

Caring Ministries and Covenant Discipleship

James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.
Grace United
Methodist Church



Although the primary task of the early Methodist Class Leaders was to collect money for the debt on the New Room in Bristol, they quickly discovered opportunities for Pastoral Care, or to use the modern term, Caring Ministries. Covenant Discipleship, the modern Class Meeting, is an excellent model for Caring Ministries. One of the four components of the General Rule of Discipleship is compassion, and that is precisely what Caring Ministries is all about.

How would it work? Caring Ministries could be the focus of one or more Covenant Discipleship Groups. Members of the group would create a Covenant which focuses on visiting members who are sick or grieving, meet weekly to talk about their experiences in visiting, and study together material that would enable them to improve their skills in Caring Ministries. The pastor could provide them with the names and the needs of persons to be visited, and on occasion, sit in with the group to give guidance and answer questions.

How is this different from how most Caring Ministries operate in the congregation today? While the primary focus for members of the group would be compassion, the other components of the New General Rule would not be left out. Justice, worship, and devotion would be integrated into the group process. Persons involved in Caring Ministries would be expressing their primary spiritual gifts through compassion, but not to the neglect of justice, worship, and devotion.

The weekly meeting would proceed as it generally does in Covenant Discipleship Groups. Leadership would be shared. The leader would open the meeting with a devotion and prayer. Beginning with the leader, each member of the group would share how he or she is doing with the Covenant, including their experiences in visiting the sick or the grieving. This would lead naturally into sharing insights. It would also be appropriate to select and use materials to help members of the group to improve their skills.

The benefit in all of this is that the Caring Ministries Team would be caring for one another at the same time that they are caring for others. The caregiver also needs to be cared for, and Covenant Discipleship offers a model for doing this. Caregivers also need to attend to the disciplines of worship and devotion, and who would better know the issues of justice than those who are doing their best to express compassion? If anyone needs to hear the comforting message of Jesus, it would be those who are dealing with illness and death. The New General Rule calls all of us, including those involved in Caring Ministries, to find ways of witnessing to Jesus Christ through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Covenant Discipleship is a good model for Caring Ministries because it puts Caring Ministries within the context of discipleship, where it belongs. ☛

Charles Wesley Tercentenary Pilgrimage

July 31-August 2007

Methodists and other Christians around the world will mark the 300th anniversary of Charles Wesley's birth in 2007. Duke Divinity School and the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church have partnered to offer a ten-day pilgrimage in England to celebrate this important event and immerse participants in the legacy of this important Methodist founder.



Dr. Paul W. Chilcote (Visiting Professor of the Practice of Evangelism at Duke Divinity School and President of The Charles Wesley Society), Dr. Steve Manskar (Director of Accountable Discipleship at GBOD), and Dr. Tim Macquiban (Principal of Sarum College in Salisbury, England) will provide leadership for this once in a lifetime opportunity.