

Rather than fight bishops, Reiki teacher steps down

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. -- To Jan Atwood, Reiki is all about healing, not theological battles.

That's why the teacher and practitioner of the Japanese healing technique has resigned from a retreat center run by Dominican nuns after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops told Catholic institutions they should not be practicing it.

Atwood will step down Friday, May 1, as coordinator of bodywork at the Dominican Center at Marywood spirituality center. She says she does not want to fight [the bishops' claim that Reiki is incompatible with Christian teaching](#) [1].

"It was a difficult decision to make, but I just felt everything was telling me to move on," said Atwood, who has been providing Reiki therapy at Marywood since the late 1990s. "I don't want to be a part of something that's political. I just want to do the work."

Her departure leaves the Dominicans uncertain whether to continue offering Reiki as an alternative healing therapy. Sisters say they were surprised by the bishops' recently released guidelines.

"This protest against Reiki is puzzling to me," said Sister Mary Navarre, a member of the Dominican leadership team. "It's not hurt anybody as far as we know, and it seems to have helped a lot of people."

Proponents say [Reiki reduces stress and promotes healing](#) [2] by laying hands on or near the body. Trained practitioners say they can free blocked energy points by channeling "life-force energy."

The bishops counter Reiki lacks Christian or scientific support. The USCCB Committee on Doctrine said it is "inappropriate" for Catholic retreat or health care centers to practice Reiki.

"(A) Catholic who puts his or her trust in Reiki would be operating in the realm of superstition, the no-man's land that is neither faith nor science," the bishops said in a March 26 report.

The Japanese practice differs from Christian faith healing because "the healing power is at human disposal," the bishops said. In contrast, "for Christians the access to divine healing is by prayer to Christ as Lord and Savior."

It is up to local bishops whether or not to enforce the guidelines, said Fr. Tom Weinandy, who oversees doctrine and pastoral practices for the U.S. bishops.

Reiki attributes to humans healing power only available to Jesus, Weinandy said, but Dominicans say they see no conflict with Christian teaching in the kind of Reiki they offer, which sees [the life-force energy coming from God](#) [3].

"It's very Christian, and we're not using witchcraft or anything of that nature," said Sister Nathalie Meyer, prioress of the Dominicans. "We certainly are not out to do something that isn't good for the church."

She said Grand Rapids Bishop Walter Hurley "put no pressure on me," and her congregation will study the issue along with other Dominican communities before deciding on a future course.

Atwood, who's a member of the Reformed Church in America, said she averages about 15 Reiki sessions a month and has trained about 300 people in the technique.

Atwood said she is being part of Christ's body by helping people heal, adding, "I believe so strongly what I'm doing is from God."

(Charles Honey is the religion editor for the Grand Rapids Press.)

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