Commissioned to Share

She was distraught as she walked down the airport hallway. I was sitting in a location where I normally don’t sit in airports. Twenty minutes later, after much discussion and prayer, she said it had been “one of those ‘God moments’ that I have read about but never thought would happen to me!” And it had been an encounter that, knowing all the circumstances, could have only been God-orchestrated.

Other experiences have been much more common. In the everyday events of life I have been able to witness about the presence and love and grace of Jesus to others. Unfortunately, there have also been those times when the words and actions of my life have been very incongruent with a witness to Jesus.

We are witnesses to something every waking moment of every day. Sometimes it is to our love of family, devotion to our favorite sports team, frustration with our job, or delight with our favorite Starbucks beverage. As Christ-followers filled with the Holy Spirit, we have been promised power to witness to Jesus (Acts 1:8). “As you are going, make disciples” (Matt 28:18–20). Wherever we go, whomever we are with, we have been empowered to witness to the good news of life through faith in Jesus Christ.

But do we? In our attitudes and actions at work, at home, in line at the local store, or on the road in heavy traffic at the end of the day, do we reflect the spirit and attitude of Christ (Phil 2:5)? It is too easy to be controlled by the world around us—events, people, values, perspectives—rather than to carry in us at all times the attitude of Christ. It is too easy to react out of the weakness of the flesh rather than to respond with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—the fruit of God’s Spirit at work in our lives (Gal 5:22–23).

Consider Acts 1:8. Christ-followers realize that every moment of life should—and can—be lived with (continued on page 2)
the intention of witnessing to the reality of Jesus Christ. In every situation and relationship of life, do I live in such a way that when my opportunity to witness to Jesus arises, people are not surprised by my confession of faith? I don’t mention the name of Jesus in every relationship I have, but I do seek to exhibit the spirit and attitude of Christ at all times. I have heard people involved in the helping professions remark that Christians are among the most difficult people to deal with. We can be demanding, demeaning, arrogant, and a multitude of other attitudes and actions, failing to realize how they affect our ability to provide our world with an accurate picture of the Savior.

The same is true in the life of the church. As those who are exhorted to grow together into the “fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13), our immaturity and self-centeredness can lead us to experience some of the most damaging witnesses to Jesus within the life of the local congregation. Remember, there is nothing that happens to us in life that gives us a right to be ungodly. Even when confrontation and correction are necessary, they are to be done in love and grace.

We have been commissioned to share the good news of Jesus to our world. That is a commissioning that extends throughout every moment of life. Jesus did not come to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17). We are to be ambassadors who joyously and faithfully carry that message.

So what are you sharing with your world?

Unless otherwise noted, SHAPE articles are written by Paul Dreger. He has served the Church of God for thirty-eight years as pastor, area administrator in Tennessee, and currently national director of SHAPE (Sustaining Health and Pastoral Excellence).

Here and There: SHAPE Happenings across North America

Cluster-leader training is taking place in Michigan and Tennessee in preparation for the launch of new cohorts in 2013. On February 4–5, Pastors Mike Stadelmayer, John Mellish, and Dennis Cole met at the Michigan Ministries office in Lansing with Paul and Regional Pastor Bill Jones to begin their training. Additional training will take place in the weeks to come with a tentative orientation retreat for Michigan’s cohort three in late spring.

Training took place in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on February 11–12 as the region plans for the launch of its sixth cohort later this year. Karen Bailey, Don Hackney, Bobby Morrison, and Danny and Linda Pinter will provide leadership for this new cohort. The regional pastor for Tennessee is Dwayne Pierce.

The Annual Carolina Ministries Pastors’ Retreat was held February 18–20 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Paul was invited by Regional Pastor Mike Claypool to introduce the ministry of SHAPE to the pastors in attendance. In the morning session on Tuesday, Paul presented “A Taste of SHAPE: A SHAPE Ministry Appetizer” to the thirty pastors and spouses gathered. Participants were provided with an opportunity to experience SHAPE through small group interaction around the themes of “Gratitude for Lives That Have Touched Us,” “Building a Community of Trust,” and “Dealing with the Tension between ‘Being’ and ‘Doing.’” In the evening session, the group discussed the nature of “Being the Body of Christ” through the presentation “The Body of Christ Revisited,” and the group was then given an introduction to the ministry of SHAPE. At the close of the session, the pastors in attendance gave overwhelming support for the region to pursue involvement in SHAPE. Pastor Mike and Paul are in conversation to develop an implementation plan for the Carolinas.

Please pray for these three regions as they continue the development of ministry to pastors.
In a recent blog I read this thought from Paul David Tripp: “From Belfast to Los Angeles, from Johannesburg to New York, from Minneapolis to Singapore, from Cleveland to Berlin, I’ve heard stories and felt their [pastors’] discouragement, bitterness, aloneness, fear, and longing. As I’ve told my story pastors have felt safe in telling me their stories. And it has hit me again and again that there are too many pastors with sad stories to tell, and I’ve wondered again and again to myself, What’s gone wrong with the pastoral culture?”

I too have heard those stories. I have stories of my own. It seems that none of us is alone in facing the challenges of pastoral life. But I read another quote in the same blog that is worth sharing. The blogger quoted Richard Baxter: “It is the common danger and calamity of the Church, to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers, before they are Christians…O that all our students in our universities would well consider this!” What caught my attention was that Richard Baxter wrote these words over 350 years ago, in 1656. Regardless of time, culture, external pressures, or internal frailties, the pastoral life offers formidable challenge as well as tremendous opportunity for kingdom service.

Most, if not all, of us live in the reality of the pastoral culture to which Tripp refers. If we deny the experiences of fear, hurt, and pain in ministry or the feelings of inferiority, insecurity, low self-esteem, and failure that often accompany the servant of God, we are in an extremely small minority of servant leaders or are in denial of the reality of our life’s journey. Either way, we are faced with an unhealthiness that can rob us of the joy and peace of heart that God desires us to experience.

SHAPE is providing many pastors with a journey of hope. We may feel incapable of bringing about transformation in the world around us sometimes, but many are finding that they need not face life’s hurt and pain and challenges alone. We are the body of Christ together, and together we are finding help and healing and hope in ways we have not found in journeying alone. And who knows, in practicing being the body of Christ together, perhaps the Holy Spirit can bring about a transformation that can fix whatever has gone wrong with the pastoral culture. I, for one, still believe in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. What about you?
Why You Should Be in SHAPE

by Rev. David I. Shrout

One of the great blessings the Lord has given me was to call me to minister in Oregon. I love this state. It is full of mountains; it has gorgeous coastal beaches, powerful rivers, and even deserts. It is a land populated by wonderful people who still have that pioneer spirit. More than 150 years ago, Oregon was at the end of the Oregon Trail, the greatest migration of people since the exodus in the Bible.

When we moved here in 1987, my wife and I had two young children. Laura was going into the third grade, and Ryan was going into the first grade. Our move to minister here was a family decision. We all agreed, packed the van, and started our own modern-day exodus. Once here, I wanted to give my family a bigger picture of the state than just the city where we had moved. For the next four to six Saturdays, I packed my family in the car and we drove all over Oregon. We went to the coast, up to the mountains, into the big cities, and even went looking for a ghost town. I felt that if they could understand where they had moved to, they would adjust more quickly and be stronger.

In many ways, SHAPE has been, for me, that exodus of my heart. In our SHAPE ministry here in Oregon, I have gone through all the surveys, read all the books, studied small group dynamics, led a SHAPE group, listened to counselors, attended a seminar in Portland to study coaching, and have written my LAMP (Life and Ministry Plan), keeping it current and alive in my life.

I have watched pastor after pastor come away from our orientation retreat saying that they now have a deeper insight into his or her own heart and mind. For the first time, these pastors have begun to understand why they do the things they do and why they feel the way they feel when something happens to them. Now they can look at their congregation and understand them more clearly. They know now where they live, just like my children did.

When you enter into the SHAPE experience, you will take a series of personality surveys and a spiritual gifts inventory, and you will bond with a group of peer pastors. You will read books in common and share the insight you receive. You will remember the leaders that have spoken into your life. You will learn how to relate to others. You will write your personal mission statement, and you will learn the skills to help your church develop its own mission statement. You will pray together and hold each other through tough times. Pastors, we were never meant to serve our church alone, but in community. Even before time began, God was in community with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

You will write a LAMP. This is a Life and Ministry Plan. If you keep this document alive by referring to it weekly, giving it careful prayer and thought, laying it before your SHAPE group and your spouse and asking them to speak into it, then this document will be a very powerful tool in your life. It will guide you into a deeper walk with God. It will stretch you to read books and study things you never thought you would. It has changed my life and ministry like nothing else could.

You need to be in a SHAPE group for yourself, for your spouse, and for your ministry.