



## MINISTERING TO WOMEN IN NEED

*Written by Glenda Holbrook – Executive pastor New Peninsula Baptist Victoria*

Ministering Women in Need - put simply is caring for others, being Jesus on earth. Jesus is our model for caring. He came, lived and ministered among us. He was actively involved in people's lives. If Jesus' love is in us, the people we care for are in a real way being cared for, by Jesus. Jesus' last conversation with His disciples before His death is recorded in John 13-17. He knows what He says will be remembered long after his departure, so Jesus speaks about what is most important to him.

### LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Is the theme that occurs time and time again! Jesus commands us His followers, to do it. (John 13:34). He tells us how to do it – “as I have loved you”. Love is to be our identity, our ‘mark’ as Christians. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”. (John 13:35)

But Jesus didn't just give the instructions and leave us to it! He knew what we would need to carry out this command, so He gave us His Holy Spirit as counselor, comforter and teacher. It is the Holy Spirit and our dependence on Him that enables us to develop the sensitivity to know and meet the needs of others.

### CARE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WHOLE CHURCH

Jesus commanded us to, “Love on another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). We need to promote a culture in our churches where everyone takes responsibility for caring for others.

### CARE NEEDS TO BE DELIBERATE

We often assume care is happening in our church when it isn't. Part of our deliberate strategy is establishing caring communities where women from our church and women from the community can come and receive love, acceptance and care.

### DEVELOPING CARING COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN

Because God is a **God of relationship**, he created us to be in relationship both with Him and with other people. Because **God is love**, he has created within each one of us a deep need to be loved and to love.

#### Types of Caring Communities

1. Small Groups/Home Groups
2. Ministry Teams
3. Accountability groups/one-on-one's

4. Interest groups
5. Discipleship Groups
6. Geographical Groups
7. Socially disadvantaged groups
8. One-on-one care – the exception and not the rule and should be temporary. The aim is to phase out your role as care giver and encourage the person to progressively rely on their own resources – e.g. family, friends and encourage and help them into a caring community

## **IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF CARING COMMUNITIES**

### **Jesus Ministered within the context of a 'team'.**

Very early in his public ministry, (Mark 1:16-20), Jesus called his first four disciples. He didn't try to 'go it' alone. He developed a team to work and fellowship with. We also see the early New Testament church met together in small communities where they shared their material possessions and passion for ministry with others. People who care for others often feel 'emptied out', so you need to refuel which comes from the support and encouragement offered by those in ministry with you.

### **The 'love' component**

As essential part of a healthy caring community is the love component. It is a measure of the relational strength of the group. If you are wondering how your group is doing on this front, ask yourself, "How much care is extended through this group outside our regular meeting time?" In a truly loving group members will contact each other outside the formal meeting time.

### **Plan for Care**

Care in any group does not happen by accident. While a certain amount might happen spontaneously, it is a good idea to have a deliberate strategy. It is an unrealistic expectation for one person to provide all the care for your group. Extending care also means embracing new women into your group. Ask yourself, "How will newcomers be cared for in our group?" This may mean developing a Care Strategy for Newcomers. Newcomers do need special care and a good group will think this through.

### **Have a designated leader**

The success of a caring ministry is to have a designated leader. This person should be chosen carefully by a pastor or other leader of the church who have wisdom and discernment about character, commitment, experience, gifting and skills. The health of your caring ministry will be dependent upon healthy leadership.

### **Commitment, vision and sharing**

These are all important in your ministry team. You must check you are all 'on the same page', that new ideas are welcomed and discussed, and that each member is committed to the ministry and ready to pull their weight as part of the team.

### **Continue spiritual growth of those on the caring ministry team**

The dynamics of a personal walk with the Lord and receiving personal support in that process enables a person to better empathize with others, and to be a better support to others as they rely on the Lord and not themselves. Devotions and prayer together as a team are vital. This can help keep the team focused, realistic in their plans and purposes and teach them the 'how-to's' of drawing near to God and growing in their relationship with Him.

### **Have fun together!**

Go out for a cuppa, or a meal. Tell jokes, share funny things that have happened in your life (but never about those you are caring for). You've heard the old saying, "A couple who prays together stays together". Well, I think that's true of a ministry team as well, but I'd add, 'a team that has fun together, stays together'. Doing enjoyable things together helps you get to know one another better, to trust each other, and to keep perspective (and how important is that when in caring ministry!)

### **Develop a referral list that your team can use when needed**

Doctors, nurses, psychologists, counselors, etc. Make sure whoever is on the list is competent and sensitive. Also provide each member of your team with a list of referral agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Sexual Abuse agencies, Drug and Suicide Agencies etc.

### **Read and share books**

Any books that help you understand people in need better or help you understand your caring role better. You can even choose some books for the whole team to read and discuss as part of their growth and development as caring Christian.

### **Training is vital for those involved in caring communities**

We see that Jesus was constantly training his team (the disciples), preparing them to carry out his ministry to others.

#### Suggested areas for training:

- **Prayer.** People need to be helped in how to pray with those they are caring for. We don't pray because it meets 'our need' to have prayed with someone. We pray when we are prompted by the Holy Spirit to pray. We pray when the conversation leads to that opportunity of if the person is anxious or afraid. We pray when people ask us to pray or when we ask them if they want us to pray and they say, 'yes'.
- **Using Scripture.** Even if right answers or right words from the Bible are given at the wrong time, they may not only be unhelpful but cause pain and damage. Sometimes quoting scriptures can be like giving answers or advice or telling people they shouldn't feel a certain way. This can cut off communication. Sharing scripture must only come after you understand the person you're caring for. It shouldn't come from your need to share scripture with someone.
- **Training seminars for your Team.** Bring in other people to talk about various issues that confront you in your ministry.

## LISTENING

Being a good listener is vital for being a good carer.

James 1:19 "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak".

Mark 4:23 "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear".

**Active listening** reflects God's attitude towards us, by conveying to the person:

- Non-judgmental acceptance
- Unconditional love

**We need to use every part of ourselves in order to be a good listener...**

- **Attending** (warmth) This is the non-verbal part of communication where we use our manner and body language and this is the major part of all communication
- **Respect.** This means respecting those you are caring for and their views even if you don't agree with them. It is treating them as an equal, not speaking down to them, and not giving cheap quick advice.
- **Empathy.** This is accurately perceiving the feelings and content of what is being said and being able to rephrase it back to the person in your own words. It's trying to understand why they think and feel the way they do.

## Barriers to Active Listening

The following are some barriers to active listening:

- Haste and impatience
- Preoccupations (it may be preferable to select a more suitable time to listen)
- Identification, where there is a similar unresolved issue in the counselor.
- Jumping to conclusions
- Prejudice and bias
- Lack of concentration and mind wandering
- Difficulty in verbalizing thoughts and feelings
- Feelings of being overwhelmed with the problem

## Advice giving

The giving of advice is something to be strongly avoided. Giving advice should be avoided during active listening and only done with great care at other times.

Most of us tend to be quick to give advice with ready stock answers before we have even heard the other person properly.

Jumping in with quick advice is disrespectful. It dehumanizes people and robs them of the opportunity to self-explore and come to their own conclusions. It can also be quite dangerous if the advice is wrong and the person follows it.

Such advice can take many forms such as in the form of clichés, questioning, insistence on the facts, directing, labeling, accusing, predicting, covering up by kind words or actions, inappropriate self-disclosure or switching to another topic



## LISTENING SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE

*Perhaps you feel you are already a good listener. If you think you are a good listener, there will still be plenty of room for further improvement.*

*Good listening is not passive but active or responsive. Responsive listening can present a threat to the insecure because it involves laying aside all prejudices and biases.*

*Good listening is powerful in its effects because defensiveness from others goes down in inverse proportion to the degree you listen.*

*You know you are a good listener when (check each one that is **generally true of you** – be honest)*

1. You listen openly to all people regardless of their status, gender or race.
2. You'd rather listen than talk
3. Others comment that you're easy to talk to because you encourage them to talk.
4. You gladly put away whatever you are doing while someone else is talking.
5. You find it easy to look the speaker straight in the eyes.
6. You find it easy to ignore distractions while you're listening to someone talk.
7. You get your whole body involved; you smile, nod your head, make gestures, and so forth.
8. You don't allow yourself to think faster than the person is talking, but concentrate totally.
9. You search for the meaning behind the words by restating what you have heard and by watching the other person's expression.
10. You gladly avoid interrupting, but graciously yield to being interrupted.
11. You keep listening normally if the other person is angry
12. You listen equally well to a compliment or a complaint regardless of the tone of voice.

13. You listen fully to a person' explanation before you form an opinion about them.
14. You avoid distracting mannerisms when a person is sharing their concerns
15. You find it easy to say, "Tell me more."
16. You readily empathize with the person's feelings and are sympathetic even if you don't agree.
17. You readily acknowledge that what seems trivial to you may seem vital to the other.
18. You try hard to understand why the person feels and thinks the way they do.
19. You avoid giving quick advice. You don't squelch the freedom of choice of others but willingly help them express what they feel and explore their options.
20. People co-operate readily with you because they feel you value them, respect their opinions (even if you disagree), and seek to understand why they think and feel the way they do.

How many did you tick? .....

We think you would agree there are not many who would score high on this test. Perhaps you could do the self-assessment again in six months.



## **SELF-CARE AND BOUNDARIES**

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### **Boundaries:**

Jesus knew how to say, “No”. He didn’t meet all the needs of everyone around him. He didn’t respond to every call that came (turn the mobile off and answering machine on!!) We need to be constantly asking God if this is what He wants us to do in the context of His priorities.

1. We must not get so involved with the problems of others that our own well being or family relationships suffer.
2. If at any time you feel that you are out of your depth; that is the time to refer. Beware of asking for information that seeks to satisfy your own curiosity, especially when the conversation borders on gossip or on details of their sexual behavior.
3. Under-emphasis or over-emphasis on the spiritual can be a danger. If we under-emphasize the spiritual the person we are helping is denied the resources of the scriptures or prayer or when there is an over-emphasis on religion, the person we are helping may be scared off. The spiritual must come into our care but it should be in balance with other issues.
4. You cannot, and should not, be available to anyone 24 hours a day
5. When helping someone we do not always have to meet with them face to face. It is good to use telephone calls, cards, letters, and other forms of communication.
6. We need to help the person develop a network of people who can help, care for and support them, so they are not reliant on us.
7. It is right and healthy to set boundaries with the person we are helping. The best way to do this is to sit down and talk this through with the person and together come up with agreed boundaries.

### **Examples of Healthy Boundaries**

- I care about you, but I cannot make your problems go away
- I need to balance my time socializing with time alone
- I am a person of worth; therefore I don’t deserve to be a target of your rage

- I enjoy being with you, but I don't have to go out of my way to make contact with you every day
- I want to hear and understand your opinions, but my thoughts and opinions are important too
- I am not responsible for your emotions
- I am responsible for my own emotions

### **Self-care:**

The needs of this fallen and broken world could swallow us up if we try and minister to others without God's strength and direction. "We are not the healers, we are not the reconcilers, we are not the givers of life. We are sinful, broken, vulnerable people who needs as much care as anyone we care for. The mystery of ministry is that we have been chosen to make our own limited and very conditional love the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God." *Henri Nouwen*

### **How to love and care for ourselves**

- Use of personal and professional support networks
- Supervision and / or peer support
- General self-care activities to maintain both physical and emotional health
- Understand that developing a spiritual relationship with God promotes greater peace, self-confidence, sense of purpose, forgiveness, contentment, love, hope and optimism
- Nourish our bodies: healthy eating, adequate sleep
- Nourish our spirits: cultivate joy, and pleasure, prayer and reflection
- Nourish our minds: on-going education, stress-reduction techniques, humor and light-heartedness
- Enjoy leisure free from guilt and anxiety

### **Coaching**

"Coaching is the process of helping people develop their God-given potential so that they grow individually and make a valuable contribution to the advancement of the Kingdom of God" *Bob Logan*

Coaching is a relationship based on love and encouragement where God uses someone to minister to, and equip, another.

Coaching is not the coach's agenda – it is all about the coachee and their agenda.

The relationship itself is the dynamic for change, although linking the person with other people and resources is also important. "Before I can walk in another's shoes. I must first remove my own" - *Unknown* "Until you walk a mile in another man's moccasins you can't imagine the smell" - *Robert Byrne*

### **National Church Life Survey:**

One of the factors associated with higher burnout score:  
When leaders feel they have no one to confide in (hence the importance of a coach)

To help reduce the risk of burnout, leaders can:

- Look after their physical health, eat well, and make time for regular exercise
- Develop and maintain strong and healthy relationships
- Nurture and enjoy family relationships with appropriate boundaries
- Nurture their faith and relationship with God

...all of which are areas covered in the Coaching relationship!

### **Main Aims of Coaching**

Relationship of equipping and empowering focusing on...

1. Improving ministry skills and performance
2. Personal and spiritual growth

**IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COACH/MENTOR, PRAY AND ASK GOD TO LEAD YOU TO SOMEONE!**