



Living as the Community of Faith

Autonomy. Independence. Division. Complacency. Apathy. Indifference. Unfortunately, these are words with which we are all too familiar in the life of local congregations, which is strange, considering we are called to be a people after God's own heart, a people firmly devoted to the Lord and living as examples of the power and presence of God in our world. Remember, we are the people of whom Scripture says,

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. —John 13:35 NIV1984

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. —John 15:12–13 NIV1984

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. —Ephesians 4:1–3 NIV1984

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ... Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. —Philippians 1:27; 2:5 NIV1984

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. —1 John 4:7–12 NIV1984

Very practically, every follower of Jesus Christ should daily ask themselves this question: "Am I lifting up Jesus in my daily conduct—internally and externally—so that the Lord and my world know that I am a faithful, devoted disciple of Christ?" Have you ever thought about your witness to the Lord? In looking at your life on a daily basis, how does God know that you truly love him? And how does your world—both those in the body of Christ and those who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior—know that you are a faithful, devoted disciple of Jesus? Remember, *there is nothing that happens to us in life that gives us a right to be ungodly*. Living as a community of faith begins with our personal response to the Lord—our commitment to the faithful pursuit of holiness and unity

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SHAPE on the Go

September

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| 4–6 | Tennessee Assembly Meeting |
| 8–11 | SHAPE Carolina Training Orientation |
| 22–25 | SHAPE Western Pennsylvania Training |
| 26 | Quarterly SHAPE Regional Directors & Coordinators Meeting <i>Conference Call</i> |
| 29–Oct. 2 | SHAPE Carolina Training |

October

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| 7 | Indiana Ministries Annual Meeting |
| 15–16 | 24 Conference—Anderson, Indiana |
| 22–26 | Intimate Life Ministries Conference—Austin, Texas |
| 24–25 | SHAPE Louisiana Leader 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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in every area of life. And when we come together and live that life corporately we find that Jesus draws people into a fellowship that will faithfully lead new believers, and each other, into the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).

It is within the context of community that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, experience the fullness of Christ (Eph 4: 11–13). In community we know and are known. Scripture affirms numerous times that we need each other in order to know ourselves fully or to know God as fully as we can.

Yes, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is this: We need each other.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. —John 17: 22–23 NIV1984

Now you [all] are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it. —1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV1984

...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. —Ephesians 4:13, 15–16 NIV1984

The Church of God reformation movement has throughout its history

proclaimed the doctrines of holiness and unity as central to its life. While these doctrines have been articulated from the pulpit and in writings over the years, the actual practice of both has been sorely lacking in many respects. We have embraced our autonomy and our independence at the expense of a genuine New Testament practice of both holiness and unity, which are built upon the holy love that the triune God has entrusted to us. Holiness and unity are relational experiences lived out and practiced in community—as the children of God to the community of faith and as witnesses to an unbelieving world of the power of the gospel to transform life. And when we neglect appropriate biblical truths regarding the daily conduct of our lives, we fail to produce the corporate life of the church that God desires for us as his people.

We need each other.

James Bryan Smith, in his book *The Good and Beautiful Community*, writes:

I need to be reminded that as a follower of Jesus I am peculiar, in the best sense of that word. Peculiar, that is, to the world around me that does not live by the teachings of Jesus. My life is rooted in the eternal strong kingdom of God; the roots of my life are in the future, safe and secure, which gives me strength to live unselfishly, to strive for unity in the midst of diversity, to forgive even when it is not easy, to set my standards high, to live generously, to long to be worshipping in the house of the Lord and to be a witness of new



Tennessee Orientation Retreat 2013

life to a dying world. I need to be reminded and I need a community around me to help me remember who and whose I am, and what that means for my daily life. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 19)

Personal spiritual formation and growth in community are critical to the health and ministry of the local congregation and must not be sacrificed for the sake of the next program that comes along. *Being* is the foundation of kingdom *doing*. *Healthy relationships* are the foundation of *healthy kingdom practices*. *Being the body of Christ fulfilling the mission of Christ in the world* is why the local congregation exists. When that truth becomes the rationale for our life congregationally, we will be on the road to a kingdom transformation that can potentially transform our communities in honor to the Lord.



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).

Did You Hear the One About...

I have spent my life in ministry listening to—and telling—stories. If you have spent any time at all circulating in ministry circles you, too, have been subjected to the onslaught of stories inherent in pastoral life. Some are mundane, some ridiculous, and some reach to the depths of our hearts. We look for sermon illustrations, ways to enliven our sermons or drive home a point. We pass on a good joke. We draw from the life experiences of others. We reflect upon world events and their implications for life. We delight in discovering the drama or emotion hidden within the depths of “the rest of the story” (remember the late Paul Harvey?) that often goes unnoticed. Sometimes, I fear, we make up stories—or at least greatly exaggerate the reality—just to make a point or in an attempt to impress.

Life elicits stories. Some are recorded for posterity’s sake. Others are forgotten and lost.

Life is a story: My life, your life, life. Two thoughts:

Let your life tell the story—the story of the One who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14: 6). I recently heard the statement, “Live your life in such a way that when people find out you are a Christian, they will want to know Christ.” That is a tremendous challenge and worthy of

embracing. The story of Jesus is the story that has the power to change life, transform communities, alter history. Tell it with words. Tell it with actions. Tell it always in love. It is not first about us—our ideas, our thoughts, our activities. It is first and foremost about Jesus. Get that story first. Get it straight. If we get Jesus right, the rest will fall into place.

But also tell your story. The intersection of your life’s story with the story of Jesus is precious and worth telling. Amid the struggles and stresses, the victories and defeats, the highs and the lows, the successes and failures, there is a story of love and grace and devotion and commitment that needs to be told. Your life is precious. What God is doing in you and through you needs to be shared. You may not consider your life significant, important, or inspiring, and consequently don’t believe your story to be worth sharing. Yet if your life has intersected with the story of Jesus, what the Lord has done—and is doing in you—is precious and significant. It may be for your family, your congregation, your close friends, or perhaps complete strangers. Whatever the case may be, what God is doing in your life needs to be shared.

I am writing my autobiography for my family. Apart from my children and grandchildren, few will ever read

it. It contains stories of my ancestors, my life growing up, and my relationship to my wife Debbie. It will tell the stories of my children from a father’s loving perspective. It will tell of successes and failures. It will mention people and events that have populated my journey. But mostly I hope it will be a positive testimony of what a life committed to growing into the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13) can be. It is a story that I pray will be perpetuated in their lives. There is no better story to entrust to those who know us than the story of the loving intervention of Jesus Christ in our life. When his story becomes intertwined in my story, the story gains eternal significance. And that is a story worth telling!

Who knows your story? With whom does it need to be shared? Who does God want to bless through your life? You may not consider your life to be successful or exciting. Yet if God is at work in you, and if you will face yourself honestly, there is a story taking place that God will use in another’s life.

The world doesn’t need more spin or more personal opinion. The world needs Jesus. It needs to experience the living Christ active and working in peoples’ lives. So, tell his story; tell your story. Tell it with honesty. Tell it with gratitude. Tell it with love. If Jesus is in there, God will bless!

Community: Now More Than Ever

By Carl Addison

I was recently at a dinner celebrating a friend’s birthday. Since most of the people in attendance knew one another, there was laughter, hugging, talking, and reconnecting. The atmosphere was joyful, and it was clear that everyone present was glad to be together.

As the guests made their way to their seats so they could order,

a younger, newly married couple caught my eye. They both seemed to be disengaged from the others, engrossed in the texting they were doing on their smartphones. After a while, my curiosity got the best of me. Since I knew them well, I asked them who they were texting. They seemed so caught up in it, surely

they were conversations that couldn’t wait.

Imagine my surprise when they sheepishly admitted that they were texting each other! At first, I was taken aback, but soon realized that in this day of media and technology, it was not at all unusual.

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Along with the many changes that technology has brought to us, many of which are good, comes the possibility that we can do life today without face-to-face encounters, without human touch, and without a deep connection to others that goes beyond words. While I love technology and take advantage of many of the things it makes possible in my life, it can create the sense that we can do ministry alone, or at least without relationship that includes togetherness, conversation, accountability, and the sharing of life with other.

This is precisely why SHAPE has a vital place in the life of the church. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “In all

my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:4-5 NIV). The word Paul uses for partnership is the same one that is often translated “fellowship” and means something far more than having a potluck at church. Here Paul is referring to sharing life together, to pursuing mission together, to doing ministry together. That is where SHAPE brings great value to the church and to those called to ministry.

Paul recognized what we are discovering in the church today. One cannot do ministry in isolation and be effective. To do so can bring loneliness and discouragement, and it can be dangerous to the minister’s spiritual

health. One of the things at the heart of SHAPE is the possibility of partnership, the reality that there are those who walk with us in ministry, growing in both ministry skills and relationships that are rich with accountability and the sharing of life.

As one who pastored for years in isolation, and who now is powerfully affected by the values of SHAPE, I can say that I will never do ministry without partnership again. It’s my contention that we need each other for so many reasons. SHAPE can help with that!

Carl Addison serves as regional director for SHAPE in Indiana. Carl and his wife Valerie lead Earthen Vessels Ministry, a ministry devoted to pastors and their families.

Here and There: SHAPE Happenings across North America

- The busy days of camp meetings and vacations are slowing giving way to the routines of school and fall kick-off activities for local congregations—and SHAPE events.
- South Memorial Drive Church of God in New Castle, Indiana, the newest site of a SHARE pilot program, continues to meet monthly with Paul. The SHARE assessment tool revealed areas needing strengthening and the congregational leadership team is now taking steps to improve their relationships and build a more effective leadership team. Chris Gamello pastors the New Castle congregation.
- The sixth cohort launch of SHAPE Tennessee occurred August 22–24 at Camp Overton in middle Tennessee. Cluster leaders for this newest Tennessee cohort are Don Hackney (Fayetteville), Bobby Morrison (Horse Creek, Greeneville), and Danny and Linda Pinter (Scott Memorial, Chattanooga). Participants in this cohort are: E. J. Swatsell, Harold Jones, Kent Aiken, Jr. Burchell, Rick Ballard, Teri Henderson, Sandy Hobbs, Mary Braschler, Nathan Heady, and Kevin Cummins. Dwayne Pierce is the Tennessee SHAPE regional director.
- Training continued August 18–19 at the Northeast Ohio Retreat Center in Berlin Center, with Shannon New-Spangler, Brian Smith, and Jonathan Holloway preparing to lead the first SHAPE clusters in that district. The first cohort is scheduled to launch in January 2014.
- The first leader training in the Carolinas occurred at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, September 9–10 with Steve Allen, Velma Champlain, Bob Cook, Steve Greer, Steve Hartsell, Michael Hone, Priscilla Logan, Jon McDivitt, Standley Moore, Richard Rusnak, David Smith, and Derek Specht joining the ranks of SHAPE cluster leaders. As regional pastor Mike Claypool commented: “I think the timing is right for us!” Training will continue into the fall. A date has not been set for the cohort 1 launch.
- Western Pennsylvania Cohort Two leader training began September 23–25 at Whitehall Camp in Emmenton. Present were Chris and Sharon Goodwin, Amy Worline, John Milliron, and Greg Smith. Rebecca New-Edson serves as regional director of SHAPE in WPA. We are grateful for the service of Barbara Ferraro, who has served as SHAPE regional coordinator in WPA. She and her husband Harold plan to retire soon and move to Indiana to be closer to family. We pray God’s rich blessings upon the Ferraros during this time of transition.