

Developing the Caring Ministry within your small group

Good evening everybody.

I have been asked to talk to you about Pastoral Care in Small Groups

To begin with, we need to ask the question : “What is Pastoral Care?”

No detailed definition is really necessary – put simply, Pastoral Care is really just the continuation of the ministry and mission of Christ in today’s world. It is not really a special job for special people – it really is something that we all can do. God calls every single one of us to care.

We have all been given gifts by God, and, with the help of his Holy Spirit, we are more than equipped to provide care for those in need.

The Caring team of this Church has many functions but tonight I intend only to focus on small groups and how small groups can be intimately involved in caring for the members of their small group.

St Martins is a large parish with some 400 families. The St Martins Caring Team simply cannot attend to every caring need of every parishioner in the parish. Fortunately we have the support of many home groups who care for their members.

It is therefore crucially important that, to the extent possible, each small group plays its own part in caring for its members.

And as always, Small Group Leaders are not left in the dark as to how they should care for others. Indeed, the New Testament overflows with instructions and examples of how we are to love one another and care for each other.

We all know the new commandment that Christ gave to his followers just before his death. He said: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Most significantly he went on to say: “By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Paul often found himself having to write to groups of new Christians and provided them with a number of helpful hints. These helpful hints can be put to good use within your small groups and can be summarised as follows:

1. Each member of the home group needs to accept every other member without judgement and criticism;
2. Members must encourage and exhort one another. This includes comforting and getting alongside each member so that they feel that there is someone who understands and cares for them. It also includes encouraging others to get on and do what God is calling them to do;
3. Be patient with one another and be quick to forgive each other;
4. We must serve one another in love, taking on another's burdens.
5. Caring requires us to be humble – we need to value others above ourselves . We need to have servant hearts. As someone once said: "Humility is the soil in which the harvest of love can grow".
6. We need to always greet each other with warm affection.

On reflection, perhaps caring, or the continuing of Christ's mission and ministry, is, or should be, the driving force behind small groups.

What can we do in our home groups to care for one another?

Firstly we can.....LISTEN:

Galatians 6:2 reads: "Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ."

Every article written on caring makes one thing very clear – when there is a need being expressed, we must listen with empathy and without judging.

One of the greatest gifts you can give people is an attentive ear. When you look someone straight in the eye and listen to him or her, it says : "I value you. I value what you have to say."

Make eye contact, be attentive and gently encouraging. What is our response to what we have heard? It is important to realise that we will not always be able to come up with a helpful solution – nor are we obliged to - but we can use our most powerful weapon - Prayer. As a group we can pray for the person

in need, gather round and all pray collectively and wait expectantly for God to answer. Press in with prayer support and maybe a few encouraging scriptures.

Secondly we can work atDEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS

Providing care for one another also deepens relationships with one another. Relationships are built on a foundation of shared experiences. The more intense those experiences the tighter the bonds of relationships grow. There is something about sharing the highest of highs and the lowest of lows of life that naturally builds intimacy.

How Caring are you?

Tomorrow you may rub shoulders with someone who is coming apart at the seams – but unless you are aware and sensitive, you may never notice their pain. All around us people are crying out to be loved, but many of us are pursuing our own desires with little or no understanding of the incredible purpose that God has for us – to lift the fallen, encourage the faint hearted and give hope to the hopeless.

Here are a few ideas that your group can implement in developing the care ministry in your groups, keeping in mind God's highest purposes in this universe are people and we must bring our purpose in line with His. His highest purpose is to make us a channel of His tender, loving care to others. To be a channel of His love.

1. **Be Pro Active**– select a key person, who can assist the leader and the group, to track key dates, maybe birthdates; important anniversaries; hospital stays; loss of loved ones or significant dates in people's lives. This will help you take your good intentions and help you put them on paper, iPhone; blackberry; iPad; computer or whatever tracking system you choose to use. Use technology to share, store and remind you of important dates within your group.

Examples – Women's group and our evening group

2. **Plan** – develop a plan of how to help others. Decide on a healthy plan for your group to respond. It may be dropping a meal for the family after a birth; a meal roster for someone in a particular need; an email blast on a

birthday; a card from the group specific to a situation; maybe a bunch of flowers. Celebrate life experiences too – it shouldn't cost too much, a token to recognise a significant thing in another person's life.

3. **Be Proportional** – try to share with equality. Try not to do heaps for one and very little for another. There are seasons for caring and obviously this can be crisis dependent. We should try and ensure that all care given is balanced for all group members according to their need.

4. **Pray** – make sure you take time to pray both when your group is together and when it is apart. Pray for the triumphs and the struggles that are going on in your group's lives. Your Care person could keep a journal of prayer needs specific to your group. Lay on Hands. Prayer is powerful and not something the world offers, but we can offer prayer support in our small group.

5. **Pass it on** – if a member of your group is hospitalised, please ensure that you pass this news onto the church office. This is important on a number of levels. If the church knows, we can support you in caring for the individual. We can support by praying and putting the particular need on the prayer chain, offering love and support to the extended family so that the person in hospital knows that both their home group cares and the church cares. We are a family and there is nothing more devastating to hear that a loved one has been in hospital and no one knew. Obviously if a member does not want the church to know that is a different thing and we must respect them. Also, if a member is struggling with loss, grief or any other deep emotional hurt, please let us know so that we can offer love, support and help them through their difficult time.

6. **Be Practical**– as a leader there are a number of small practical things that you can do for your group. If there is something significant going on in their lives, perhaps one could – send a text; a scripture; a phone call;

an email; a well placed note; bake a batch of biscuits; prepare a meal and drop it or pick up a meal from our St Martins caring freezer; pick a few flowers and drop them; meet for a coffee; share a meal - anyone of these can make the world of difference.

Caring for one another provides a powerful witness to Christ's love to a watching world. We offer as the body of Christ through our caring for one another a demonstration of the kind of love that outsiders find attractive – and our caring provides a tremendous Christian witness to others. This witness is very powerful.

Remember that through thoughtful caring within in your group, you can transform your group from a group that simply “knows” each other to a group where everyone truly loves each other with the love of the Lord.

We have a caring team to support home groups care for their groups. We do ask that your home groups care for one another as the first port of call. This way the caring team will be more freed up to serve those not in a home group. However, having said that, we care and we will support you in Caring for you homegroup. Please just let us know. We would love to be of support and encouragement.

Practical list available for leaders.