki in medical settings by providing a list of hospitals, medical clinics, and hospice programs where Reiki sessions are offered.” Reiki is used throughout the country in hospitals—during labor and delivery, with cancer and AIDs patients, in Rehabilitation units, on pediatric and neonatal units, in surgery and emergency rooms. Some physicians have begun writing specific orders for Reiki in their medical prescriptions!

One of the first studies conducted by Wendy Wetzel, RN, found that subjects receiving their 1st Degree Reiki training showed a significant change in the oxygen-carrying capability of blood within a 24-hour period (following initiation) as reflected by measurement of hemoglobin and hematocrit values at statistically significant levels.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine have recently supported the following studies in Reiki (Refer to [nccam.nih.gov/health/reiki/#](http://nccam.nih.gov/health/reiki/#)):

- How Reiki might work
- Whether Reiki is effective and safe for treating the symptoms of fibromyalgia.
- Reiki's possible impact on the well-being and quality of life in people with advanced AIDS.
- The effects of Reiki on disease progression and/or anxiety in people with prostate cancer.
- Whether Reiki can help control blood sugar levels or improve heart function in people who have nerve pain from diabetes.

Hospital physicians and administrators who have been using Reiki at their facilities as a treatment prior to and during surgery have reported patients needing less pain anesthesia during surgery and less pain medication following surgery.

Used in conjunction with conventional cancer treatments, Reiki is reported to ease the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation, improve immune function, ease anxiety and enhance positive emotional attitude, decrease pain and promote relaxation.

Other research into Reiki include:

Autonomic Nervous-System-Changes During Reiki Treatment: A Preliminary Study. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine Volume 10, Number 6.* This study revealed a significant reduction in diastolic blood pressure and heart rate in the Reiki group that didn't appear in the placebo group or the control group, thus tending to indicate that Reiki created an important effect that was not caused by suggestion.

The Reiki Research Foundation reports on a study using Reiki as a treatment for Multiple Sclerosis: 90.2% Reduction of Lethargy; 87% Reduction of Depression; 78.7% Reduction of Cognitive Problems; 75.3% Reduction of Motor Problems; 73.5% Reduction of Pain; 70.2% Reduction of Fatigue; 69.1% Reduction of Urine Problems; 62.8% Reduction of Bowel Problems; 38% Reduction in Walking Time. <sup>2</sup>

Both hands-on and distant Reiki treatments resulted in statistically-significant decrease in the symptoms of psychological depression and self-perceived stress, and the treatments had a long-term effect.<sup>3</sup> The nature of psychological effects arising during a Reiki session were studied, and anxiety was shown to reduce after treatments.<sup>4</sup> Certain physiological changes were associated with receiving Reiki treatments, including decrease in systolic blood pressure, increase in salivary IgA levels and decrease in salivary cortisol after treatments, increase in skin temperature and decrease in electromyographic activity during treatments.<sup>5</sup>

Outpatients with HIV/AIDS have been shown to be able to reduce psychiatric medication under medical supervision while using Reiki self-treatment.

NIH-supported clinical trials, which are currently recruiting patients, will test the efficacy of Reiki (including distant Reiki) in the treatment of Fibromyalgia at the University of WA - CFS/FM Research Center, Seattle, Washington, and Reiki in the treatment of patients with advanced AIDS will be performed at Temple University and Albert Einstein Medical Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A planned study, which will

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<sup>2</sup> [www.reikiresearchfoundation.org/msstudies.htm](http://www.reikiresearchfoundation.org/msstudies.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Shore, A.G., "Long-term effects of energetic healing on symptoms of psychological depression and self-perceived stress", *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 10(3): 42-48 (2004)

<sup>4</sup> Engebretson, J., Wardell, D.W., "Experience of a Reiki session", *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, 8(2): 48-53 (2002)

<sup>5</sup> Wardell, D.W., Engebretson, J., "Biological correlates of Reiki touch healing", *J. Advanced Nursing*, 33(4): 439- 445 (2001)

be performed by Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio will test the effects of Reiki with prostate cancer patients.<sup>6</sup>

The large number of hospitals who have Reiki programs indicate that while Reiki is not completely embraced by the medical community it is far from rejected by it. The on-going study and research of Reiki will continue to provide valuable insight into this healing modality.

### **REIKI AND SPIRITUALITY**

There is a great diversity in Reiki Masters and Practitioners regarding spirituality and Reiki. Many people practice Reiki independent of any link to any spiritual or religious practices. Many others choose to integrate Reiki into their religious or spiritual beliefs. Many Catholic Reiki parishioners include Christian symbols, prayers and scripture into their healing practices.

Reiki Masters do not guarantee divinely produced miraculous results from Reiki healing sessions. The only promise is a balance of the client's energy system that usually results in relaxation, stress relief and promoting the body's natural abilities to heal.

The bishops claim that an appeal to the assistance of angelic beings or "Reiki spirit guides" may introduce "the further danger of exposure to malevolent forces or powers." For Catholics who practice Reiki this appeal is identical to prayer to the angels or saints for guidance and intercession, a practice completely acceptable in the Catholic Tradition.

For Catholics who practice Reiki, Jesus is the source of healing. Catholics who practice Reiki have a connection to Jesus Christ the healer and Master Teacher. He taught compassion and love. From this teaching flowed a desire to help others, especially

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<sup>6</sup> [www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct/search?term=Reiki&submit=Search](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct/search?term=Reiki&submit=Search)

those who suffer most. The Christian tradition recognizes that individuals are given spiritual gifts, including healing. Catholic Reiki practitioners do not view themselves as the source of Reiki healing, only stewards of the energy.

### **CONCLUSION**

Catholic Reiki Masters do not agree with the Bishops Guidelines about Reiki. The discussion regarding the scientific and medical evaluation of Reiki is on going. The medical practices and studies illustrate that one cannot merely claim Reiki is only “superstitious.” Catholics who practice Reiki believe that Reiki can help them on their spiritual journey, not provide a dangerous exposure to evil forces. To claim that the worldview, which helps one to understand “universal life energy”, is a “no-man’s-land that is neither faith nor science” is a prejudiced view against Eastern philosophy and belief. The bishops’ document is merely a guiding document to help bishops discern the appropriate uses of Reiki in Catholic institutions. The concerns expressed in the document can and should be adequately addressed in dialogue with Catholic Reiki practitioners.