

A Call for Enhancing the Shepherding Ministry

One thing that I regretted most during my 26 years of running the shepherding ministry in church was that I have failed to guide church members to move on the path to maturity, that is, to learn how to love one another as Christ has loved us. Though members might be preoccupied in many activities, they were merely 'stamping on the same spot'. Their activities did not enable them to love one another as Jesus has loved us. To exhibit Christ-like love is the benchmark for Christian maturity.

Reflecting on my past experiences, I realized that all the activities of my ministry had focused only on Bible studies, fellowship, missions, worship and business meetings. Church members were not facilitated to interact with one another in the manner that the apostle Paul had urged for more than 40 times that we must love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, admonish one another In other words, Christians ought to get involved in an interactive process to build up the capacity of loving one another.

In the light of the phenomena of the early church, a church is supposed to be a dynamic body of Christ with members functioning actively in the temple as well as in their homes. "All the believers were together and ...gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (As. 2:44-47). Church members must therefore work together and interact with one another as members of the body of Christ. They must integrate what they have learnt from the church into their lives in their own homes. Home in fact is the primary base for their spiritual nurturity. Even Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.....that they

may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-16). In other words, believers must be nurtured in their homes as children of the light before they can shine with their good deeds before men.

The church today must realize that as the technology of media communication advances, less people are able to interact on a personal level. And "the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matt. 24:12-13). We must develop a system of support for church members to stand firm to the end and to build up the capacity of love for one another, in order to do what our Lord had commanded at least in their homes. Though I have advocated group ministry, it had focused only on evangelism, prayer, bible studies and preventing one another from falling out of the church community. I was disheartened to discover that some members could not even have harmonious spousal interactions and worse, a few of them even broke up their marriages.

I therefore believe that the role of a pastor is to prepare church members for the work of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. We must remember that Jesus spent 30 years of His life at home to be nurtured until He attained the stature of manhood, having the capacity to love humankind unconditionally. Therefore, loving one another as Christ has loved us is the goal of shepherding. As Paul had said that even if we surrender our bodies to the flames but have not love, we gain nothing. That is why Jesus said only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven. No one can do the will of God without having the capacity of love. Jesus clearly showed us that He would not acknowledge those who claimed that they prophesied or performed miracles in Jesus' name. In other words, any service without love or building up the capacity of love is of little value to the kingdom of God.

Forming Covenant Family Groups may be a practical strategy to ensure that every member of the church is engaged in the growth process of the church life. These groups are formed by believers who share a common need and conviction of building a Christ-centered marriage and family. It is so that members can share and interact with one another freely of their feelings, thoughts and experiences about God's word which may directly be related to their own families. Normally group members are covenanted to be supportive of one another's well-being in their families. Thus it creates an avenue for them to trust and love one another. The love of Christ and the grace of God will be enhanced through such group experiences. The Covenant Family Group is therefore a practical means of enhancing the loving relationship between spouses and family members.

It is best that each Covenant Family Group be formed after the couples have gone through a marriage enrichment camp where they are taught some fundamental beliefs in marriage and family life. With similar foundation of belief and issues related to family life, group members can interact from a common base. Moreover, trust and commitment to one another might have been established during their open-hearted sharing in the workshop sessions of the camp. Encouraging one another to obey the commands of the Lord in their own family context is the most practical and challenging aspect of the ministry in the group. Ultimately, families will be integrated as a base to inculcate the Christian character and capacity of love.

The family has always been regarded as a microcosm of the church. The church will be built on a strong and stable foundation when its members practice Christ-like love in their homes. That is why the apostle Paul instructed husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. Moreover, the prophet Malachi prophesied that before the end time, fathers' hearts would be turned to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, otherwise God would come

and strike the land with a curse. In other words, husbands must demonstrate the love of Christ through loving their children's mother. And children would emulate such love from the day they were born. This is the process of how God puts His laws in the minds and writes them on the hearts of the people of the new covenant He made with us. (.Heb.8:10).

After eight years of research and preparation of books and materials with the intention of helping pastors enhance their shepherding ministry, our center is launching a mission of training those interested pastors to modify their shepherding ministry of the church. Our programmes will be helpful to those pastors who are convinced that the church is the body of Christ and every member must be connected with one another through a loving interactive system for their spiritual development. Our ministry focuses on empowering every family through the Covenant Family Group as a basic interactive system for every member of the church, and each group is equipped by the pastor to function as an empowering station for the whole church. The church will then become an organismic system with the structure that Christ is the head of every member, the pastor is the head of the Covenant Group leaders, and Covenant Group leaders are heads of parents and husbands are the heads of wives and couples are the heads of children, and God is the head of Christ. The church will then become a dynamic loving interactive system and every member will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Should the church wish to be relevant to today's world and be presented as a radiant church to Christ, enhancing the shepherding ministry is an issue pastors should take seriously.

If you are a pastor who has the conviction of enhancing your shepherding ministry, please email or call our center. We will be glad to render our assistance in whatever way we can. .

By Rev.Dr. Francis Ngoi, Director of Oasis Family Life Enrichment Centre, Email.Oasisflef@gmail.com