

Sierra Leadership Network: Month 11, Year 1

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the quarterly meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 11, Year 1

Date Completed

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Mentor Comments

Pastoral Counseling

[Estimated time: \_\_\_\_\_]

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Mentor Comments

Organize a Prayer event

[Estimated time: \_\_\_\_\_]

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Mentor Comments

Your Prayer Life

[Estimated time: \_\_\_\_\_]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mentor Signature

## **Pastoral Counseling/ Giving Spiritual Direction**

1. You are not a therapist! The first thing you will need to learn, and then try not to forget this because you may be tempted to dabble in something you are not trained or called to do. There will be many who want to come to you because they cannot afford, or don't want to pay for a therapist. Therapists and counselors have a fine vocation, but it is not yours. Psychology has its place, but the pastor is not called to be a psychologist. Your job is to help people move closer to God, and become like Christ, not to try and relieve suffering by helping them work through the roots and complexities of their emotional life. You may read this paragraph now, but the more you learn about psychology either from a college professor, from a TV shrink, or from a self-help book, you will be tempted, as we all are, to dabble somewhere you don't belong. Well meaning or penny pinching parishioners or visitors will implore you to fix their marriages, fix their children, fix their spouses, but people are not machines to be fixed, and you are not a mechanic. Your place is the care of the soul to help lead them to maturity.
2. People give a lot of advice, look at what is normally given and why. Most errors in pastoral counseling or better termed "spiritual direction" are made every Sunday AM and all through the week. If you pay attention, you will quickly learn what not to do. Pat answers, spiritual cliches, bumper-sticker-chosen Bible passages are dispensed like band-aids. Sometimes the recipients of these bandaids suffer from self-inflicted wounds, or simply, as a toddler, derive a sense of comfort and security knowing that their church has an ample supply of these pastoral treatments. Some of the wounded have been clearly devastated, and the attempt to address these wounds with bandaids is insulting. That this happens is no surprise to any sensitive observer, yet it is important to ask "why". Most advise is given sincerely, yet for most of us what we say comes from who we are and what we are trying to accomplish. We want and need our "quips" to work. We want to have answers. If we know we are in above our heads, we at least want to apply something that will take the edge off of OUR pain, in seeing their's. This is the next thing to remember about pastoral counseling, it is not about our pain, and our goal should not be to lessen our discomfort in seeing our brother or sister's pain.
3. Learn about boundaries. In my opinion, a good broad spectrum relational anti-biotic for relational infections is the Boundaries book by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Yes, these men are trained therapists, but the observations they make in the book are helpful for you as a pastor to keep from getting hopelessly entangled in what is not yours. If you are going to be of any help to any one, it is important to have some clarity about what is you, and what is not you. This should be basic reading for every pastor and learn to apply this wisdom in your relationships in the church.
4. Be quick to listen, slow to speak. This is biblical and sound advise. You will help far more people by simply listening to them and letting them know they are heard, and not alone in their pain. In most cases, you won't be able to do much of anything about their pain. Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn.

5. Your job is to help someone towards holiness, not necessarily to give them quick relief or quick satisfaction. The physician and the therapist work to alleviate suffering. Buddhists seek to banish it. Pastors need to grow accustomed to it. Christ promised we would suffer, modeled suffering, and noted that losing our lives is a necessary part of finding them. Hurting people will come to you in the hope that you will be able to relieve their suffering. Relieving suffering is indeed an important thing that you can do, and often you will try and succeed. However, your primary goal is not the relief of suffering, but the pursuit of godliness, and this pursuit often requires suffering. This isn't an invitation to be trite, or simplistic in addressing blame or declaring what is behind the curtain in the mind of God.
6. Don't say more than you really know. This is amazingly difficult. You want to rush in, you want to apply, you want to suggest, but be very careful about what you really know. Your knowledge of God's word and your experience in the Christian life will tell you something about God, will give you wisdom in the Christian life, but be slow to suggest in detail what exactly is happening in the life of this brother or sister. God has allowed this suffering, and chances are no one living right here right now knows why. See Luke 13:1-5, even Jesus resisted the crowd when they wanted to engage in this kind of speculation. To those who wanted to be the accountants of suffering Jesus exhorted that they pay more attention to the health of their own souls, rather than speculating on the destiny of others.
7. You are not an "expert" or a judge, you are a companion trying to be helpful. Spiritual direction is essentially sharing a journey. A path of suffering and mystery in which God through his Spirit uses Christian community to further us on the way. The only real "quality control" in this endeavor is the fact that you will be going through time together. On the way trash will be seen as trash, and accountability will be mutual. Pain will be shared, joy will be known, God's kingdom will be witnessed to.
8. Understanding the Crisis: One more word before the assignment. Understand crises not as chances for you to play spiritual fireman, but rather invitations in truth. We are all game players and it is often only in the time of crisis that individuals are ready to tell the truth, sometimes only now by force of circumstance. This is a chance for all parties involved to make real spiritual headway. What is most important at these times is your availability and honesty. Don't be too quick to take action, but stay in the area.

Books that I've found especially helpful. Talk to your mentor about their list.

1. A bunch of Larry Crabb books:
  - a. Connecting:
  - b. Safest Place on Earth
  - c. Shattered Dreams
2. Boundaries by Cloud and Townsend

3. A lot on pastoring by Eugene Peterson, but especially Working the Angles in this area.

Assignment:

1. Read the attached excerpts of Peterson's Working the Angles . If you can get a copy of the book, read the last three chapters or read the whole book.
2. Write a reflective paper on a time in your life where you acted as a spiritual director or a pastoral counselor. Describe what the situation was, what you did, and what came out of it. Share this with your mentor and discuss it.

### **Organize a Prayer Event**

Assignment:

1. Either organize and lead a prayer event and report on it, or report on a prayer even you have organized or led in the past.
2. What kind of event was it? A special prayer service at a normal service time? A special service? A called together gathering to pray for a special need like a tragedy (9/11), national day of prayer, illness of a friend or member of the church?
3. How did you structure the prayer time? Was it more impromptu or organized? Did many people pray or just a few?
4. How can you judge the effectiveness of this prayer event? What kind of response did you receive from the people?
5. What kind of priority does prayer have in your church? There has been an effort in many classes and churches to have prayer coordinators. Does your church have one? What do they do? Is it effective? How would you tell?

### **Your Prayer Life**

The more I know about prayer, the harder it is to talk about. We are exhorted to pray without ceasing. Centuries of Christians have struggled with prayer. In some ways we struggle even to arrive at an apt definition. Sure there is the formal times of talking to God with eyes closed, hands folded, on your knees perhaps, but all of us know our conversations with God happen in all different ways. The goal of this exercise is that you have a good discussion with your mentor on

prayer. You may write about it too if that is helpful for preparation with meeting with your mentor.

1. Look at great examples of prayer in the Bible. What is prayer?
2. How do you pray? What are ways that prayer comes easily? When is prayer difficult? What kinds of prayers happen naturally to you? What kinds of prayer do you struggle with? Is your prayer more a fruit of discipline or spontaneity?
3. Do you enjoy praying, why or why not? Be honest.
4. Was there a time in your life when prayer was especially important to you. When? Why? Why did it diminish?
5. Are there any new disciplines of prayer, or groups to pray with that you long for or thing you should form or join? How is your prayer time between you and your mentor?