



SHAPE

sustaining health & pastoral excellence

Vol. 1, Issue 1

SHAPE E-newsletter First Edition

Welcome to the first edition of our new SHAPE e-newsletter. As a current or former cluster participant you are receiving this newsletter as a means to keep us connected and informed of the happenings of SHAPE throughout North America and to provide fresh insights into the ongoing ministry of SHAPE. We are glad you are (or have been) on the SHAPE journey! We are planning six issues for this year, and we look forward to sharing stories of life change as well as articles that inform and inspire. Let us know what is happening in your life as a result of your journey with one another in life and ministry.

It is a new year. It reminds us of the opportunity for new beginnings. New beginnings, they come whenever we make a commitment to move

from where we are to embrace new goals, new endeavors, new challenges. We believe 2013 will be a year of tremendous opportunity for SHAPE to move in significant ways into new beginnings: new clusters, new initiatives, new resources, new opportunities to strengthen relationships and experience life transformation. I pray that 2013 will be rich with new beginnings for you, your family, and your congregation!



This edition of SHAPE is written by Paul Dreger. He has served the Church of God for thirty-six years as pastor, area administrator in Tennessee, and currently national director of SHAPE (Sustaining Health and Pastoral Excellence).

The Shape Journey: A Maturing Ministry

A Good Journey

Since its inception in late 2002 and early 2003, SHAPE—Sustaining Health And Pastoral Excellence—has had an impact on the lives of hundreds of pastors within the Church of God through the development of loving, caring communities of leaders growing together into the fullness of Christ. The SHAPE journey has taught us many lessons and resulted in changes that have strengthened this ministry. As we keep learning from our experiences, adjustments will continue to be

made for the optimal effectiveness of SHAPE. We are deeply indebted to the many persons who have committed and contributed to this ministry over the years. We are deeply dependent upon the continuing involvement of our regional directors and coordinators, as well as the emergence of new leadership to guide us into the future. While we have made strides to move beyond a programmatic mentality to truly become a force for lifestyle transformation, we have much yet to accomplish. *We must begin to embrace* (continued on p. 2)

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SHAPE on the Go

JANUARY

- 7–8 Tennessee Cohort 6 Leader Training
- 31 Northwest Leader Training

FEBRUARY

- 5–6 Michigan Leader Training
- 18–19 SHAPE Introduction in the Carolinas
- 28–March 1 Missouri SHAPE Rally/Training

Submissions

E-mail SHAPE-related articles and relevant photos to PDreger@chog.org to be considered for SHAPE newsletter. Submission implies consent for publication.

CHURCH of GOD MINISTRIES

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*covenantal relationships and trust in the broader context of **kingdom life** rather than merely **cluster life**.*

To maintain relevance and growth in transformational effectiveness, SHAPE must continue to emphasize these key areas of concern in the life of the pastor:

- ongoing growth in character, competence, and community;
- journeying together with other pastors in community in fulfilling the kingdom mission;
- living in safe, trusting relationships of support and accountability;
- avoiding the pitfalls of independence and isolation while seeking the benefits of interdependence and ministry connectivity;
- journeying with other pastors in the implementation of SHARE—taking the principles and practices of SHAPE to congregational leaders—and in the development of specific training initiatives for each congregation;
- encouraging and supporting one another in a way that enables each pastor to finish well in life and ministry.

Expanding Our Thinking

It is possible to utilize the ministry of SHAPE/SHARE to draw pastors and leaders into new practices of holiness and unity—the combination of theology and practice that, taken holistically, helps define our distinctiveness as a church group—that are critical to the transformation of the Church of God movement. *There must be intentional, courageous steps taken in order to call pastors to a new level of relationship,*

*accountability, and responsibility to the Lord and to the body of Christ we are called to lead into the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). **Movements are empowered and propelled forward, not by institutions, but by relationships and shared passions.*** Significant conversation and a renewed commitment to prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit must occur to establish a credible plan for the strengthening of leadership within the Church of God.

Program or Lifestyle?

One of the most significant misconceptions regarding SHAPE that we are addressing is the idea of a “three year and out” program. SHAPE was never intended to be a three-year program. It was believed that three years was sufficient time to grasp the value of life and ministry in community that would continue beyond those three years. However, language and practice—a SHAPE “graduation” after three years, for instance—perpetuated the idea of a three-year program. Efforts are now being made to change language to help reduce the impact of that concept and move us more effectively into a “lifestyle transformation” paradigm. It may be good to think of the first three years of the SHAPE journey as an initiation into a SHAPE lifestyle of life and ministry in community.

As we move beyond the perception of some of SHAPE as a three-year experience, we must not lose the power of the four key elements of the SHAPE experience: the cluster, the cluster leader, the curriculum, and the LAMP. Cluster meetings will continue to be the focal point of the SHAPE/SHARE journey. The cluster meetings should continue monthly. While greatly discouraged, some flexibility is allowed after the initial three years of the experience for groups to

adjust their meeting schedule as benefits ongoing ministry. However, care should be given to the reality that meeting too infrequently can weaken the connectivity and trusting relationships that have been built. If we have made it three years into the experience of monthly meetings, we should be able to carry that on with an increasing effectiveness in ministry and strengthened ministry community. If we are too busy to meet together monthly for this journey in corporate ministry, we may be too busy doing the wrong things, not developing a ministry team as we ought, or just too lazy. Obviously there may be extenuating personal or health circumstances and unresolved issues within the cluster that may preempt any of those reasons. Such issues should be dealt with redemptively within the cluster or with the help of the regional pastor.

The Big Picture—the “Bigger” Picture

We have yet to emphasize how the commitment to trust and confidentiality can transfer from the cluster to the broader SHAPE community and to the Church of God. If we experience a caring, trusting relationship within the cluster, what can we do to expand that kind of trustworthiness and care beyond the cluster to other pastors involved in the SHAPE journey? We must also consider how covenantal relationships can help lead to transformation throughout the Church of God. One of the most effective ways to accomplish that is to model such behavior in all of our relationships. While trust-building, confidentiality, helping build one another up in Christ, and journeying together into the fullness of Christ are multifaceted relational experiences, we are each individually

responsible for what we bring to our relationships. Modeling trusting behavior can greatly enhance our corporate ability to move into a higher, more God-honoring realm of relationships.

Regional Focus

The key to long-term impact rests in the regional director/coordinator's commitment to establishing leader connectivity and growth as a major component of strategy for state/regional ministry. While numerous initiatives regarding congregational health and growth are being embraced in parts of North America, SHAPE/SHARE continues as a viable option for long-term development due to its inclusion of spiritual growth and development

and relational connectivity as part of its vision and also because of its relatively low financial burden on already stretched budgets. The more regional leadership can move toward a relational paradigm in all structuring and programming, the more effectively we can build a strong foundation for the implementation of effective ministry tools for optimum kingdom service.

Annual regional rallies could enhance the ability to widen the impact of the SHAPE experience to the broader SHAPE community (beyond one's cluster) and contribute to our ability to transition from one cluster/region/state to another and maintain a SHAPE relationship. The more we can extend the SHAPE experience to settings beyond the cluster, the more we can influence

the church to see SHAPE as more than a program and instill "ministry in community" as the way we do ministry in the Church of God.

A Road Well-Traveled

We have travelled far; we have travelled well. But in many ways the journey is still young and there is much to experience and learn. This journey is much larger than the ministry of SHAPE. As we journey onward, let us think more and more from a kingdom perspective rather than from a SHAPE perspective. If SHAPE is truly a gift from God, then I am certain God's vision of the future of this ministry is much larger than anything we have asked or imagined!

Created to Be

As we think about what it means to be the church, our minds usually race first to buildings, programs, or organizational structures. As pastors we may think of sermons to prepare, budgets to develop, visits to make, lessons to write, agendas to follow, expectations to live up to. It is possible that our kingdom service is little more than servitude to the expedient rather than obedience to the Spirit of God. Unquestionably we are called to action for the sake of the kingdom (Matthew 7:21 and Ephesians 2:10 immediately come to mind). Yet our first calling is not to *doing* something for the Lord but *being* in intimate relationship with the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ. When we begin to think relationally about the kingdom, we think first of who we are, not what we do. And there we come face-to-face with the power of the kingdom. We were created by God and for God:

- *For by him all things were created...all things were created by him and for him* (Col 1:16 NIV1984).
- *...created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph 4:24 NIV1984).
- *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them* (Gen 1:27 NIV1984).

We were created to be in intimate relationship with our Creator and Sustainer. Our value and worth is not determined by our position or power or performance. The One who created us loves us dearly and has provided all that we need to live in that divine intimacy. From the opening pages of Scripture we are confronted with the loving God who makes and gives and sustains, who is deeply involved in creation. Time after time we are reminded that it is God who makes

of kingdom people much more than they could ever make of themselves. (See Gen 2:7–8; Gen 12: 2, Gen 32:9; Gen 48:14; Deut 9:14; Isa 49:6; and Matt 4:19, where God says in a variety of settings, "I will make you...") Paul reminds us that those who are to lead the church do so not by their own choosing but by the creative gifting of God: *It was he who gave some to be. . .* (Eph 4:11). Our giftedness for life and ministry is not first about a role or position or activity but rather about an intimate relationship with the Giver and with those others whom the Lord has given to *be*.

So who are you and what gives your life meaning and purpose? Rather than listening to the world, listen to the Word of God. There we discover an identity and meaning and value and purpose to which nothing in the world can compare! Sometimes even those of us who are pastors forget that. Never underestimate the beauty and value of

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your life. But never forget that it is God who provides that beauty and value!

In Exodus 3, Moses is confronted by the life-giving, life-sustaining God who calls us to *be*. In verse 14, after exhausting his reasons for not taking up God's mission to the Hebrews, Moses asks for that clarifying, identifying declaration of God's being that would convince the Hebrews he had been sent by their God. God's reply was simple: *tell them I AM has sent me to you*. Could it be that there is something inherently profound and powerful in that response that is valid for us who have been created in the divine image? When we move toward the attitude and spirit that enables us to declare with confidence the "I am" of our own being—not encumbered by the weights of competition and comparison—we begin to build a strong foundation of a healthy relational life with God, self, and others. It is a foundation, not of power, but of love. It is the foundation that enables us to declare along with Paul, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Phil 4:12). The personal "I am" of

human experience enables us to declare with confidence:

I am...

- Created in God's image (Gen 1:27).
- Fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14).
- Loved by God (John 3:16).
- Capable of loving all that God loves (1 John 4:19).
- Gifted and empowered to give myself away to my world in the name of Jesus (Eph 4:11).

I am able to become all God desires me to be!

Such a spirit enables us to live in a freedom that God alone can provide:

Freedom to be...

- With the Father.
- Submitted to Divine Lordship: "God alone."
- Unshackled from the chains of comparison and competition.
- Filled with peace, joy, love, hope.
- A vessel of divine love.

...the person God created me to be.

As we think about the life of the local congregation, we must always remember that most often conflict arises, not as the result of broken methods, but as the result of broken relationships. What we bring to the table spiritually as leaders has far more to do with the success of the ministry of the church than the programs and methods we embrace. That is not to downplay the value and importance of effective and productive methodologies. But the spirit in which any method is embraced will ultimately determine its effectiveness. The foundation of true holiness and unity in the body of Christ is love, and that love becomes part of the local congregation through the lives of its people. We must never underestimate or neglect the power of love in the life of the church. Love is the factor that can make or break the methods we choose to embrace as we serve our world in the name of Jesus. To serve in the name of Jesus, we can do no less than build upon the foundation of love. Anything else will fall short of the work the Lord desires to do in us and through us (Eph 3:20).

SHAPE continues to expand!

December saw the emergence of Western Pennsylvania as our newest SHAPE region! We are grateful to Regional Pastor Rebecca New-Edson and Regional Coordinator Barbara Ferraro for their leadership in helping launch SHAPE. Thirty-one people met at Whitehall Camp in Emlenton, December 6–7, 2012, for Cohort 1 Orientation. Led by Rebecca New-Edson and Paul Dreger, the group was introduced to the core values of SHAPE and met for the first time in their clusters to experience their first steps in the SHAPE journey. Leaders for the five

clusters in Cohort 1 are Gary Bates, Phil Conklin, Keven Dickerman, Barbara Ferraro, Bill Hargenrader, Dean Olson, John Phillips, Sharon Price, Herb Shaffer, Bob Shallenberger, Dan Smith, and Jimmy Swogger.

The launch of Cohort 2 in Eastern Canada, originally scheduled for December 12–14, 2012, has been postponed until early 2013. Cluster leaders for Cohort 2 are Bob Barnhart and Stanley Desjardine. Regional Pastor Cecile Barnhart and Pastor Craig Arbon provide leadership for SHAPE in Eastern Canada.



Tennessee SHAPE Rally participants



Oklahoma SHAPE Cluster