

Sierra Leadership Network: Month 6, 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 6, Year 1

Date Completed

____/____/____
Mentor Comments

Doctrine of Man

[Estimated time: _____]

____/____/____
Mentor Comments

Pastoral Care:

[Estimated time: _____]

____/____/____
Mentor Comments

Forgiveness:

[Estimated time: _____]

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

Doctrine of Man:

Read, digest, and discuss with your mentor, cluster group, etc. the following:

Donald McKim: Introducing the Reformed Faith , (We will provide this book for all our SLN participants), Chapters 6, 7

Louis Berkhof: Manual of Christian Doctrine, p. 121-150 (You may be able to find this book at your church, at the library, or on Amazon.com)

The Belgic Confession Articles: 14, 15 (you can find these on the internet at www.crcna.org under “Beliefs”)

The Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s days 2, 3, 4

1. Write a paper, or discuss with your mentor what you believe the most prevalent understanding of the “doctrine of man” is in our culture? Support your argument with examples from popular culture, novels, movies, TV shows, etc. Contrast it with what you read in McKim and Berkhof. What examples can you give out of your own life experience, popular culture, etc. to illustrate a Reformed understanding of humanity

Pastoral Care:

What is Christian Pastoral Care?

Pastoral care is in some ways the most complex, and the most simple element of Christian ministry. The most prevalent misconception in pastoral ministry today is the confusion between psychotherapy and pastoral care. The temptation to do this is great. Modern psychology since its inception has held out the promise of a “scientific” and “proven” method for relieving humanity of its emotional, experiential and behavioral problems. While psychotherapy and counseling certainly have a legitimate place in God’s world, they in no way displace the need for Christian pastoral care. Many well-meaning church attenders will try to cast you in the role of “shrink on the cheap” and lure you into a therapeutic relationship with them. Avoid this trap. Unless you have been trained as a professional therapist or counselor don’t try to administer what you have not be trained to practice, learn instead what you DO have to offer.

The task of a modern psychology is to address human dysfunction in a way analogous to how a medical doctor addresses physiological dysfunction. If you have already read and studied your lesson on the doctrine of man (mankind or humanity), it might occur to you that the medical and psychological fields, for all that they accomplish are fighting a losing battle. Despite all we know and can afford to practice, people die and people continue to injure themselves and others, physically, emotionally and morally. Your task in pastoral care is not to “fix” human sinfulness, but rather to as much as possible bring the power of the Spirit of God through Christian community to bear on human sinfulness and suffering. In the Christian practice of pastoral care we, with fear and trembling, introduce the conscious presence of God into the realm of human

suffering and death.

Christian pastoral care grows out of the theological assertion that our most basic problem is our alienation and separation from God. This alienation has led (since the fall) to literally a world of human suffering which we will simply not solve or resolve before the second coming of our Lord. Christian pastoral care attempts to address this suffering by helping the sufferer recognize the spiritual and theological dimensions of their suffering. The Christian community may indeed address and attempt to engage the physical aspects of this suffering, helping the poor, trying to assist those who suffer from addiction of many kinds or advocate addressing sinful behaviors that are leading to suffering, yet theologically we are aware of the fact that we cannot and will not resolve everything. Jesus healed the sick and gave to the poor as a sign of God's mercy and His kingdom power, yet left unresolved a world of pain and suffering, especially His own.

What does Christian Pastoral Care Involve?

Community: The first task in addressing the suffering around you is the creation of Christian community. Ultimately Christ's presence in this sinful, suffering world is found predominantly through Christian community. He promises that where 2 or 3 are gathered, His presence is there. It is my belief that a careful reading of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament locates the Holy Spirit primarily and predominantly BETWEEN us in Christian community, not just INSIDE us as if the Holy Spirit could be some kind of personal possession. The Spirit of God brings healing, reconciliation, and the power to be holy, both as individuals and in community. If you are going to be involved in pastoral care on any level, make community building your first priority. For more on this check out Larry Crabb's excellent books Connecting and The Safest Place on Earth.

For community to be affective, it must go beyond the formal and perfunctory, and into the deep and the real. Community must be safe, a place where we can tell the truth about our sinful desires and habits without fear of alienation and retribution. Community must be stable, a group of people who will travel through time together. Community must be biblical. We desperately need a "straight line" in this world that loses focus and perspective. The Bible offers us focus and a guide, even with all of its difficulties and paradoxes. Community must be intimate and yet open. There will be times to limit community to a small group of trusted and long term brothers and sisters. At the same time community must always have an open and evangelistic focus, never satisfied with only meeting the needs of a few.

Prayer: Pastoral care is about prayer. Prayer for others, and prayer with others. As with community, God is most present with us when we are in prayer. There will be many times when you will have absolutely nothing "concrete" to offer anyone but a prayer and most will accept that willingly imagining "it can't hurt". We ought never to underestimate both prayer's ability to alleviate immediate suffering and its potential to address supernaturally what we could never hope to address directly. If Jesus himself saw it as key to his ministry of care, how should we diminish its perceived importance.

Listening: People need to talk. Talking is therapeutic and you will find many people just need an ear and a sympathetic smile. The Bible says "be quick to listen, and slow to speak" and this is

never more true than in Christian pastoral care. You will find you have some significant pastoral relationships where people may not care a thing for what you have to say, but greatly value the fact that you were willing to sit and listen, sometimes for hours.

Spiritual Direction: We instinctively imagine this to be key, but in my experience it is the most difficult and should be approached with greatest fear and trembling. Again, “be quick to listen, and slow to speak.” Before you wade in to say what you think about someone else’s life or suffering, remember that the value of your comments will be directly related to the quality of your community with them, the quality of your prayer relationship with them, and the amount of listening you have done. Unless this person really trusts you, and your relationship has grown significantly, most of the time you take telling them what you think is probably time wasted. Most of what we say we say responding to our own internal needs for significance, importance or prestige. If you are humble, if you have invested your life into the other person in significant Christian community, just maybe you will gain the privilege of God using something you say to help the other.

Further Reading: I have found the following authors to be most helpful for me in the area of Christian pastoral care. Larry Crabb, Eugene Peterson, Henri Nouwen.

Exercise:

1. Reflect on the ways that God has used you in the past to help someone who was suffering. If possible, write a brief description of the relationship (change names and circumstances if necessary), and describe how God uses you. How were community, prayer, listening, and spiritual direction involved? Discuss this with your mentor.
2. Ask your mentor for times and examples where community, prayer, listening and spiritual direction were significant in their exercise of Christian pastoral care.

Forgiveness:

1. Note the role of forgiveness in the teaching of Jesus
 - a. Matthew 6:12-15
 - b. Matthew 18:21-35
2. What does teach you about the value of forgiveness?
 - a. Who really has the greatest need for forgiveness, the one who wrongs or the one who is wronged?
 - b. Forgiveness seems to be a glaring exception and even challenge to our idea of “salvation by grace”. Why do you think Jesus elevates its importance so far?
3. Discuss with your mentor someone in your life you struggle to forgive.