



SHAPE 2024: Thoughts for the Journey

In the last issue of this newsletter we considered the future of SHAPE and the importance of catching a vision of life and ministry in community that extends beyond the SHAPE programmatic elements. The hope of this ministry has always been to move us to embrace a lifestyle of interdependent kingdom service that rejects isolation and autonomy for the sake of “Being the Body of Christ Fulfilling the Mission of Christ” in cooperating, coordinated, compassionate, compelling service. As we continue to move beyond program to lifestyle, consider these ideas for maintaining life and ministry in community:

- Don't abandon the SHAPE curriculum, but recognize and practice those elements that are worth repeating or provide open-ended activity. Revisit “Building an Altar of Remembrance,” “Which Christ Do I Need Most,” and “Writing Your Life and Ministry Statement,” for example. These experiences open doors for continuing to share life's stories and connecting with current opportunities and challenges that enhance the cluster journey.
- The Life And Ministry Plan (LAMP) is an ongoing source of sharing. Remember that the LAMP is “personal but not private” and is a dynamic document for lifelong learning, healing, and growth.

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- SHARE (Sustaining Health And Relational Excellence) will be made available in 2015. This companion ministry to SHAPE for pastor and congregational leaders will provide ongoing opportunities to bring greater health and mission focus to local congregations as clusters work together in developing training experiences for congregational leaders.
- Spend time in the Word. The ability of the Bible to lead us into deeper relationships and continuing growth and development is boundless.
- Be open to new resources that enhance life's journey.
- Life happens. Continue to share life's experiences; encourage one another in every way possible.
- Never abandon the core values of SHAPE. Remember who we are and how we most effectively fulfill our calling as kingdom servants in loving, caring community.

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SHAPE on the Go

October

- 6–8 North Central Retreat
- 13–15 Michigan Cohort 4 Orientation Retreat
- 22 W PA Leaders' Retreat

November

- 6–8 Jamaica Leaders' Training Retreat

Other events in planning stage. Please contact Paul at PDreger@chog.org for 2015 events.

Submissions

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



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I received another e-mail today that carried the message: “I wish we had this opportunity...years ago...” Now that we have found it, let’s see it for what it is: an opportunity to move from isolation and independence to connectivity and interdependence in the loving power of God’s Holy

Spirit. Look beyond the programmatic aspects of SHAPE and hear the voice of God calling us to be “the body of Christ fulfilling the mission of Christ in our world.”

Let the transformation begin!



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

The Relational “Bottom Line”

There were times in the early years of preaching that finding a title for a sermon was almost as difficult as writing the sermon itself. It had been said in preaching classes in seminary that a good title was important in providing insight into the content of the sermon, generating interest in the sermon, and “hooking” the audience before the sermon even began. I did not always do well at that task. Some titles were anything but uplifting: “Discouragement,” “Discouragement II,” “The Conflicts Within” and “The Burdens We Bear.” Others were simply dull: “Temptation,” “Receiving the Word,” or the classic, “Untitled.” But a title that has stuck in my mind was one of my earliest sermon titles (actually it was sermon #11!): “Getting Along with Others in Two Easy Steps.” It was catchy, informative, and generated interest. It was also misleading. Were one to follow the two steps identified in the sermon, relationships would undoubtedly improve. But easy? Hardly! In fact, a few years later I developed a relationship series that I titled “Getting Along with Others in Two Easy Steps—and Other Sermon Titles I Have Changed over the Years.” I hope I have grown in preaching ability in the years since then. I have certainly grown in my understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the challenges we

face as we seek to live together in harmony as world inhabitants.

The church is constantly in need of renewal relationally. The tension between the call of God to unity and holiness (John 17:20–23; Eph 4:13; and others) and our struggle with self-will and personal desire is undeniable. Nor is it something new. Ever since God asked Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” (Gen 4:9), we have struggled to accept the responsibility we have to God and to one another as God’s children. Did you catch that last statement? It is first the acceptance of our responsibility to God that creates tension in our relationships. You see, Cain’s problem was not really with his brother Abel. Cain’s greatest problem was that his heart was not right with God: his *heart* sacrifice was not complete. He was guided more by self-will than God’s will. But notice what happened. Because he

could not honestly face the need of his relationship with God, did he take his frustration out on God? No. He took it out on his brother! And that has more often than not been the nature of the struggle of interpersonal relationships ever since.

God grieves over our inability to get along with one another. When we selfishly manipulate and use one another to build up our own sense of importance and worth or meet our own need, we sadden the heart of the One who called us to consider one another as more important than self (Phil 2:3). When we point out the minor fault in another’s life and ignore a major problem in our own (Matt 7:1–5), we fail to practice God’s call to forgive without limit as persons of grace (Matt 18:21–22). When we criticize, belittle, and condemn another person, we disappoint our Creator who told us to love our neighbor as our self

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(Matt 19:19 and 22:39). When we are jealous or envious or covet another person's life or possessions or position, we condemn the plan of the One who made us in divine image and called us according to divine will and placed us in this world and in the church for divine pleasure. In short, when we intentionally hurt each other, we grieve the heart of God.

Getting along with others is more than just a good idea. It is God's will for us. The bottom line is love. If you struggle to love all that God loves (which is everything except sin), then first check your love for God. There is a good chance love of self and the things of this world are greater than your love for God. How do we lose self in divine love?

Surrender. Get over yourself.

Keep the temporal and the eternal in proper perspective. That is difficult for those who have professed to be Christians for any period of time. But I have lived long enough to know from my own journey and from dealing with conflicts among church people that professions of faith in God don't

necessarily make us faithful Christ-followers. It still amazes me that one of the most basic statements of Jesus—"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24)—is so misunderstood and neglected by professing Christians. Surrender to God does not diminish self-worth; it enhances it in ways nothing else in this world can. When we do apply that verse to life, all of life is then transformed in ways we previously could not begin to imagine.

Oh, yes. What were the "two easy steps" of that early sermon?

- *"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"* (Matt 7:12 NIV).
- *"When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say, "Give this man your seat."*

Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, "Friend, move up to a better place." Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:7–11 NIV).

Loving, humble service. Not a bad place to start after all! Perhaps complete surrender to the Spirit of God really can make this task of healthy relationships easier than we think.

Surrender. Get over yourself. That is the hard part. It is certainly countercultural, maybe counterintuitive. But from divine perspective, it makes complete sense. Being exalted by God is greater than anything the world has to offer.

So go ahead—surrender. Peace and joy beyond your deepest expectations await you on the other side.

Here and There: SHAPE Happenings Across North America

August and September saw a number of regions launching new cohorts:

- Eighteen pastors gathered in Illinois, August 21 to 23. Regional Pastor Eric Livingston is already looking toward the development of another cohort in the months to come.
- The 2014 Indiana cohort held their orientation retreat at the

Indiana Ministries office in Fishers, September 5–6. Leaders for this year's clusters are Kim Schuessler, Chris Gamello, and Brett Talley. Carl Addison coordinates SHAPE in Indiana.

- Louisiana launched their new cohort at a retreat held September 11–13, at Camp Pollock, north of Alexandria, Louisiana. Orientation was followed by

a rally on Saturday morning attended by pastors from four clusters, who shared testimonies, prayer, and discussions about congregational health and ministry effectiveness.

Please pray for these regions and the pastors who are beginning their journey in life and ministry together.

Being the Body of Christ

More than an institution, more than an organization, the church is the *body of Christ*. We are the life of Jesus Christ being lived out by the power of God's Holy Spirit in our world, however that world is defined. We are a people identified by our relationship to Jesus Christ, united in faith and in knowledge of the Son of God (Eph 4), and motivated by a common purpose of helping as many others as possible to experience the eternal joy of finding their life's identity and purpose fulfilled through a personal relationship of faith with Jesus.

As the body of Christ, the heart and soul of our life is the relationships we have with God and with one another. Most often in the life of the local congregation, it is not broken methodologies but broken relationships that cause the most distress. What we bring to the life of the local congregation spiritually and relationally as leaders has as much to do, and perhaps even

more, with the success of ministry than the programs and methods we embrace. In other words, our *being* is just as important, if not more so, as our *doing* in the life and ministry of the local congregation. The spirit in which any method is embraced will ultimately determine its effectiveness.

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—SHARE Manual, page 13



Reflections: 2013 National Steering Committee Meeting, Hermitage, Tennessee