

*Francis MacNutt, at this time, was a Catholic Priest and was greatly impacting the Charismatic Renewal within the Catholic Church. In the 1970s he left the priesthood, eventually married, joined the Episcopal Diocese of Florida and started Christian Healing Ministries. Much of what is being done in healing rooms today is the type of prayer that MacNutt refers to as "soaking prayer".*

## **Healing the Woman With the Withered Leg**

The most remarkable example of healing through soaking prayer I have ever seen took place after a retreat we gave in the Diocese of Sonson, Rionegro, Colombia, South America, in February 1975. Bishop Alphonso Uribe had invited me to give a retreat for priests there, and our team included Father Carlos Aldunate, S.J. (of Chile), Sister Jeanne Hill, O.P., Mrs. William Callaghan, and Alberto del Corral as translator. Although the retreat was for priests, other people heard about it and came onto the retreat grounds asking for prayer. So it was no surprise for me to find, after the last conference (around 4 p.m.) Mrs. Callaghan, Sister Jeanne and others praying for a young Colombian woman; they called me over to show me her deformed leg and told me that already something had happened—that the leg had grown an inch or more. So I joined them in their prayer. Talking to the 19-year-old woman, Teresa Patino, I found that she had stepped on a sharp object in a swamp when she was only five years old. Due to the lack of proper medical attention, an infection developed and then went to her bone and developed into osteomyelitis. As a result her right leg had been warped, as it were, from the knee down. It was about six inches shorter than the other leg and

twisted as well. There also was a deep scar where an unsuccessful bone graft had been attempted.

As we prayed gently for two hours, the leg seemed to grow about an inch. About eight of us were praying, taking turns holding her leg (since kneeling down for several hours can be painful). The bishop himself prayed as part of the group. Then we took a break for supper and came back to pray for another two hours that night. Again, it seemed that her leg grew still another inch. Also, the twisted leg was gradually straightening. You couldn't see it happen, because it was so gradual, but by comparing the length every 10 minutes or so, we could see the comparative change taking place.

The next day we gathered at Alberto del Corral's home in Medellin—again with Bishop Uribe—and prayed two more hours in the morning and two in the afternoon, prayer of this kind takes a lot out of you. This day the leg seemed to grow another inch (it had grown about three inches the day before), so that by evening there was only about a two-inch difference between the two legs. Most remarkably, though, the right foot, which was flat and had no arch to speak of, grew and changed shape until the arch came in as in the normal foot. The toes of the deformed foot, which were about half the size of

those on the other foot, also grew until they were almost the size of those on her normal foot. In a period of hours her toes on the right foot had nearly doubled in size!

Several other unusual developments occurred which helped us to understand better some of the factors we had already learned about healing. They had to do with the relation between bodily healing and spiritual healing. Twice we came to realize there was a need for a healing at the spiritual level; both realizations—one in the morning, one in the afternoon—came because the healing and the growth seemed to have stopped. After the first cessation we discovered that Teresa needed to forgive her mother for what had happened after the osteo had developed. Because her family was poor Teresa's mother had to give Teresa up and board her with other people who could afford to get her the proper medical treatment. It was the only thing that could be done in the circumstances but to Teresa as a child it seemed like rejection. After we asked Teresa to forgive her mother and after praying for an inner healing of her feelings of rejection, Teresa's leg again started straightening and growing.

The second incident happened during the afternoon when the leg again seemed to stop growing (this was always hard to ascertain, since it could only be checked by comparative measurement over the course of perhaps half an hour). This time we found that a brother of Teresa's was severely injured in a wreck some

years before and she had offered her crippled state to God if only he would spare her brother's life. So she was feeling guilty about the healing taking place, since it seemed to her like going back on a promise she had once made to God. Here Bishop Uribe stepped in to help by using his authority, as God's representative to free her from the effects of any such vow. Once again her leg started to heal.

As that day of prayer ended we also noticed how the deep scar on her leg had grown closer to the surface and, except in two spots, it was now white instead of the purplish color it had been throughout its length when we started the day before. Since by now her right leg had grown enough to reach the ground (for years she had needed crutches because her right leg was too short to reach the ground), Teresa wanted to try walking for the first time since she was a child, but we told her to wait until she had checked it out with a doctor. Alberto offered to take her to a doctor and to form a team that would continue praying with her. Bishop Uribe, too, promised to stop by her home and pray with her once a week.

Since then her leg has continued to grow until there is only half an inch difference. At one session her foot made a turn until the scar that had formed a spiral down her leg became a straight line from the knee to the foot. The group checked with a doctor who examined Teresa and said that the bone was still broken and weak and counseled against walking yet. Alberto describes the further developments: Shortly after her visit

to the doctor, a group gathered again with Bishop Uribe for further prayer. As we laid hands on Teresa we noticed that the place where the bone was broken was quite warm and the lump greatly reduced in size. We prayed for about two hours and finally Bishop Uribe asked Teresa to stretch her leg and foot, an act which always caused a great deal of pain. Hesitantly, Teresa stretched out her leg and as she did so, the bone stayed in place for the first time in years. She felt no pain or discomfort as she moved her leg. We were all quite joyful and thankful, for it seemed as if the bone had welded. However, we advised Teresa to see a doctor before using her leg. Several days later she saw not one but two doctors, both of whom confirmed that her bone had welded."

Now, for the first time in 14 years, Teresa is walking again. It's impossible to calculate exactly how many hours of soaking prayer went into this extraordinary healing. Nor how many people prayed. And there is still need for more prayer for the leg still needs more healing. But most of the healing, which required that her leg and foot grow and straighten and be mended—when the doctors had given up hope of any further improvement taking place—has now taken place.

Again—it's impossible to say for sure—I don't think any of Teresa's healing would have taken place if we hadn't learned something about the time element required in praying for healing, nor if there hadn't been friends willing to spend hours gathered around Teresa in prayer. To see changes take place in a deformed leg like Teresa's

is exciting; to see the tears of gratitude in her eyes as she felt her leg strengthen is all the human reward anyone would ever need after spending hours praying with her.

But when you start praying, you never know—unless God reveals it—how much might happen, or not happen. And it's hard work—at times, exhausting. No wonder Jesus referred to his healings as "works"—"The works I do in my Father's name are my witness" (Jn 10:25), rather than as "miracles."

Seeing the effects of soaking prayer has given me a whole new outlook on healing. It used to be that when I passed a cripple I would wonder if prayer would heal him, but at the same time I would feel that the chances of a cure - although possible - were slim. Now when I see a cripple I just wonder if he could not be cured, or at least dramatically improved, if there were only someone who could take the time to sit beside him and pray.

Excerpt from "The Power to Heal" by Francis MacNutt. Ave Maria Press 1977.

You can find more information on the ministry's web site: <http://www.christianhealingmin.org>