

COMMUNITY CARE GROUP GUIDE

APRIL 8, 2018 - EASTERTIDE

Welcome to the time set aside for Communities and Community Care Groups! This is the seventh (yes, we are still keeping track...) of 9 Sunday opportunities to meet this winter and spring leading to the final date on May 6. You may want to start thinking about how to keep your Community connected throughout the summer months.

We are now into the season of Eastertide which stretches from Easter to Pentecost, a total of 50 days, seven weeks plus one day. The purpose of Eastertide is to celebrate and reflect on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the power and love of God displayed in that great act of power over sin and death, and on the power given to the church. The challenge of the Scriptures calls the church to be a visible witness to the invisible realities of the gospel. Unity, reconciliation, justice – these are spiritual realities in Christ. But the church is called to bear witness to these spiritual realities by making them visible realities in this fallen world that testify to the Kingdom of God on earth. Over Eastertide you are going to be hearing a lot about the **Belhar Confession**, written in South Africa in the 1980's in the face of Apartheid, a program of government-sponsored racial segregation that had its roots in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Synod 2017 adopted the Belhar Confession as a contemporary testimony for the Christian Reformed Church. Not only will we be including the themes of the Belhar Confession – unity, reconciliation and justice – in the upcoming worship services, but opportunity will be given to dive deeper into the Belhar on 5 consecutive Wednesday evenings, beginning April 18 in our ongoing “Dive Into Doctrine” series. www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/contemporary-testimony/confession-belhar

***There are **two options** for discussion presented in this material, preceded by some creative “connecting” questions for people to get comfortable with one another. Of course you are also welcome to go back to any material from previous weeks. The material is on the church website under the “Communities” tab. Suggestions (they are merely suggestions meant to provoke some thoughts or ideas of possibilities for community involvement) for Communities/Community Care Group projects or involvement can be found on previous CCG guides (January 28 and February 11).

Option 1 includes the results of and feedback for the Community Exercise, now sent to all 12 Communities. The pastoral elder and deacon of the Communities have material in their possession.

Option 2 includes questions about the current sermon series on the Gospel of Mark. Questions cover both the message from April 1 (Easter) and from today, April 8.

Leaders are asked to go through these materials ahead of time and use them to prepare a discussion for the meeting times. Feel free to pick from all the available options.

(Note: At the moment it is not possible to have the latest sermons online)

Beginning Your Time Together

Spend some time with one or two of the “connecting exercises” (good for all ages). Here are some suggestions:

- Talk about your week. What did you do and what did you experience?
- What signs of spring have you seen already?

- What book have you read lately and why would you or would you not recommend it?
- What are the youth or children watching?
- Anyone see the new film about the life of the Apostle Paul?
- Review the Community list. Who is all in your Community? Have you made contact with someone you don't know?

Prayer: Whichever of the options you choose to discuss as a community, ask God to bless your conversation and grow you as a Community through it.

Option 1 – Since your Community leaders have received feedback on and questions about the Community exercise, you may wish to work through them (one section at a time). Please spend some time talking about the exercise and the questions it raised.

Prayer: As you think about your Community, take the opportunity to spend some time in prayer for your Community – the CCRC members and also your neighbours. Pray that the Lord would bind you together as a small “congregation” and provide leadership. Pray that the Lord would open doors of service in the broader community around you. Include people of all ages in your prayer time. Such prayer can be done early in your gathering or at the end of your time together. You will need to plan some time if a number of members of the group are going to be involved in prayer. Waiting until the very end of the meeting often cuts prayer time short because it encroaches upon eating time or departure time.

Option 2 - Reflections on the Gospel of Mark

Scripture Reading: Mark 16 – (April 1 sermon - led by Pastor Carel)

1. Now that we have completed our study of the Gospel of Mark, perhaps there are those who may wish to share some observations about the Gospel as a whole.
2. Now that we have once again come through the Good Friday-Easter weekend, share with the group what struck you about the worship services last weekend.
3. If you have a children's Bible and children, spend some time reading the resurrection story. Then sing or listen to an Easter song. Here are some links to wonderful songs:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBvU7arNhQs – Matt Maher's "Because He Lives";
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IExdrZGQVei – Matt Maher's "Christ is Risen";
www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Lmv_xR6_q8 – Don Francisco's "He's Alive"; and so many more.
4. If you have the time compare the four resurrection accounts: Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-20. What are some of the differences or similarities in the way in which the stories are told?
5. Why was it so hard for the disciples to believe that Jesus was actually alive again?
6. Did you notice in the story of the resurrection that women are more prominent than men? In fact, it is often noted that Mary Magdalene was the first preacher of the gospel as she went to tell the disciples about the risen Christ. What sorts of thoughts do these statements bring to your group?
7. We celebrated Easter on April 1 this year. Many believe that the resurrection is but an April fool's joke. For example, when the people in Athens heard about the resurrection from the dead some talked about the “strange ideas” that Paul was bringing to them (Acts 17:20).” How “strange” is the story of Easter? How do you explain the resurrection?

8. In the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe Jesus rose from the dead and we also confess, "I believe the resurrection of the body." What does that mean? How does that confession comfort you?

Scripture Reading: Acts 10 (April 8 sermon – Pastor John preaching)

1. Share: This morning we were introduced to the Belhar Confession. Have you ever heard about the Belhar Confession before this Sunday? If so, what do you know about it?
2. If you have children from grades 4, 5, or 6 in your group ask them what they talked about in their sermon discussion this week. What sorts of topics and questions were raised?
3. Acts 10 tells the story of Peter's vision. What was the point of the vision? What was God telling Peter about the church?
4. Acts 15 is the story of the first church assembly or "synod". What was the meeting about? How did it speak to unity?
5. This morning we celebrated the sacrament of Lord's Supper. What does the Lord's Supper have to do with unity in the church?
6. In the Belhar Confession we confess that "unity is both a gift and an obligation for the Church of Jesus Christ." Reflect on the meaning of the words "gift" and "obligation". In what way might unity be a gift? In what way is it an obligation?
7. Pastor John told a story of his friend in Nigeria who was teaching a class when everyone walked out at 3 PM. How do you react to the story? Think of some similar cultural traditions that we confuse with what the gospel demands of us. How do we know that how we live out the Christian faith is truly Christian as opposed to a certain family or ethnic tradition?
8. How accommodating or sensitive are we to other traditions or to people who are different from us?
9. Read, reflect on, and discuss the following words from Article 2 of the Belhar Confession: ". . . *that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is a sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20, 23).*" What phrases particularly stand out for you?
10. How would your congregation look different if it perfectly maintained "visible and active unity"? How would the CRC look different? How would the church of Christ universal look different?
11. What things most threaten the unity and witness of CCRC?
12. Are there conditions for membership or inclusion in CCRC, written or unwritten, spoken or unspoken, that hinder your unity with other Christians and your witness in the community?
13. It has been said that 11:00 a.m. Sunday morning is the most racially segregated hour of the week in the United States and perhaps also Canada. Do you agree? If so, what might be the cause? How does the Belhar speak to this North American reality?
14. Complete this statement: "I find it hardest to love Christians who . . ." Reflect on this and use your reflections as an opportunity for repentance and change.
15. What do you think about the fact that there are so many Christian denominations? Are denominations always an expression of disunity? How might there be both diversity and unity in the church?

Prayer: For your closing prayer time, it's always a good idea to go around the circle and let everyone who is willing share what is on their hearts. Be sure to include children as well. Let everyone who wants to pray have a chance to pray. If you want, you may close your time together by singing a song or reciting the Lord's Prayer together.