

## Care For Others: January HCI Workshop

### I. Welcome and Introductions

How do we love each other in the church?

In order for the Church to fulfill its purpose, we need to spend some time looking at how we care for others in the church as well as care for those we are seeking to introduce to Christ. If we cannot love each other in the church, how can we possibly model God's love for those who are not yet in the church?

How we care for those in the church translates to how we care for those outside the church.

### II. Created in the Image of God

Begin with a Mini Hymn Sing:

- The King of Love My Shepherd Is #138
- Great is Thy Faithfulness # 140
- On Eagles Wings #143
- Amazing Grace #378
- Rock of Ages #361
- Saranam, Saranam #523
- What a Friend we Have in Jesus #526

(Do not do all of these – the workshop is just two hours. Discuss what the song communicates. Use these hymns to help persons begin to reflect on themselves and the church: Who they are and the church for what it is in relation to what God has called us to be. We are created in the image of God – Where does that image reflect through us? Through the Church?)

Music is one of our greatest resources for communicating God's love and Grace, and for helping human beings to see who we are in relationship to God. The words in a song are important, but equally important and maybe even more important, is how the music interprets the meaning and the emotion of the words. One may not fully grasp an understanding of the words by themselves, but when put to music, the heart and soul can be opened to new revelation.

Share Genesis: 1: 27 – 28

Commentary: God gave humanity a responsibility, a responsibility that has its New Testament echo in the great commission when Jesus says be fruitful, go out and multiply, bring the world back to a knowledge of God as the Creator and Giver of Life. What have we or are we, or will we do to live up to this responsibility, which calls us to be good stewards of "every living thing," which includes ourselves and other people?

### III. We are created to be partners in Ministry

- Abraham and Sarah
- Moses and the Israelites  
From the beginning God intended for people to live and move in community and to care for one another.
- Mary and Martha
- I Corinthians 12 “varieties of gifts, but the same spirit. Varieties of service but the same Lord. ... Now you are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it.”
- Philippians 1:3 – 11 (Prayer that the Partnership would be caring/based on love.)

Break into groups: Study sheets with questions (separate documents): 20 minutes for small group work and then 10 minutes to share back with whole group. Leader assign passages. Do not have to do them all. Pick the two or three around which the leader feels most comfortable facilitating discussion. – focused on what the scriptures communicate about caring for others – how to do it? And why this care is important? How is it part of the image in which we are created.

### IV. Interdependence - (systems theory)

-In the Church the actions of individual members upset and influence the response of others. Each committee also dances in balance with or in reaction to other groups in the church.

(Illustration: A mobile)

-The balance of the church is compromised by conflictual relationships and poor communication.

Show DVD “The Critics” Discuss

People do not want to be a part of negative energy in the church – they get enough of that in other places in their lives. We are called to be a people who make a joyful noise. How could the scenes in this DVD been played out differently?

### V. Caring for Others: Sharing Responsibility and Authority

- The church, like any organization needs to assign to various committees and individuals the responsibility for making decisions and overseeing tasks and programs. New committee members will often ask, “What are our responsibilities?”
- In a healthy organization, these responsibilities correlate well with authority and the trust that the whole organization has placed on the committee. It says, “You are responsible for x and z, and you are given the authority to decide these matters and to spend the money in this budget line.” **When a church is**

**dysfunctional, however, people are given responsibilities but denied authority.** They may feel called, trained, and passionate

- about a task but frustrated by the unwillingness of others to let them implement their decisions. This leads to rapid turnover and reinforces the reluctance of newcomers to serve in leadership roles in the church. Consider these examples:
1. A Sunday school superintendent might be given the responsibility for seeing that every class has a teacher, but is not trusted with the authority to recruit and train new leaders.
  2. The worship committee meets regularly, feeling that they are responsible for worship; but all of their decisions are ignored by the pastor, who takes total control of each service.
  3. is appointed to address some felt need but is not given the authority to spend any funds from the church budget.
  4. A trustee chairperson makes many decisions without consulting his committee. He justifies these actions by saying, "They are all so busy that I didn't want to call a special meeting."
  5. Another trustee committee severely limits the youth group's activities and meeting places. Having to get permission for everything was a shock to the couple who volunteered to lead the group.
  6. A task force is formed with the implication that the results of their study will be considered at an upcoming board meeting, but their report is never given much attention. The task force members are left wondering why they were asked to study the issue.

Sometimes what creates this divorce between responsibility and authority is a lack of trust. In the case of the youth group leaders above, a careless incident involving previous youth leadership may haunt their current relationship with the trustees. Until this lack of trust is openly identified and discussed, neither side will fully meet the expectations of the other.

There are many people who rise to positions of leadership in our society without ever learning how to share responsibilities or delegate decisions. The pastor who refuses to share worship planning responsibilities with the laity may justify this attitude as necessary to preserve the authority of the pastoral office. However, effective leadership is defined by the capacity to delegate and to cultivate the skills of those with whom one can share both responsibility and authority. When we do this, we draw more and more people into fulfilling paths of service. In fact, the purpose of the church involves recruitment, training, and the sharing of power. We call this "making disciples."

Often individuals and committee who currently wield power are reluctant to envision the church as a dynamic, changing system built on caring relationships of trust. For them, the church is a hierarchical pyramid, and authority flows from the top down. Little in Jesus' teachings, or what we know of the early church, supports this rigid structure – a structure that makes the church more about those that have power and position, than

about God and Christ or making disciples. Today few people want to be involved or volunteer in an organization that lacks flexibility.

Think of the mobile of your church system. Are there some controlling individuals that extend lines of hidden influence that keep persons subject to their authority? Do the leaders in your congregation care enough about each other and the mission of the church to fully entrust those who have been asked to serve in various roles both sufficient independent authority and meaningful responsibilities? (possible discussion)

Bill Easum: “The life and spirit of established churches is being drained by mean-spirited people called Controllers. Controllers are those leaders who withhold permission or make it difficult for new ministries to start. Control and the abuse of power and authority have no place in the Body of Christ. It is time for us to either convert or neutralize the Controllers.”

(The material for section V. Comes from chapter 9 of *The Church Transition Workbook, getting your church in gear* by Bill Kemp)

## **VI. Care for others: Practical Application and Practice**

How do we care for others?

How do we love each other in the Church?

**First we recognize that it is not about us!!! In fact, we care for others when we are the answer to someone’s prayer. We should be the answer to God’s desire and the prayer of our neighbor. (Matthew 22:37 – 38)**

In order to care for others and be the answer to God’s desire and someone’s prayer we must be God – Centered and not Self – Centered.

Christians do not like to think of themselves as self – centered. Many of us tend to rationalize our behavior in ways that defend our way of living life as God – centered. Some of the rationalizations are: We pray, We attend church services, We serve on church committees, We try to do the right things. However, we must remember the story of the publican and the tax collector (Luke 18:9 – 14) The publican thought he was God-Centered, too! Are we falling into the same trap?

A tool for helping us keep on track is a Personal Reflection test. This tool can be used individually or as part of a group, committee devotion. It helps to raise our awareness of self-centeredness versus God-centeredness. We are far more caring and joyful when centered in God.

### **Personal Reflection Test (Handout) (Give time for people to take the test)**

1. Are your prayers more about you, your ideas, or your goals than about others?

2. Are you pointing out things about people or the church that do not measure up more often than celebrating growth, progress, and possibilities.
3. Have you ever walked away from a situation denying your help or idea?
4. Do you have hate in your heart for another person or group of persons?
5. Have you ever accused/judged a person, group, or church identified with Christianity to be non-Christian.

Discussion after the reflection:

At some point in our lives, we have all probably answered “yes” to at least one of these questions. Part of our human struggle is being self-centered and trying to become God-Centered. The disciples themselves were back and forth. See Matthew’s feeding of the 5,000 (Matt. 14: 13 – 21, or the conversation as Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) – if people want an illustration of this.

### **Tools that help us to be Caring People (Hand out)**

There are several things we can use to help us examine ourselves in order to be more enabled to allow God to touch and center us thus enabling us to do better in our care for others. First, there are a few simple things we can use on a daily basis.

1. The pointing finger. Every time we point our finger we state our self-importance, just like the publican. Remember when you point a finger at someone else, you have three more pointing back at you.
2. Examine your prayer life in terms of praying hands, palms together, fingers straight. Thumb: pray for those closest to you. Pointer: Pray for those who show you the way. Middle: pray for those in leadership or those with roles of supervision. Ring: pray for those who are weak. Pinky: pray for the smallest and furthest from you as well as yourself.
3. Use the prayer of St. Francis (#481 in the United Methodist Hymnal)
4. Instead of only memorizing John 3:16, put John 3:17 with it realizing that condemnation of others or self was never God’s purpose.

**We have the perfect model of God-centeredness in Jesus Christ. To work on our God-centeredness means we must come to God, not just through worship or prayer, but through meditation and study of the scripture. We must learn about and experience God. We must learn about and experience Christ. (share - not on handout but paragraph in participants copy)**

Examine Peter’s life in terms of your own. Peter was always vacillating between self and God. Peter even denied Christ three times to protect himself. Then he meets up with Jesus after the resurrection. Does Jesus say I told you so? No. Does Jesus point out what Peter did wrong? No. Does Jesus express anger and walk away because Peter did not carry out his disciple role just right? No. Does Jesus tell him that periods of denial do not or cannot happen for those who follow him? No. Does Jesus demand an apology before ever associating with Peter again? No. Does Jesus nurture and harbor the pain and hurt he must have felt when one of his closest friends denied him? No.

What does Jesus do? He asks, “Peter, do you love me?” Peter, do you love yourself or me? Jesus asks this three times, patiently reorienting Peter from self to God. Three times Peter says, “Yes.” Jesus responds, “Then, feed my sheep.” Care for others, be an answer to somebody’s prayer! (John 21: 15 – 17)

To care for others means not giving up on them or pushing them, their thoughts, their ideas, their concerns to the side. To care for others involves being God-Centered and not self-centered.

### **Practical Tools Continued (Handout)**

1. Try this exercise on two consecutive days. Reflect on your behaviors and attitudes in light of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 1 – 17), the first day. Do the same with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1 – 11), the second day. Does one approach help you to see yourself more clearly than the other? Why? Does one move you to a greater desire for holy Living? Why? (Thompson, *Soul Feast*, p. 90)

#### 2. Life Centered Prayer

“Gather the day. Identify the ten or twelve major events of your day.”

“Review the day. Reflect upon each occurrence listed, without judging yourself, avoiding feelings, or making excuses. This is the actual substance of your daily life.”

“Give thanks for the day. Thank God for each part of your day, for your life, and for God’s presence in it.”

“Confess your sin. Acknowledge your faults in thought, word, and deed toward God, your neighbor, and yourself.”

“Seek the meaning of the events. Reflect on the larger significance of each event in your life. What is God saying to me? What am I being called to do?” (Thompson, *Soul Feast*, p. 94 – 95)

3. Take 15 minutes at the end of each day or about 30 minutes at the end of each week and answer the following questions:

- When have I been aware of God’s Presence, guidance, or grace this day or week?
- How did I respond?
- When have I been especially unaware of God’s presence, guidance, or grace this week?
- Why?
- What habit of the heart do I need to acquire in order to live a more faithful, God-centered life?

(Some or all of these questions are a great way to start a Church meeting. These questions can be used in conjunction with setting a seat for Christ - see below.)

To Care for others involves allowing God to use us as an instrument to be the answer to someone's prayer. Allowing ourselves to be used as an instrument to be the answer to someone's prayer is the essence of St. Francis' prayer. When we enter into a daily and/or weekly discipline of self-examination, we will come to a healthy self-awareness, and a greater knowledge of self and God, which allows us to become a people who are at peace with ourselves and who can therefore make peace with others, care for others, and be the answer to someone's prayer. The practices that have been shared prepare us and the church to make choices and life decisions that are in accord with God's intentions for us.

Another tool or practice to help us better Care for others in and outside the Church:

### **Setting the Seat for Christ**

Setting the seat for Christ involves literally setting a seat for Christ in the midst of what the church is doing – worshipping, meeting, gatherings, etc. It is a visible tangible reminder that Christ is the host of our gathering – whatever that gathering happens to be. This practice helps us do away with the quick lip service prayer. Setting the seat, yes an actual seat, for Christ with a Bible, or chalice, or loaf of bread, candle, ... gives tangible recognition to the fact that if we are first centered in Christ, Christ will enable the work that needs to be done. When we are not centered in Christ then who we are becomes unclear and what we do and say comes out of a self-centeredness rather than a God-centeredness. To invite Christ to sit with us and be the host and leader of the gathering is to ask the Spirit of God to transform our thoughts, our wills, our actions, our agendas, our hearts, minds, and spirits to the thought, will, action, agenda, heart, mind, and spirit of God.

We need to be challenged in the Church not to let even one issue with which our ministry area works to be discussed without spending some quality time setting the seat for Christ and inviting Christ to give leadership to all that was thought, said, and done. Something really amazing happens when people really and truly believe and cannot help but to see some tangible symbol at the table or in their circle of gathering that reminds them that Christ is no where else but sitting right with them. What people say and how they say it changes – we care better for others.

### **Another Tool – Remembering the Heart Principles in all we say and think and do**

1. Heart Understand – Realize from your heart that although people may think differently in the church, they would not be there if they did not care.
2. Even if you disagree. Don't make me wrong
3. Acknowledge my loving intentions
4. Remember the God in me. (See the Christ in your brother and sister)
5. Tell me the truth in Love. (God or Christ-centeredness enables this to happen.)

**Thank people for coming and Close in Prayer.**