

WALKING ALONGSIDE

ADDRESSING POVERTY IN COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

Welcome!

You are part of a special group of people who, in the next several months, will help the Center for Family and Community Ministries shape and develop a series of studies for the church focused on community ministries that address poverty. Thank you for your interest in this work, which we believe has the potential to transform both individuals in our congregations and in our communities.

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Grant Authors

Dr. Diana Garland, Dean, School of Social Work, Baylor University
Dr. Gaynor Yancey, Professor of Church and Community, Associate Dean, School of Social Work
Dr. Jon Singletary, Director of CFCM, Editor of *FCM Journal*, Assistant Professor
Vicki M. Kabat, Director, School of Social Work Marketing and Communication

Editorial Contributors

Dr. Diana Garland, Dr. Gaynor Yancey, Dr. Jon Singletary, Vicki M. Kabat
Heather Deal and Courtney Drew, MSW/MDiv students
(authors of "Understanding Poverty")

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The mission of the Center for Family and Community Ministries (CFCM) is to strengthen ministries designed to serve families and communities. CFCM seeks to provide research, continuing education, and resource development to support and enhance the work of congregations and denominational agencies with families and communities. Since its founding in 1997, the CFCM has been blessed with an exceptional staff. Diana Garland, founding director, led the Center until 2005 when she appointed Dr. Jon Singletary to be director. With varied backgrounds and gifts, the diversity, energy and passion that each person brings to the Center is commonly focused on creating strong families, communities and congregations.

Center Staff:

Jon Singletary	Director
Sam Oakley	Associate Director
Angela Dennison	Associate Director, Research and Development, in collaboration with Buckner Child and Family Services Inc
Jeremy Everett	Director, Texas Hunger Initiative
Tammy Woods	Research Associate
Kimberly Schlesinger	Administrative Associate
Diana Garland	Founding Director

Contact Information:

Phone: 254.710.3854
E-mail: First name_last name@baylor.edu
Web: www.baylor.edu/cfcf

Scripture used in the Legacies of Care study is from the following translations:

New International Version (NIV)
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
New Century Version (NCV)
Today's New International Version (TNIV)
The Contemporary English Version (CEV)
Simulated Video (SV)
The Message



COME, WALK ALONGSIDE US ON THE JOURNEY

Dust whirled up at each step as the two men trudged heavily along the path. The sun was making its descent, and they still had a long way to go. They barely noticed. Their minds were full of what they had experienced during the last few days. Occasionally, one would say, "And could you believe what you heard this morning?" And then the other, after several more steps, "I just don't understand. What was any of this about?"

They had just lost a great friend, perhaps the greatest friend they had ever had. He had seemed so full of promise and possibility. Each had imagined himself going through the rest of his life with this man by his side. A future they thought comfortably in their possession had suddenly evaporated when their friend died. No, when he was killed. Cruelly, publicly. Treated as a joke! It was humiliating, confusing, unbelievable.

Yes, "unbelievable" was the word. Because just that morning, one of their friends who had gone to the gravesite to mourn came running back to the larger group to tell them the body was gone! No one could believe it. Others ran to see for themselves. Many others stayed behind speculating: grave robbers? a political ploy? What could any of this mean?

So distracted were they by their thoughts that it took a moment for them to notice that another person was walking alongside them on their journey. They did not recognize him or know who he was.



How often in our lives do we stumble along confused, scared, worried, unsure of anything – even our next step – never realizing that we do not walk alone. That in step with us, walking alongside, is our Saviour and our Lord. As he did on the road to Emmaus that Cleopas and his friend traveled, Jesus asks us, "Why are you so sad? What has happened?"

The real question Jesus asks us is, "Do you not know that I am here?" If we do, how then can the circumstances of life so overwhelm us? We are not alone; we never will be again.

Once we understand that Jesus is our constant companion, there awakens in us a peace and assurance we have never experienced. Cleopas and his friend say that Jesus' explanation of the scriptures "burned within their hearts," as though falling newly upon their ears and spirits. Being in the presence of Jesus, the Risen Lord, transforms us, and in our response of gratitude, we become servants willing to give ourselves away in God's service.

This is how we love one another. In gratitude to God, we long to reach out and bring another into this holy fellowship. This love is expressed in the pews of our churches, but also in the alleys behind our churches; in our fellowship halls but also in the urban soup kitchens that feed the hungry.

The one who walks beside us on this journey of life may not be one we recognize or know. He or she may be very different from us. Ragged and dirty, of a different colored skin or different culture, female or male, adult or child, physically weak, mentally unstable, scared, hurt, lost. But look into the eyes of this one in our midst. Look deeply enough, and you may see yourself. Look more deeply, and you will see Christ.

INTRODUCTION TO WALKING ALONGSIDE

"It's such a caring congregation."

"They're so ready to help one another in times of need."

"I've never felt so welcomed and cared for."

These are the comments all church leaders hope to hear from new members or visitors, and certainly this kind of care for one another is a primary component of what church means to most people.

As Christians we are familiar with the Greatest Commandment found in Matthew 22:37 to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Too many of us spend a lifetime focusing on this commandment but forgetting that Jesus had more to say: "And the second [commandment] is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39; NIV).

Often understaffed and overwhelmed by the needs of our current members, most churches do well just to make the hospital visits and the casseroles for those whom we know. Our "neighbors," though, are all around us, not just in our pews.

The Walking Alongside curriculum is designed to help you individually and as a church think about these questions:

- Who is my neighbor?
- What is my responsibility toward my neighbor?
- What is my church's responsibility?
- How have others responded and what does that teach us?
- What do scriptures tell me about my neighbor and what my response should be?
- How does that affect me? What can I do?
- What can my church do?

One thing is clear throughout these studies: Caring for community is not optional. It is part of God's plan for how we serve and provide in community, but also for how we become more Christlike. Being obedient to the second commandment helps us mature in the first. We care for others out of gratitude and love for the Creator of us all – and in so doing, we all travel a bit farther along the path toward our Lord and Savior.

Join us on the journey.



*Do all the good you can,
in all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as you ever can.*

– John Wesley



WALKING ALONGSIDE RESOURCES

No one begins a journey without packing the supplies and equipment that will be needed for the path before them. The Walking Alongside curriculum is part of a “backpack” of resources available to congregations as they seek to begin, strengthen and sustain community ministries. A list of these resources can be found at www.baylor.edu/social_work/ccm.

This study guide provides the following materials for Sunday School classes, small groups, church staff development, youth retreats, or individual instruction:

- “Legacies of Care” – a six-part study of systems of care in ancient and contemporary history and how these practices influence our choices today.
- Leader’s instructions (this page)
- Reproducible Teaching Leaflets

Other study series in the Walking Alongside curriculum include:

- Biblical Foundations for Caring
- Understanding Poverty

Plus SUSTAIN!, a separate unit to help congregations assess, design, implement and evaluate community ministries.

LEADER’S INSTRUCTIONS

The lessons are self-explanatory – easy to use for the beginner or long-time teacher. Several reproducible Teaching Leaflets are included and are referenced in the studies. These provide additional history and context for teacher preparation, class distribution or individual study.

A variety of Bible translations are cited to offer additional depth to the study. Prayers are provided, but we encourage leaders to let the Spirit guide them in these prayer times.

» In each lesson, you will find arrows to guide you to specific opportunities to reflect individually or engage as a group on materials presented. These include weekly “challenges” for participants that include options to appeal to different learning styles.



Footprints will highlight quotations from ancient and contemporary theologians to remind us that others have taken this journey and offer us much wisdom.

Lessons include a “Context for today,” which we believe will help individuals engage personally as they “walk a mile in the shoes of another.”

To further inform your study and to build upon it, additional resources, links to existing community ministry projects, other teaching materials, congregational and community assessment tools, and much more is available at the Walking Alongside Web site at www.baylor.edu/social_work/ccm.



Focus verses

*"So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."
John 13:14-15
(NRSV)*

*"I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other."
John 13:34-35 (NCV)*

*"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."
1 John 4:11-12
(TNIV)*

LEGACIES OF CARE

LESSON ONE: THE RADICAL LOVE OF JESUS

Opening prayer

"For God is greater than our hearts ..." – 1 John 3:20 (NIV)

*All of our capacity to love,
God is more
All of the compassion we show,
God is more
All of the mercy that wells within us,
God is more
All of the social justice we long for,
God is more
In all the ways that I am less
God is more.*

– V.M. Kabat

Introduction to the lesson

From the earliest civilizations, people have found ways to care for those who could not care for themselves. As populations grew, caring for all who lived on the margins of society became increasingly difficult. We will explore how societies, throughout the ages, have cared for their poor. We will look at the mutual forces involving church and government in these care-giving roles, and we will examine motivation and expectations involved in caring for "the least of these." Undergirding the study will be the radical theology of care that Jesus called all of us to in his incarnation of *agape* love.

This shocking love

People respond differently to the topic of providing care for others, and there are many good reasons that they do. Our responses to this topic have been shaped and informed by influences such as federal programs, denominational initiatives, personal experiences, religious education and family teachings.

These influences are important for us to recognize so that we can assess with growing maturity what we believe. As Christians, we know there is only one teaching that should guide our thoughts and actions – "Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12, NIV) – yet most of us find that this commandment is hard to practice daily.

Jesus was born into a world of various beliefs, philosophies, numerous gods and oppressive legalism, and what Jesus taught was radical and revolutionary. Shocking, even! The world changed when Jesus came into it as the manifestation of *agape* love. *Agape* is a Greek word for love, but Jesus redefined its meaning (see John 3:16) to be "self-giving love" – a giving away of one's self in love with no thought or expectation, return or recognition. It is God's love for us as experienced in the life and death and resurrection of his son, Jesus. It forever changed how we are to understand our "neighbor" and our "community."

Jesus as servant

Perhaps one of Jesus' most astonishing statements to his disciples and us – among many - was when he said, "... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28, NIV). Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus lived out this truth. Consider just a few examples where Jesus placed himself among the despised and discarded of Jewish society to bring comfort, hope and healing:

- Healing lepers
- Dining with tax collectors
- Talking with the Samaritan woman at the well
- Driving demons out of the possessed

In a ritual system that greatly valued purity, Jesus' willingness to interact with the people described here was indeed shocking. No one had seen such self-giving love, certainly not for these "others."

Knowing that Jesus was fully human during his ministry on earth, how did he do it? Jesus' compassion was a natural expression that flowed from his deep relationship to his Father in heaven; it enabled all other relationships. This *agape* love can be described as God's love to us and in us. It is the same love available to us today. Such love is freely given, without regard for status or merit, without regard for return or benefit. It is obedient love responding to the nature of God, not to the nature of the person who receives love. This love – and how it can transform all of our relationships – is Jesus himself.

» Individual reflection

Most of us have heard the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13) so many times, we may have lost the impact of how truly extraordinary this action was. Read through this passage of scripture and then quietly reflect on what this meant in that time and place. Try to place yourself in the scene as one of the disciples, hot and weary and covered with dust as you step into the room. Then, write a short letter to a friend describing what you felt when Jesus, your Master and Teacher, knelt before you and washed your feet so that you would know "the full extent of his love" (John 13:1, NIV).

Following the Way

Something happened to those who were cared for by Jesus with such unconditional love. In his presence, the unworthy were deemed worthy, the unvalued were valued, the discarded and forgotten were reclaimed and celebrated. Their lives were transformed. They leapt and ran and shouted the good news to all who would hear:

Following the Narrow Way of Jesus carries with it the mandate to think, live and act differently from the world. As were the first disciples, we are called to a different standard – that of *agape* love. Serving others is no longer something we fit into our lives, it IS our lives. We move from preoccupation with self to sacrificing self because of our relationship with God.

» Class discussion

Write where all can see responses from the class to these questions:

- What do these two phrases used in today's lesson mean to you – "Following the Narrow Way" and to "lose ourselves in the very heart of God?" Restate them in terms more familiar to you.
- Has there been a time in your life when someone expressed *agape* love to you?
- Jesus says that in our loving one another, all will know we are disciples of Christ (John 13:34). What does it mean to consider yourself a disciple of Christ?

We are all one

Neither could any group of people be excluded from this transforming love. Jesus freely gave his love and care to all he met because of his relationship with God. More than that, Jesus went *out of his way* to help others. The message to all people in all ages is this new commandment: that we love one another as God loves us (John 13:31-35). To say we love God and yet not love our neighbor is to not love God. For those who profess Christ as the Risen Lord, the two are now one.

There is another spiritual truth at work in Jesus' teaching. It is that we are all broken in some way and all in need of God's saving grace. In this, too, no one is excluded.

» Context for today

Ask a volunteer to read the following scenario aloud and then discuss the questions following:

People dressed in their Sunday best mill about outside the sanctuary doors before entering for worship. There is laughter as people greet and hug one another. Suddenly, the wailing of a small child outside catches everyone's attention. Several turn to look as a young woman and three small children walk hesitantly through the open church door. Their clothes are wrinkled and worn, one child is coughing, her nose running. Two of the children are crying and pulling away from their mother, finally breaking away to run into the sanctuary. As they do, they run into an elderly man, who stumbles against a pew before catching himself. "I'm sorry," the young woman whispers, her head down, before she hurries to collect her children and seats all of them on a pew toward the back. No one sits beside them.

Moments into the sermon, the children begin arguing loudly and several congregation members turn to stare at the mother, disapproval etched heavily into their faces. But the young woman, who is obviously pregnant, has fallen asleep. Her head sags heavily against the back of the wooden pew.

- Have you experienced a similar situation in your church?
- What happened? What did an usher, staff person or church member do?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like the "stranger"?
- How were you treated? How did that make you feel?

» Silence before God

Read today's focus verses aloud, and then meditate silently on them. Read them to yourself slowly, stopping whenever a word or phrase catches your attention. Underline those words and return to them this week during your devotional time.



"Come, then, my beloved souls, let us run and fly to that love which calls us. Why are we waiting? Let us set out at once, lose ourselves in the very heart of God and become intoxicated with his love."

Jean-Pierre de Caussade



Jesus took the command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and pushed the definition of who is our neighbor out, out, and still further out, until it reached to the ends of the earth and included all of humanity – all of God's children.

– Alvin Alexi Curri

Key points from today's lesson

- Many factors influence our beliefs about caring for others.
- It is important to recognize and re-examine what those influences are.
- We are called to “love one another” with the *agape* love of Jesus as a response to the nature of God, not to the nature of another person.
- There is no longer any division; we are all one in Christ.
- The *agape* love of Christ has the power to transform lives.



Challenge

Choose from the following options for the coming week:

- Reflect this week on 1 John 4. Use commentaries to inform your study. Journal the thoughts that the Holy Spirit brings to you throughout the week.
- Reflect on how you would explain *agape* love to someone.
- Our lesson talks about groups of people in Jesus' time that lived on the margins of society. Who are such groups in our world? Read current media and note stories that address the situation of these groups. Note what opinions and actions are reported and then compare those to the focus verses in today's lesson.



A sense of oneness

Have you ever tried looking at another person and seeing your own self within him or her? I don't mean projecting onto another person all our miserable traits. I am speaking of recognizing the hidden truth that we are one with all people. We are part of them and they are part of us.

Frederick Buechner spoke of growing to a point where “selfhood, in the sense that you are one self and I am another self, begins to fade. You begin to understand that in some way your deepest self is the self of all - that you are in them and they are in you.” Finding this sense of oneness is a natural part of the intimate journey with God. The more we are one with God, the more we are united with one another. We begin to feel a new and deeper identification with people. We come to see that we are all truly related, that what happens to them happens to us.

— Sue Monk Kidd, *God's Joyful Surprise*



Focus verses

"Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should be. Be sure to welcome strangers into your home. By doing this, some people have welcomed angels as guests, without even knowing it. Remember the Lord's people who are in jail and be concerned for them. Don't forget those who are suffering, but imagine that you are there with them."
Hebrews 13:1-3 (CEV)

"... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."
Ephesians 4:12-13 (NIV)

"Be compassionate in the way your Father is compassionate."
Luke 6:36 (SV)

LEGACIES OF CARE

LESSON TWO: LOOKING INWARD

Opening prayer

*Lord, you are our one true source,
God in Jesus the Christ.
We are yours, yours alone.
through whom rivers of love flow
smoothing away barriers,
eroding boulders,
but always, nevertheless,
on course.
Flowing from a source
that we cannot see
but that we know exists,
to a place we cannot imagine
but we know is true.*

—V. M. Kabat

Introduction to the lesson

The radical love of Jesus is a challenging commandment. Although we all desire to be faithful, most of us fall short. Before we explore outward expressions of how we love and care for one another, let's take some time to look inward.

Last week's challenge

Share from the challenge you chose to do during this past week.

» Class discussion

Many of us learned about helping others as children. Look at the following statements and add others that come to mind:

- Charity begins at home.
- My mother always took food to neighbors if they were sick.
- I got where I am today by my own hard work; no one ever gave me a handout.
- We went to a nursing home once a month to sing hymns with the residents.
- Jesus said the poor would always be among us; it's just a fact of life.
- Eat your vegetables! Children in (fill in the country) are starving!

Do any of these comments strike home with you? What are your memories associated with that comment? What emotions are triggered?

Religious education

Many of us also learned about caring for others at church. Here are some commonly held teachings from scripture (add others offered from the class). Read each aloud as class members respond by sharing meaning, memories and emotions about each teaching.

- The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12)
- Faith, love and charity, but the greatest of these is charity (1 Corinthians 13:13)
- The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37)
- The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:1-22)
- Love your neighbor as yourself (Romans 13:9)

Cultural influences

We live in a world deluged with media messages – all of which imply that we are incomplete as human beings if we don't have (*this product*). Everywhere we see excess – from the larger houses we build to the storage sheds we erect to hold our stuff, from the supersizing of fast food items to the number of vehicles in our garages. These are powerful messages that inundate us constantly.

The teachings of Jesus about the rich young man is as relevant today as it was in Jesus' culture. Given our addiction to everything from specialty coffees to designer jeans, from custom chocolates to another pair of shoes, there is no doubt that our culture competes with Jesus' teachings for the control of our hearts.

Motivations and expectations

The majority of Americans are wealthy – wealthier than half of the world's population, which lives on less than \$2 a day. We were born into a culture that promulgates a certain mindset of motivations and expectations. "If you work hard, you'll succeed." "Anything is possible if you apply yourself." We've all heard these truisms that encode independence and self-sufficiency deeply into our psyches. Often that success is measured by how much money we make, where we live, what we drive, what our job title is and how many possessions we own.

A growing percentage of us, however, cannot afford health insurance or child care. We must work more hours than ever to make ends meet. Even when we do have equal opportunity, we do not have equal outcomes. This concept of success is a fairy tale for those who spend each day surviving (finding food, relief from the heat or cold, medication for illness, a safe place to sleep).

Until we can understand and accept this very uneven playing field that exists in our country, we will be inclined toward a spirit of judgment and entitlement. Nevertheless, what Jesus modeled through love is continuously the call before us; we are to overcome our former nature and become a new creation – one in which every single human life has dignity and worth and every person has a name – brother, sister. We have to discern daily how God is calling us to serve and to love. And, we have to decide daily if, and how, we will follow.

» Context for today

Listen as a class volunteer reads the following scenario and then discuss the questions that follow:

Jan and her husband Bob had just begun volunteering at the local homeless shelter for women and children. They met weekly with Martha, a middle age woman who had recently come out of rehab for her heroin addiction. Martha had been married, in a good job, and actively involved in raising her two teen-age children. But one day her daughter drove to the store to get milk and never came back. She was killed in an automobile accident. That's when Martha picked up a habit she had only experimented with in her younger days.

Jan, a mother herself, was especially stricken by Martha's story, and longed to help her get back on her feet. The couple talked with Martha about job interviewing techniques, presentation, and helped her explore employment opportunities. Jan even brought some of her nicer clothes from home to give to Martha to wear on her interviews.

But one week, the executive director of the homeless shelter called to tell them not to come in.

Martha had left the shelter, and the director had heard from others on the street that she was using again.

Jan and Bob were stunned. Everything seemed to be going so well. Martha had shown such determination in their meetings. They were disappointed, angry, and even felt betrayed by Martha's lapse. Later, the shelter director counseled the couple with this advice: "Here, we have to redefine our expectations and what we mean by success."

- What are our motivations and expectations about helping others?
- How do you interpret the shelter director's advice?
- How would you advise Bob and Jan?
- Have you had a similar experience?

Be encouraged

As you can see in even this brief sharing of memories, there are many experiences in our lives that influence how we think about caring for those in need – some positive, some not. In the weeks ahead, we will discover that systematized caregiving and the ideologies that created it also have influenced us.

There also are many ways to love and care for others. Be encouraged that whatever your gift is, God can manifest blessing through your willingness to offer it. Even if your gift seems meager – such as the small child's fishes and loaves – it is your cheerful bringing of it to Jesus that enables him to multiply it and make it more than enough.

» Silence before God

After today's focus verses are read aloud, reflect on them and note any word or phrase that particularly impacts you. Close your eyes and repeat the phrase to yourself slowly. Again. Is the Spirit enlivening this phrase in you at this time? Why might that be?

Key points from today's lesson

- Our views toward helping others are influenced by many factors.
- These influences have imprinted us more deeply than we may realize.
- The things that are valued in our culture are not always the things God values.
- Many of us have been raised with a set of values that idealizes independence, self-sufficiency and materialism. This set of values is quite different from those of people caught in the cycle of poverty.
- We are called to think and act differently. What is important to God is that we honor God by obediently offering our gift; we trust God for the outcomes.

» Challenge

Choose from the following options for the coming week:

- Recall a personal experience of helping someone. Write adjectives that describe how you felt when offering that service.
- If you could do one thing on a regular basis to help someone, what would it be and for whom (i.e., what age, what population, what societal need)? Why have you chosen this?
- If you have identified a situation that touches your heart, find out what, if any, services your church or community offers for people in this situation.

Good deeds and good news can't and shouldn't be separated. It's not really 'church' if it's not engaged in the life of the community through ministry and service to others.

– Rick Rusaw & Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church*. (2004)





Focus verses

"If there is anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD our God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be."
Deut. 15:7-8 (NRSV)

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."
1 Peter 4:8-10 (NIV)

Teaching Leaflet A
"Systems of
Care Overview"

Teaching Leaflet B
"Eight Degrees
of Charity"

LEGACIES OF CARE

LESSON THREE: ANCIENT ROOTS OF CARE

Opening prayer

*Holy Spirit,
giving life to all life,
moving all creatures,
root of all things,
washing them clean,
wiping out their mistakes,
healing their wounds,
you are our true life,
luminous, wonderful,
awakening the heart
from its ancient sleep.*

— Hildegard of Bingen, translated by Stephen Mitchell

Introduction to the lesson

Last week, we looked at personal life experiences and teachings that informed our understanding of what it means to serve others. We also have inherited societal responses to caring for those in need. In today's lesson, we will trace some of these ancient roots of systemized care to see how these philosophies intersect with ours.

Last week's challenge

Share from the challenge you chose to do during this past week.

Systems of care

We will look at five societies from ancient history – Egyptians, Greeks, Imperial Romans, Jews and Early Christians. There are numerous societies we could have explored, but each of these has an ideological perspective that has served as a building block for why and how some people were helped and others were not.

More information on each of these periods is provided in Teaching Leaflet A titled "Systems of Care Overview." The chart on the next page summarizes this information.



Jesus did not get into trouble with the powers of his day simply by challenging his individual hearers. He challenged the very systems of his society - the cornerstones. Just as the values of Madison Avenue, Wall Street, and the Pentagon conflict with the gospel, so too with Jesus and the institutions of his time: he took on the power structures of his own day, religious and civil alike.... Yes, discipleship does have its cost - anyone who has dared to bring the gospel to bear on his or her own life knows that - whether we feel it may be a good litmus test for discerning if we are truly following on his path, or pursuing a false trail.

— Jeanne de Celles, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*

	Ancient Egyptian Society	Ancient Greek Society	Roman Imperial Society	Ancient Jewish Society	Early Christian Church
Time period	Ca. 5000 BC	Ca. 400 – 100 BCE	Ca. 100 BCE – 500 CE	Ca. 4000 BCE – 100 CE	Ca. 1 – 500 CE
World-view	Emphasis on the afterlife; the Book of the Dead	Emphasis on many gods/idols, philosophy and science emerging	Emphasis on productivity and belonging; many races & cultures	Emphasis on obeying the law; doing for others what you would have done to you	Emphasis on following the example of Jesus' life by showing love to others
Concept of God	Pharoah was supreme; worshipped many gods	Worshipped many gods; believed in self-accomplishment	Imperial cult imposed; deified the state; allegiance to Caesar	Worshipped one God, Yahweh	Worshipped one God; Jesus as the Son of God
Concept of Giving	Give with no expectation of return; your deeds will be rewarded in the afterlife	Give to gain honor and self-respect; give to those who “deserve” help	Public aid given to those who belong to the state; assigning responsibility for care; exercise authority over; on the dole	Give to the alien & stranger, orphan & widow; give to honor God; no means test	Give to the “family of God”; believers sold their possessions and gave to church and poor; willingly and joyfully
Key Concepts to caring for “the poor”	Book of Dead listed negative & positive confessions; Acts of Mercy; absence of harm	Reciprocity; Worthy vs. unworthy poor; an “exchange” b/t giver and receiver	Concept of citizenship – who has responsibility for you?	Justice and mercy' care for others out of obedience to God; charitable acts	The call of the church was to embody Christ; love (<i>agape</i>) not based on merit

Overview

The Egyptian, Greek and Roman societies were polytheistic, worshipping many gods; the Jews worshipped one God, Yahweh. The first three societies were motivated to help those in need primarily to elevate status of self or state; Jews were motivated out of obedience to the Mosaic Law, which includes the admonition to “do unto others what you would have them do unto you.” **Each of these societies has some key concepts we want to note:**

Egyptians gave us the concepts of negative and positive confessions. They showed compassion to others more often by choosing not to harm someone than by proactively helping someone. Their acts of mercy – or lack of them – were recorded in the Book of the Dead, which they believed would earn them a better afterlife.

- “negative confession” – not helping, but not harming either

The **Greeks** also were polytheistic. Athens was “full of idols,” as Paul discovered as he waited for Silas and Timothy to join him there (Acts: 17:16-23). So religious were they, in fact, they even had an altar to “An Unknown God” (v. 23). The Greeks taught us about the extremes of wealth and poverty and introduced the concept of the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor. The Greeks believed that the helping relationship was an “exchange” between a giver and receiver. People who worked with their hands (the artisans) were considered to be the “worthy poor”; people who did not work were considered by the aristocrats to be “unworthy” of help. The motivation for giving was to accrue honor and status.

- “deserving” and “undeserving” poor

Roman society became increasingly diverse as tribes from conquered regions were assimilated into the Empire. Romans placed great value on productivity and to “belonging,” i.e., their status as a Roman citizen. Roman citizens were afforded certain rights and privileges, which others did not receive. Care included benevolence from the state if you were in need, i.e., a Roman citizen was cared for as a matter of honor and respect for the state. They gave only to people who could return the favor in some way, and they gave to receive the title “Benefactor” (Luke 22:25). From the Romans we learned the concept of determining who was responsible for the poor; however, giving to them was often a means of exercising authority over others to keep them in subjection.

- citizenship, exercising authority over others, subjection

Jewish society was shaped by Mosaic Law and the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. Justice and mercy were primary motivators for care giving (Micah 6:8). In fact, the Hebrew word for “charity” is more accurately translated to mean “justice.” There was an obligation to do positive acts of good, and not just to ensure an absence of harm. Furthermore, it was accepted that recipients of good deeds had a right to such help. If a Jew had the ability to meet another person’s need and did not do it, it would have brought God’s displeasure. Commitment to the stranger, i.e., hospitality, was important to this society. (See *Teaching Leaflet B*, titled “Eight Degrees of Charity.”)

- charitable acts, justice, hospitality and journeying together in life

» Class discussion

Reflect on the two topical events listed below and discuss if or how they relate to the systems above:

- Residents of Ninth Ward in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina
- Debate about how to respond to increasing number of immigrants

Early Christian Church

Jesus began his ministry in a milieu of these cultural influences. His message and modeling of *agape* love was countercultural and revolutionary – disturbing those in both the Jewish and Roman societies. Following his resurrection and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit, the first disciples began in earnest the work of the early Christian church. Their motivation is summed up in 1 John 4:11: “... since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (NIV). There was a new Way.



*It is not you who shapes
God, it is God who
shapes you.
If then you are the work
of God, await the hand of
the artist
Who does all things in
due season.
Offer God your heart, soft
and tractable,
And keep the form in
which the artist has
fashioned you.
Let your clay be moist,
Lest you grow hard and
lose the imprint of God's
fingers.*

– Irenaeus Shalem News,
www.shalem.org

What made the teaching of Jesus different and apparently so hard to accept then as now, was that it required a critical reassessment of the structures and values, and attitudes of human society as his listeners and followers shared in it.

- Monika K. Hellwig,
Jesus: The Compassion of God



This radical theology of care was lived and taught first by his disciples and apostles and later throughout the early church. The Book of Acts recounts the actions of those who took seriously their conviction to follow Jesus' teachings.

Providing for all in need – regardless of circumstance, family connection or societal worth – was a belief and practice that existed within the early church, but it was not widely accepted. Many people converted to following the teachings of Jesus and forming a community of faith that shared freely with one another. They provided food for all, cared for orphans and widows, sold what they owned in order to share. As followers of Jesus, their commitment was to choose daily to accept all people as deserving of care, i.e., because God loved them (*agape* love), they practiced love (Christian charity) to those in need.

In the letter to the church at Ephesus, the early Christians are given additional instruction about helping those in need: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28; NIV).

The commandment echoes throughout the New Testament; we are to "live a life of love, just as Christ loved us" (Eph. 5:2; NIV). There is no acceptable excuse for doing otherwise.

» Context for today

Listen as a class volunteer reads the following scenario and then discuss the questions that follow:

Joe and Angela had just met a young couple with two small children who were visiting the church. The four adults hit it off, and soon Joe and Angela were invited to Felipe and Maria's home for a simple supper. Felipe and Maria had a 3-year-old daughter and a newborn son. They were renting a large, older home in an inner-city neighborhood, but only one room – their bedroom (where they all slept) – was cooled, with a window unit. Because of the heat, they took their plates of food into the bedroom to eat.

"Oh, Maria goes a little crazy trying to keep the babies happy in just this one room all day," Felipe said, "but we're just grateful to have this place. We'll get by."

Joe and Angela were struck by their new friend's hospitality and gratitude for their less-than-ideal situation. "You know," Joe said, "we have that window unit just sitting out in the garage. Why don't we give it to them so they can open up another room?" Angela readily agreed.

When Angela mentioned this to her parents, though, she got another reaction. "You just gave it to them?" her father demanded. "You could have got at least \$100 for it!"

- What do you think of Joe and Angela's response?
- What do you think of Angela's parents' response?
- How do we know when to offer our help or when not to?

- Are there situations in which offering help could be offensive? How?
- Which model of care described in the lesson today does this scenario reflect?

» Silence before God

The focus verses today from 1 Peter say that “whatever gift” we have received should be used to serve others. Think about what your gift is – that one thing about which you are passionate – and how you might use it to comfort those in need. Conclude by writing a prayer (for yourself only) as the Spirit leads you.

Key points from today’s lesson

- Ancient societies developed systems of taking care of their poor.
- These systems developed from different motivations and expectations.
- Some of what we believe today about caring for the poor originates from the concepts in these ancient societies.
- Jesus’ radical call to love was countercultural and revolutionary in his day, and it is still so today.
- We love because God first loved us; worthiness is not a factor.

» Challenge

Choose from the following options for the coming week:

- Meet with your church’s staff person or committee chair responsible for community outreach and service. Make a list of your church’s current ministries. Find out what percent of your church’s annual budget is allocated to service ministries. Offer to report your findings to the class next week.
- Reflect on 1 Peter: 4-8. What words do you, or others who know you, use to describe your gifts? Beside these words, list any actions you have taken or could. How does this action show God’s grace?
- Pray daily for one person, family or community challenge, seeking the Spirit’s direction on any further involvement with that situation.



To show great love for God and our neighbor we need not do great things. It is how much love we put in the doing that makes our offering something beautiful for God.

Mother Teresa,
A Gift for God

The church is not going to be different until someone in it is different. God waits for each of us to hear: “Behold, I do a new thing - through you!” The question is always, can we open our lives so that the Holy Spirit may descend and new power break that we may be the kind of person around whom renewal begins?

– Elizabeth O’Connor, *Call to Commitment*





Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Three: Ancient Roots of Care

“Systems of Care Overview”

The Egyptians

The Egyptian civilization, the oldest with a large written record, formed in the Nile River Delta as Egyptians settled along the river to gain access to water for their crops and animals. A sophisticated culture developed out of this humble beginning. Because the culture depended on crops for their survival, they worshipped gods who controlled crop success and failure, sun and rain, as well as life and death. In order to maintain order in the society and appease their gods, the Egyptians developed a religious system that governed their daily life and patterns of relating to people as well as their worship.

Egyptian society operated within an authoritarian hierarchy, and the Pharaoh, who was believed to be a god, ruled from the top. Most of the writings that have been discovered offer instructions and sayings for the Pharaoh and other rulers to follow in order to encourage them to exercise their power with justice. Those in power were expected to care for those in need without an expectation for a return favor. Those who were not in authority did not appear to have any rights of their own, and so justice was defined in the context of the weak depending on the strong who would help them.

Egyptians believed that their actions in this life affected the quality of their life after death. The Book of the Dead, among other things, recorded these actions so that they could help the dead succeed in their after life. When a person died, Egyptians believed they had to make confessions in order to gain rebirth, and these confessions came from what they did and did not do in their lives on earth. Negative confessions were statements about acts they did not commit: “I have not defrauded the poor of their property. I have not done what the gods abominate. I have not caused harm to be done to a servant by his master. I have not caused pain. I have caused no man to hunger. I have made no one weep” (Hooker, 1996). They gained credit for good and just behavior simply by not doing something to hurt someone. These Acts of Mercy were predicated on an absence of harm to the persons in need. Acts of Mercy such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing shelter, caring for the sick, caring for criminals, and burying the dead were considered important, however, and these acts were recorded upon a person’s death and sent to their grave with them. Although positive actions to help were important, justice often meant that a person had successfully avoided hurting another individual rather than that they had actively helped to alleviate a need.

The Greeks

Greek life was characterized by developments in philosophy and science — and these were not necessarily thoughts rooted in religious belief. The government was organized primarily in small city-states rather than around one major city-state. Small elite groups exercised control over the rest of society. True democracy existed only for a relatively small percentage of the population.

The majority of Greek citizens were either slave or artisan. The artisans were people who worked with their hands and who, many times, had their own businesses. Typical Greek thought for this time period suggested that any individual forced to work with his or her hands was poor, but because they worked, they were considered to be the “worthy” poor. Still, others were categorized as poor based on issues of gender, age or illness. Able-bodied citizens who chose to beg were viewed as the “undeserving”



or “unworthy” poor. Aid of any form usually was reserved for those overwhelmed by unavoidable disaster.

Most surviving documents from this time period deal with the exchange of goods between individuals. The giving of gifts or help could be considered as self-serving in that the giver anticipated something in return. These earliest forms of philanthropy served as a way to build friendships and form social cohesion among the wealthy. Originally, philanthropy was meant to benefit the community and city-state. The elite provided gifts to the city-states with the understanding that they, the elite, would be honored at a later date. Many times individual artisans would benefit from trickle-down effects of philanthropy, i.e., money loaned might permit an individual to keep and continue with his or her job. However, any aid received also came with the understanding that the individual would give back to the community.

As early as 400 B.C.E., Greek culture had so shifted away from the idea of reciprocity that it was no longer considered suitable for the giver to expect a return. The philosopher Aristotle even went so far as to suggest that the value of a gift was not to be judged by its worth but by the spirit of the giver.

The Romans

Rome was a worldwide empire with people of many different races and classes. As a multicultural and expanding society, citizenship was extended to nonslave members in Rome and in its provinces. The state began to blur the division between family and stranger (people not considered to be citizens of Rome). Care was provided to citizens who were poor or in need by both the state and personally by individuals who were wealthy. The pride that Romans took in their city and the pressure to benefit the city motivated the people to care for and help those who were considered dependents. The type of help, if any, that a person received was predicated on being a citizen of Rome.

There was a sense of obligation for those who were patricians, the wealthy original citizens of Rome, to help those who were considered plebeians, the lower working class. A former slave was free to return to his patron's, his former master's, home every day for work or some type of gift. Wealthy patrons were also expected to provide for poor, extended family members on a daily basis if necessary.

There was also public assistance available to the people residing in Rome. Grain and oil, considered the basic necessities of life, were the most commonly distributed food sources. Originally designed to aid those considered Roman citizens, food was eventually being distributed at no cost to all of the poor living in the city. People who were considered citizens did, however, receive help as a right of their citizenship, not because of their individual need.

The Romans valued self-reliance and independence. The widows, the orphans, and those who were victims of war were treated with sympathy and offered means of care. Those who were able to work but remained poor were not well-respected. The recipient's appreciation of the patron's way of life was in part what motivated the giver to help. Reciprocity remained an important ideal in Roman society. Pity was considered dangerous to the welfare of the Roman state, but reciprocity was valued because the giver and receiver maintained their respect when there was some sense of obligation on behalf of everyone involved.

Jewish Society

Although the history of the nation of Israel predates the Greeks and the Romans, we include it here because it sets the stage for the early Christian church. Israel, made up of many tribes and clans, had to fight to keep itself unified in the middle of intertribal conflict and attacks from outside. Laws given in the Hebrew Testament defined how individuals in the culture should relate to each other in their daily routine in order to keep peace and ensure survival. The Hebrew Testament was the first document to describe these types of ethical laws in this much detail.

In contrast with the previous cultures studied who believed in many gods controlling their lives, the Hebrew culture believed that life was governed by one God who is both loving and just and that God's pattern of relating to humankind should be the model for the way they related to each other. The



Hebrew laws directed people to actively work to do good for others, especially those who were unable to help themselves like strangers, widows and orphans. Sin was both an individual act and an act of the whole group when the community had enough but did not help the poor who did not. Helping, then, was a positive act and not just a passive choice to refrain from hurting others, as in Egyptian culture. Doing justice and being merciful to others was more acceptable than sacrifice.

The Hebrew culture developed several ideas about caring that were somewhat unique to their culture. In order to survive and have enough food, cultures tended to provide for only those who belonged to their family and clan. Anyone, like a stranger, widow or orphan who did not have a connection to families and clans would be left without provision. Hebrew law specifically dictated that individuals and families provide for those outside of their group so that all would have enough. This commitment to the stranger came, in part, as a response to Israel's experience as slaves in Egypt: they did not want to treat others as they were treated. Commitment to the stranger also came from their belief that all people, no matter their status or role, were sojourners in a land that belonged to God and not to them. In fact, the Hebrews believed that everything they had, including their lives, was a gift from God to be shared freely. If people had needs, they received help without any other requirements. Finally, the Hebrew law stressed that caring in a way that would maintain people's dignity was as important as obeying the command to care. These attitudes prepared the foundation for the attitudes of the early church.

Early Christian Church

During his ministry on earth, Jesus set the example for the church on how to care for others. Jesus connected love for God with love for others. He declared that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord, but the second is to love our neighbors as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). In John 13:34, Jesus declares that we are to love others as He has loved us, and in this way others will know that we are Christians. Time and time again, Jesus challenges the religious authorities by choosing to do good instead of evil (Mark 3:4). He heals on the Sabbath, he dines with the prostitute, and he saves the adulterous woman from being stoned to death. He consistently chooses love in his encounters with those who are needy.

The early church followed Jesus' commands to care for and love others. They sold their possessions and gave the money to the poor as Jesus instructed (Luke 12:33; Acts 2:45). They shared everything that they had, and there was not a person in need among them (Acts 4:32-34). They worshiped and celebrated together in one another's homes. Their way of life led many people to follow Christ.

As the number of Christians increased so did the number of people who needed help. The Greco-Jews thought their widows were being overlooked by the Hebraic Jews in their daily giving of food. These widows had lost their human support system of family when they converted to Christianity. They were considered to be humanly dead to their families, thus shifting responsibility for their care to the "family of God" – the early church. The disciples convened and decided they would be neglecting their work of teaching, preaching, and prayer if they also served food. They selected seven men who were "full of the Spirit" and considered wise who would be responsible for caring for the poor among them (Acts 6:1-7). This is the first division of focus involving two gospel imperatives: providing for needs and study of the scriptures. The disciples discerned both were fundamental in the life of those following Christ.

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Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Three: Ancient Roots of Care

“Eight Degrees of Charity”

(from lowest to highest)

Give, but with reluctance and regret. This is the gift of the hand but not of the heart.

The **second** is to give cheerfully, but not proportionately to the distress of the sufferer.

The **third** is to give cheerfully and proportionately, but not until we are solicited.

The **fourth** is to give cheerfully and proportionately, and even unsolicited; but to put it in the poor man's hand, thereby exciting in him the painful emotion of shame.

The **fifth** is to give charity in such a way that the distressed may receive the bounty and know their benefactor; without being known to him.

The **sixth**, which rises still higher, is to know the objects of our bounty, but remain unknown to them.

The **seventh** is still more meritorious, namely, to bestow charity in such a way that the benefactor may not know the relieved persons, nor they the name of their benefactor.

Lastly, the **eighth** and most meritorious of all, is to anticipate charity by preventing poverty; i.e., to assist a reduced person so that he may earn an honest livelihood and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding up his hand for charity. (Poppo & Leighninger, p. 193)

Source:

Poppo, P. R., & Leighninger, L. (2005). Social work, social welfare, and American society (6th ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.



Focus verses

"The King will reply, 'Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brother and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"
Matthew 25:40 (TNIV)

"This is how we know what real love is: Jesus gave his life for us. So we should give our lives for our brothers and sisters. Suppose someone has enough to give and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person. My children, we should love people not only with words and talk but also by our actions and true caring."
1 John 3:16-18 (NCV)

Teaching Leaflet C
"Timeline of
Social Ministry"

Teaching Leaflet D
"Perspectives
of Care"

LEGACIES OF CARE

LESSON FOUR: PHILOSOPHIES OF CARE

Opening prayer

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement
and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you
in every good deed and word. – 2 Thess. 2:16-17 (NIV)*

Introduction to the lesson

Last week, we looked at ancient civilizations and at how people in need were labeled as "worthy" or "unworthy." This concept of merit would continue to be the basis for how societies allocated care for those in need as evidenced in the English Poor Laws of the 1600s, which American colonists later adapted as the basis of the American welfare system. This duality of care, which still pervades our society, is not scripturally based. It is a perversion of the agape love embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus.

In today's lesson, we will examine the emergence of three philosophies that gripped America from its earliest days and came to define the young nation's independence, self-sufficiency and energy. These approaches also impacted the nation's approach to caring for those in need in ways that are still with us today.

Last week's challenge

Share from the challenge you chose to do during this past week.

Church and government

Beginning with Constantine in the fourth century, governmental systems and the organized church have struggled to define their roles, responsibilities and resources in their efforts to address escalating needs. Historically, it was the church's mission to care for the poor. After the Reformation, the church and the state were one so it was difficult to discern the differences in roles.

At times, governments would contract to offer systems of support; at other times, they would back away from these commitments. Similarly, in some eras, the local church would take the lead. Care would shift from provision for individual need to addressing systemic ills, from locally focused congregational ministries to institutionalized efforts, such as schools, hospitals, prisons and orphanages. (*For a more thorough overview of these efforts, see Teaching Leaflet C titled "Timeline of Social Ministry."*)

Reasons for poverty

Why and how do people become poor? Beginning with the ancient societies and evident to some degree in America since, the common theory was that a person is poor either because of:

- **individual defect** such as illness, being orphaned or widowed, disability or lack of character; or
- **spiritual defect** such as sin, amoral beliefs or sloth, i.e., laziness.

Later in history, another factor was acknowledged – a person's **environment**. The Great Depression of the early 1930s is the prime example of environmental poverty in America. Other examples would include global expansion, unstable economies, natural disasters and mass migrations.

These accepted reasons for why people are poor center on judgments about who merits care and who is responsible for providing care. *Neither* is relevant to the Great Commandment, which is given to every believer of Christ. Every person deserves care and every believer is responsible for offering it.

Dominant philosophies of care

The legislation described in Teaching Leaflet A, “Systems of Care Overview” (Lesson 3), shows us the many ways in which societies and governments attempted to provide care. These laws were shaped by three primary ideologies – perspectives – that impact the way we think about what we do, with whom, and how we provide care as individuals and through government, as local communities and as the church, to this day. More information is available in Teaching Leaflet D titled “Perspectives of Care.”

- **Protestant Work Ethic**
- **Social Darwinism**
- **Social Gospel and Evangelicalism**

Protestant Work Ethic

Key words: *good works, predestination, earning salvation, idleness as sin, determining merit*

The Puritans brought to American colonies the English views about care of the poor and built upon those systems for their new world. The Puritan view of work was derived from doctrine developed by prominent church reformers such as John Calvin. Calvin relied heavily on 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 to support his theology, with its warning against idleness: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (3:10; NIV). Calvin believed that a person's willingness to work provided evidence for his or her salvation and that care for others was a way to “earn” salvation.

The Puritans also believed that people should pursue wealth as a means of giving God glory. A person's ability to become wealthy and successfully pursue his or her calling provided evidence of God's favor and selection, i.e., that God predestined a person's societal status. Puritans identified an unwillingness to work as one of the highest sins, and begging was viewed as a sin.

Prior to the Reformation, the Catholic Church provided structure for provision for the poor. After the Reformation, diminished church roles in offering care created the need for new systems. The Elizabethan Poor Laws in England were attempts to shift this responsibility from the church to the government. Modeling the early Greek society, people in need of support were divided into the “worthy” and “unworthy.”

Social Darwinism

Key words: *survival of the fittest, moral defect, demonstrating one's fitness for salvation*

In his 1859 book, *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin outlined his theory of evolution based on natural selection and competition. From his theory came what is commonly known as “the survival of the fittest.” It espoused that “the poor” were responsible for their poverty and were so by moral defect or choice and thus were considered to be inferior socially and morally.

This scientific theory strongly influenced society's view of work and the church's willingness to care for those in need. The Protestant Work Ethic combined with the Survival of the Fittest worldview affected the church's view of ministry and faith as well. Although salvation might be "by grace through faith," ministry and caring often became tools by which to demonstrate the faithful Christian's fitness for salvation.

American Expressions of the Gospel

Following the Civil War in the United States, the church began to struggle with new social realities and developed different religious ideologies. The Gospel was expressed through the following perspectives:

Evangelicalism – This philosophy developed out of the teachings of evangelists such as D.L. Moody, who believed that alcohol use and homelessness resulted from not knowing God. The evangelicals, then, focused on individual salvation first and providing for needs later.

Key points: *individual salvation first, providing for needs later*

Perfectionism – This Wesleyan-influenced movement called individuals to right the ills of society, such as poverty, unfair labor practices, alcohol abuse, inadequate housing and racial divisions. Christian leaders such as Charles G. Finney believed that churches could not grow in faith while ignoring social needs.

Key points: *spiritual maturity depended upon helping those in need*

Social Gospel – this approach emerged following the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century in which new pockets of poverty developed in North American urban centers. Walter Rauschenbusch and other social reformers taught that Christianity should be reflected in a faith that leads to the church's responsibility for social transformation. It was common for people who were wealthy to believe that people were poor because of individual choices, and this theology challenged that assumption.

Key points: *faith and one's spiritual growth results in social transformation*

»» Class discussion

We're beginning to see the many factors that can influence our personal and church response to providing for those in need.

- What new information on this subject did you learn today?
- What did you find most interesting? Disturbing? Surprising?
- How has your philosophy been shaped by these ways of thinking about poverty? Do you see your personal philosophy fitting, or not fitting, into these ideologies?
- What other perspectives do you believe shape our response to the needs of people around us?

»» Small group activity

Break into small groups with each choosing one of the following scriptural references (encourage use of different translations to enrich the discussion):

- 1 Corinthians 12:25-27
- Ephesians 2:8-10
- James 2:14-17



Authentic abundance does not lie in secured stockpiles of food or cash or influence or affection but in belonging to a community where we can give those goods to others who need them - and receive them from others when we are in need.

– Parker Palmer



To believe you can approach transcendence without drawing nearer in compassion to suffering humanity is to fool yourself. There can be no genuine personal religious conversion without a change in social attitude.

— William Sloane Coffin, *Credo*

In your group, explore how your scriptures address the three philosophies about care for the poor described in the text above. How do you see the influence of these philosophies on your understanding of these passages? Share your thoughts with the class when you reconvene.

» Context for Today

Ask a volunteer to read the scenario and then discuss the questions following:

Tom, a man in his 70s, had been volunteering weekly at a local food kitchen for almost five years. His job was to fill the glasses with ice at the front counter. Some 250 people a day came through the line to receive a hot, freshly made meal for a donation. Probably fewer than a handful ever had anything to donate.

Tom mentioned his volunteer work to a recent acquaintance. Joe, also a wealthy, retiree, was interested. "So most of these folks don't donate anything?" he asked.

"No, most can't, you know," Tom said.

"Do they come every day?" Joe asked.

"Yes, whenever we open the doors. For some, it's the only food they have for the day."

*Joe was quiet for a moment. "Well, how many of those do you think **could** pay but don't? I imagine many of them are just taking advantage of you all."*

Tom was surprised by this comment, but answered, "I guess that's between them and God. I'm just giving them a cool drink."

- Do you see elements of any of the three philosophies described in today's lesson in this scenario? What are they and how do they apply?
- Has there been a time in your service to others when you felt taken advantage of or that a recipient didn't deserve your charity? Describe.
- How does this experience influence how you provide service to people in need today?

» Silence before God

After the verses are read aloud, quietly reflect on today's focus verses. Think about a time in your life when someone helped you, or did not. What did that experience feel like? Did it change you in any way?

» Challenge

Choose one of the following options for the coming week:

- Use as your meditation this week the passage on Jesus washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper (John 13:1-10). Use commentaries to inform your study.
- Reflect on the times and ways throughout your life you have used your talents or finances to help those in need. What were the challenges? What were the blessings? Where are you currently in your life of service?

Key points from today's lesson

- Determining who merited care became the underpinning of most social and religious provision of care.
- Church and government passed responsibility for this provision of care back and forth.
- Merit and assignment of responsibility are not scriptural considerations; every person is deserving of care and every believer is responsible for offering it.



To find the kingdom is the easiest thing in the world but also the most difficult. Easy because it is all around you and within you, and all you have to do is reach out and take possession of it. Difficult because if you wish to possess the kingdom you may possess nothing else. That is, you must drop all inward leaning on any person or thing, withdrawing from them forever the power to thrill you, or excite you, or to give you a feeling of security or well-being. For this you first need to see with unflinching clarity this simple and shattering truth: Contrary to what your culture and religion have taught you, nothing, but absolutely nothing can make you happy. The moment you see that, you will stop moving from one job to another, one place, one spiritual technique, one guru to another. None of these things can give you a single minute of happiness.

— Anthony de Mello, *The Way to Love*



The Gospel is handed down from generation to generation but it must reach each one of us brand new, or not at all. If it is merely "tradition" and not news, it has not been preached or not heard - it is not Gospel.... If there is no risk in revelation, if there is no fear in it, if there is no challenge in it, if it is not a word which creates whole new worlds, and new beings, if it does not call into existence a new creature, our new self, then religion is dead and God is dead.

— Thomas Merton,
Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander



Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Four: Philosophies of Care

“Timeline of Social Ministry”

- 1536** First draft of the English Poor Laws
- 1834** Act of 1834 differentiated between the deserving and undeserving poor
- 1841** Dorothea Dix documents inadequate care for mentally ill, beginning with hospital in Cambridge, MA
- 1877** American Charity Organization, Buffalo, NY, was one of first attempts to help people with severe social problems in an organized and logical way
- 1889** Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr begin Hull House in Chicago. Such Settlement Houses addressed the causes of poverty and expanded jobs for the poor.
- 1929** Great Depression begins and lasts almost to the start of World War II in 1941.
Dust Bowl from 1935 to 1938 adds millions to the unemployed and displaced in America.
- 1933-41** FDR ushers in several initiatives including:
- The New Deal
 - National Labor Relations Act
 - Works Progress Administration
 - Social Security Act
 - Civilian Conservation Corps
- 1964** Civil Rights Act passed; Title II and Title VII forbid racial discrimination in “public accommodations” and race and sex discrimination in employment
- 1965** Lyndon B. Johnson begins his War on Poverty in which he vows to overcome poverty and ushers in his vision of the “Great Society”:
- Voting Rights Act
 - Affirmative Action
 - Economic Opportunity Act
 - Older Americans Act
 - Administration for Children and Families
 - Medicare and Medicaid
 - Food Stamp Program
 - Elementary and Secondary School Education Act
- 1972-73** State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) introduce revenue sharing, direct aid to local communities
- 1975** Title XX of Social Security Act provides states with the flexibility to provide social services
- 1970s-‘80s** Moral conservatism of Republican party; Moral Majority’s influence increases and begins to impact national political agenda; government begins legislating moral values
- 1990s-2000** “Compassionate conservatism” of George H.W. Bush
- 1996** Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which established Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in 1997, effectively ending welfare as entitlement.
- Bill Clinton opens Faith-Based Initiatives Office, which doesn’t become fully active until George W. Bush’s administration

Source: Adapted from *Social Work in the 21st Century*, Morley D. Glicken, Sage Publications Inc., (2007)



Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Four: Philosophies of Care

“Perspectives of Care”

The historic role of the church

The history and the mission of the church to provide care for the poor; society saw that as the church's role and responsibility. Before the 1500s, this charity was not governmentally administered or controlled. It was a complete separation of church and state. It was a means for providing help based on the relationships of one social class to another. Consequently, the giver of the aid assumed a position of power and authority over the recipient of the aid. In this early church, it was the Catholic church that provided alms to the poor, shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, care for the sick and the imprisoned, and care for widows and orphans.

Early Protestants

When the colonists arrived in the new territory that would become America, they brought the English Poor Laws with them, but with some significant differences. In the colonies, labor was scarce, so it was theorized that everyone could work – and every hand was needed. Second, there were no organized charitable relief organizations – not until the end of the 18th century. Third, churches insisted on individual effort (the value placed on hard work) and believed that relief to the poor contributed to the spiritual ruin of the poor. This was a major shift in how the church viewed its responsibility to meet the needs of the poor.

In the 1600s, care for the poor became the responsibility primarily of local towns, relatives and communities. Still, there was great value placed on hard work – a belief system we visited in last week's Protestant Work Ethic. In the 1700s, the American social welfare system began to develop as the church system took a less formal role in providing aid to the poor. In the 18th and 19th centuries, charitable organizations and voluntary societies began to form to provide assistance to the poor. Also during this period, denominations began to address social problems in a more systematic way.

Evangelicalism Movement and the Great Awakening

During this same period, the Evangelicalism Movement and the Great Awakening gained momentum and emphasized mutual responsibility between the wealthy and the poor: the wealthy should give because there was need; the poor should be grateful to the wealthy and work hard.

As the young nation industrialized, populations moved into the cities. Voluntary societies no longer could handle the multitude of problems that came with urbanization, and so social welfare services were formalized into the profession of social work. The Charity Organization Society and the Settlement House Movement were important milestones in the development of this new profession. The COS adopted social Darwinism and its tenet of “survival of the fittest.” It was believed a better world could be created by “containing” people afflicted with problems such as poverty, mental, emotional or physical disabilities, and those of races other than white. Thus science and religion joined in legitimizing institutionalization – warehousing people in inadequate and dehumanizing conditions.



The Social Gospel Movement

One of the most popular proponents of this religious theory was a German Baptist pastor named Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918). A pastor in the Hell's Kitchen area of New York City, he recognized that traditional Sunday preaching, education and revivals were making little difference in the lives of people in his community. He argued that the gospel must be lived on a daily basis among those experiencing social ills if it was to change lives and transform communities. This movement had greatest acceptance in the industrial cities of the North.

Other approaches

Not all church leaders believed it was their responsibility to care for the poor. Famous revivalist preachers such as Dwight Moody (1837-1899) and Billy Sunday (1863-1935) thought that social issues were a distraction from the real mission of the church – saving souls.

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Focus verses

"Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"
James 2:5 (TNIV)

"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."
2 Cor. 8:12 (TNIV)

Teaching Leaflet E
"Recent History:
Turbulent Decades"

Teaching Leaflet F
"Response in
Recent History"

LEGACIES OF CARE

LESSON FIVE: THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

Opening prayer

*Be converted to love every day.
Change all your energies,
all your potential,
into selfless gifts for the other person.
Then you yourself will be changed from within
and through you
God's kingdom will break into the world.*

— Anonymous

Introduction to the lesson

We have been following through history two primary concepts of caring for others, both of which have shaped and determined our society's approach to social welfare. One is based on the concept of merit, i.e., a judgment about who is worthy to receive care. The other is based on determining whose responsibility it is to provide this care – church or government.

We now look at the more recent past, from the Great Depression through faith-based initiatives introduced in the 1990s. (*Additional information is available in the Teaching Leaflet E titled "Recent History: Turbulent Decades."*)

Last week's challenge

Share from the challenge you chose to do during this past week.

A brief recap

Up until this time in America, the generally accepted theory about those who were poor was that everyone *could* work and make something of him or herself; if they did not, it was either because they physically were not able to or they willfully chose a life of sin and sloth.

Throughout history and these studies, we have seen that initially, under Constantine, the church and government were one. With the separation of the two institutions, there has been a continuous tension regarding their roles in the provision of services to those in need. Various forms of care, i.e., orphanages, hospitals, educational systems, and systemic care for the imprisoned, initially were operated by or within churches. Since the Reformation, though, there has been an ongoing push/pull factor between the church and government.

The strain of providing care for people in need has been too much in every era for the church alone. Who responds to society's needs – the church or government – still is a major challenge and continues to be played out today. (*More information is available in Teaching Leaflet F titled "Response in Recent History."*)



The important question to ask is not, "What do you believe?" but "What difference does it make that you believe?" Does the world come nearer to the dream of God because of what you believe?

—Verna Dozier, *The Dream of God*

The Great Depression

When America was thrown into economic ruin in the Great Depression, government systems upon which the nation's citizens had depended disintegrated. Suddenly, *all* were poor; and the myth of the "worthy" and the "unworthy" poor crumbled. This was truly a revelation for most people. No longer could poverty be defined by a person's individual flaws or lifestyle. The Great Depression became the great equalizer on the topic of poverty.

» Class discussion

Some in your class may remember living through the Depression as a child. Others may have stories about that time told to them by parents or grandparents. Share these memories.

- What, if any life lessons, were learned because of the Great Depression?
- How do they impact lives today?
- Relate these memories to today's focus verses.

Post-WWII and beyond

The last six decades of America's history have been a rollercoaster ride of societal and cultural events. Beginning with WWII, we have been involved in four wars. We have experienced great prosperity and great poverty. The awareness during the Great Depression that environmental situations could place everyone in need was forgotten. Once again, the country, and so many of us as individuals, returned to a perspective of determining who was and was not worthy of receiving help.

During these years, the fabric of our society has raveled and ripped as inequity between the poor and the rich, racial tensions, involvement in conflict and distrust in government escalated. Many Protestant churches turned inward, choosing to ignore the conflict and societal pressures outside their stained glass windows. The African-American churches of the 1960s were an exception. They, with a young Martin Luther King Jr. as their leader, pressured the government for civil rights, equality and social reform.

» Class exercise

Review and discuss Teaching Leaflet F, "Response in Recent History." Share specific memories class members have of these eras. Ask the following questions:

- Which actions or legislation seem scripturally based?
- Throughout these decades, which American leader/s do you think had the best ideas for helping people in need regain independence from welfare?
- In recent history it has become more widely accepted for churches and religiously affiliated agencies to be the providers of help for the poor. Do you think that is the better approach? Why or why not? Can the church provide better care than the government or not?

Where we are today

For the past decade, as a result of Charitable Choice components of Welfare Reform legislation, the discussion about whose responsibility it is to provide social welfare systems has been renewed. As we know from this study, it is a debate as old as time itself.

While the political rhetoric on this issue continues, some churches have taken seriously the challenge of recent administrations to increase its involvement in addressing social welfare needs. Programming by these churches focuses on moving those who are poor from a position of dependence to a position of independence and self-sufficiency, i.e., the “welfare-to-work” approach.

The church’s response

Unique to the calling and mission of the church is the gospel story. Throughout history, the church has taken that mission seriously, and we see that in both individual and local church efforts as well as in national, denominational initiatives.

We are on the cusp of a new era in our society as it pertains to care for the poor and the “stranger” among us. In innovative and grace-filled ways, individuals, churches and religiously based agencies are “walking alongside” individuals in need. They are stepping out in faith to do an “impossible” work – a God-sized mission.

Volunteers may serve as mentors and educators teaching life and work skills and spiritual values in ways that research has shown is respectful of individual religious beliefs and values. The church is beginning to demonstrate a refreshing ability to think unconventionally about how to partner with other agencies and groups to meet needs.

With this revitalized sense of purpose has come a hunger from churches to learn more about how to assess, design, implement and sustain effective community ministry programs. The occasional food basket or toys for children at Christmas may no longer be enough for church members who desire not only to meet immediate needs but to transform lives – including their own.

Our prayer is that we are returning to Jesus’ example of radical love, where there is no concept of merit and no assignment of responsibility for provision of that care to one system or another. We are all called to love our neighbors – every single one of them. What remains to be seen - and truly has never been fully examined - is if individuals, churches and governments can find ways to work together.

In the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that what we do for “one of the least of these brothers of mine,” we do also for him (v. 40: NIV). Look deeply enough at the person beside you, and you will see Jesus.

The early Macedonian churches

For further encouragement in this God-sized mission, revisit 2 Cor. 8 and Paul’s report to the brothers of “the grace that God has given” them (v. 1; NIV). The poverty and trial they were experiencing in the churches was extreme, yet with “overflowing joy,” they begged for the “privilege” of participating in the collection for the poor saints of Jerusalem. Paul notes that “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (v. 5). It is the churches’ willingness, despite their circumstances and regardless of the amount they could give, that made their gift so excellent (see v. 12). Nor did they ask for a collection for themselves; they gave to others. As Paul writes to Titus, and to our churches today, “see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (v. 7).



*... God will act in us
and through us to renew
the Church by prepar-
ing, in prayer, what we
cannot yet imagine or
understand. In this way
our prayer and faith
today will be oriented
toward the future which
we ourselves may never
see fully realized on
earth.*

*- Thomas Merton
from Contemplation in
a World of Action*



Silence before God

We all have reasons for not trying something new or risky. If you could imagine one single way to help one person in need, what would it be? What would keep you from doing it? Ask the Spirit to lead you in this exploration.

Key points from today's lesson

- Throughout history, the church has quietly carried out its mission of helping those in need.
- Because the church is also a segment of society, it too has struggled with ideological and theological differences. Because of limited resources, the church also has made choices about who should or should not receive care.
- We are experiencing a renewed emphasis on divesting the federal and state government of its responsibility to provide care for those in need and returning it more deliberately to the church and religiously affiliated agencies.
- Many believe that the societal needs are so great that this approach will not be sufficient.
- It is our willingness to give, not the amount or the results of giving, that makes the gift acceptable to God.

Challenge

Choose from the following options for the coming week:

- Make an effort this week to learn more about the immigration situation in your church's neighborhood. Talk to city or local government leaders. Research on the Internet. Call your denomination office and ask what materials they have on this topic.
- Meditate on the words "stranger," "alien" and "neighbor." Have you been in situations when you felt or were treated as any of these? Explore the emotions and reactions in those situations.
- Finish each devotional time this week with this prayer: "God, what would you have me do?" Write down any direction you feel you receive.



If the gospel is about transformation, how is it that two thousand years of proclamation have had so little effect? How is it that the gospel of Jesus Christ, so far from producing radical change, has instead become a cloak for avarice and arrogance, for a willful deafness to the cry of the poor and of the earth itself? ... It is only possible to speak of the gospel as a source for a remedy of the planetary crisis that we face if we are talking about a gospel that makes possible, indeed requires and in fact produces, a radical and visible transformation in all dimensions of life. Only a gospel that produces holiness, scriptural holiness, can transform the economy of death - or rather, abolish it and give in its place something that can really be "good news to the poor."

— Theodore Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor*



Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Five: The Church's Response

“Recent History: Turbulent Decades”

The Great Depression

The stock market crash in 1929, the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl derailed the myth of American prosperity, success and indestructibility. The nation that viewed itself as “God’s Favored,” suddenly was thrust into economic ruin. Even the “worthy” found themselves bankrupt, homeless and waiting in soup lines. The structures that society had depended upon to support it, even for those who worked hard, had collapsed. In a few short months, all knew what it was like to be poor.

The church and individuals stepped into the gap as much as they were able. People shared what they had. They seemed to understand as they had not before that the unkempt man who knocked at the backdoor and asked if he could rake leaves for a sandwich could well be their father or brother or son. There was a rare unity and commonality inspired by the nation’s misfortune. Even government was not prepared for the economic devastation of this great depression! This served as the precursor for the creation of the Social Security Act of 1935.

Government to the rescue

Franklin D. Roosevelt, first elected president in 1932 and serving in that office until his death in 1945, ushered in unprecedented federal aid and assistance to lift a destitute nation to its feet. His New Deal included the Social Security Act, and his Works Project Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps put thousands of Americans back to work. Once again, every man had an opportunity to work and make his own way – all through efforts provided by the federal government. Women would not enter the workforce in any significant way until the World Wars of 1914 and 1941, and after the first war, they quickly returned home.

This period of time became the demarcation point in more recent contemporary society at which government accepted primary responsibility for the social welfare of its citizens. The idealization of the “work ethic” quickly returned as Roosevelt provided opportunity, and by the time America entered the Second World War, the concept of merit concerning the poor was firmly in place again. The Wars brought renewed prosperity to America; women stayed in the workforce following WWII, forever changing this economic dynamic; and the gap between the wealthy and the poor widened. Those on the welfare rolls of the nation rose dramatically.

The Sixties rock the nation

A number of societal forces shifted dramatically during the 1960s, shaking the nation and its citizens to their core. A spirit of anti-authoritarianism rocked the government, the church, political parties, inner cities and the culture. Racial tension between whites and African Americans escalated, women protested for equality in the workplace, free love and experimentation with hallucinatory drugs enchanted the nation’s youth. Meanwhile, anti-war sentiment against the United States’ engagement in Vietnam and distrust in the Nixon and then Johnson presidencies was unprecedented. The assassinations of three of the country’s brightest leaders – John F. Kennedy in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, and Robert F.

E

Kennedy in June 1968 – stunned the American people. Once again, the country was in chaos as the dependable systems of the past failed to adapt and respond to massively changing societal needs.



Although the white, Protestant churches in large part sidestepped the turbulence outside their narthex doors during this period, the African American churches did not. Their pastors and leaders pressured the government to address the issues of poverty and hunger, especially among African Americans. King's leadership in the Civil Rights Movement aroused the sleeping lion of inequality and racism.

Church involvement during this time included the initiation of many self-help programs to address teen pregnancy and substance abuse.

LBJ's War on Poverty

Several significant federal aid programs were begun during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 and his War on Poverty, which he envisioned would overcome poverty and usher in a Great Society, began in 1965. This legislation ushered in many of the social welfare systems we still rely upon today, including:

- Voting Rights Act
- Affirmative Action
- Economic Opportunity Act
- Older Americans Act
- Administration for Children and Families
- Medicare and Medicaid
- Food Stamp Program
- Elementary and Secondary School Education Act

Family values of the Seventies

The 1970s brought the Watergate Scandal, the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon, and the Iran Hostage Crisis during Jimmy Carter's administration. Economic recession and gas shortages created financial stress. The American Psychological Association issued a statement that homosexuality is not a mental illness, which created a new dialogue about the definition of family, with the gay agenda mobilizing on the heels of the APA announcement.

The Catholic Church, in response to these events and to the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision on abortion, aligned with the Republican Party, creating the morally conservative nature of the party. Many other mainline churches that previously had focused on social ministry began to focus more on internal structure, maintenance of programs and boosting membership (Hessel, 1992). The church also began relocating ministries to help individuals out of their buildings and relied on hired personnel instead of church volunteers to run the programs.

Reagonomics and The New Poor in the Eighties

Tired of chaos and the perceived moral decline, the nation elected Ronald Reagan for two terms as president beginning in 1980, welcoming his moral, social and economic conservatism. It was in this decade that the Moral Majority or Christian Right gained popularity and political power, championing – if not issuing the clarion call for – a return to morality and conservatism. This moralistic agenda resurrected the belief that individual flaws and weaknesses were the main reasons for the increasing numbers of people on the welfare rolls.

Reagan called for increased involvement from all sectors of U.S. society to address social welfare needs. In essence, he challenged the nonprofit sector and churches, in particular, to meet the social welfare needs of the country.

His economic mandate called for extreme budget cuts in education, job training, public service employment and social services. Despite his assurances that people in need would not suffer, Reagonomics created what became known as "The New Poor." Individuals suffering with mental health problems who had been in institutions and hospitals were turned out into the streets, with no means to continue their medications and with no place to live. Homelessness in America escalated dramatically.

E Reagan's policies were influenced by the work of Marvin Olasky, a journalism professor at the University of Texas, who researched the work of the church in meeting the needs of the poor during the Great Depression. Olasky was a proponent then and now that the church is more successful in meeting social welfare needs than the government. He believed that if the churches could meet the needs of so many people during the Great Depression, then it could surely meet the needs of the poor in today's society. This ideological perspective was the start of what has continued to impact the nation's response to those in need from the early days of Reagan's presidency into the first decade of the 21st century.

Reagan's ambitious attempt in the 1980s to scale back the welfare state failed because of public opposition, but the groundwork he laid would influence Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush in the succeeding years.

Compassionate Conservatism: The Nineties

George H.W. Bush continued to emphasize conservative values, which included an attack on the "culture" of welfare. He blamed liberals for this environment and the welfare state it created. He tried to make social welfare reform a state issue and promised to waive certain federal regulations to expedite this shift.

Bill Clinton assumed the presidency in 1992 promising to "end welfare as we know it." He proposed providing health care and job training to welfare recipients, requiring them to hold fulltime work within two years. Once again, Olasky was an influence on presidential policy-making. Olasky's 1992 book, *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, stated that the responsibility for caring for the poor should be moved away from the government to individuals and private organizations, including the church. He believed the church gave the most personalized care to the poor and also the strict discipline that he believed was needed, in some cases, to lift the poor out of poverty (Bartkowski & Regis, p. 4). Olasky's premise was based on the possible transformation of the poor so that they would no longer be dependent on the distribution of food, clothing, or shelter by any entity.

This "compassionate conservatism" led Congress to enact the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, which established Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in 1997, effectively ending 60 years of federal entitlement for poor families. This era created welfare-to-work programs as a way to effectively address general poverty and to move people from "generational poverty" to independence from government aid.

Clinton's administration also opened an office for Faith Based Initiatives, but it did not become fully active until George W. Bush's administration.

Faith-based initiatives

George W. Bush, with the support of the Christian Right, has continued the social agenda of the previous administrations. During his first term of office, the Faith Based Initiative Office was fully activated, preparing the way for churches and parachurch organizations to assume responsibility for many social welfare functions.

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Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Five: The Church's Response

“Responses in Recent History”

	Great Depression	WWII	1960s	1970s	1980 – 2000
<i>The poor</i>	All are poor, great equalizer; no “worthy” or “unworthy” poor	Returns to class system; economy rebounds with war	Divide b/t rich and poor increases; African Americans are disenfranchised	Gulf widens; mentally ill put on streets; homelessness escalates	Poverty increases; now have “generational poverty”
<i>Care for the poor</i>	Gov’t systems fail; individuals/ churches provide care as they are able	Fed gov’t increasingly provides care	Fed. gov’t carries primary responsibility	Reagan slashes social welfare budgets, creates “New Poor”	Gov’t & church share uneasy alliance, but gov’t still primary
<i>Culture</i>	Massive economic ruin; migration to West	Great prosperity after WWII	Anti-authoritarianism, racial tensions, anti-Vietnam war	Watergate, Iran Hostage, gas shortages, recession, Moral Majority, family values	Family values, anti-gay issues, distrust of government
<i>Leadership/ Legislation</i>	FDR’s New Deal puts nation back to work; Works Projects Adm., Civilian Cons. Corps	FDR’s programs continue	Assassination of key leaders (JFK, MLK, RFK); LBJ institutes second wave of welfare reform with his Great Society	Reaganomics calls for decreased gov’t provision for poor	Faith-based Initiative Office in DC; TANF, welfare-to-work programs

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Focus verses

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command:

Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

1 John 4:20-21 (NIV)

"Again, this is God's command: to believe in his personally named Son, Jesus Christ. He told us to love each other, in line with the original command. As we keep his command, we live deeply and surely in him, and he lives in us. And this is how we experience his deep and abiding presence in us: by the Spirit he gave us."

1 John 3

(The Message)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:16 (NIV)

Teaching Leaflet G
"Next Steps"

LEGACIES OF CARE

LESSON SIX: LOOKING FORWARD

Opening prayer

Listen!

*Something strains to be born
to shake itself free:
something brand new trembles
at the far edge of our minds:
the shape of a world to come
conceived in our present labor and pain.*

— "The Shape of a World to Come" by Catherine deVinck,
Poems of the Hidden Way

Introduction to the lesson

The "Legacies of Care" unit has given us a more comprehensive understanding of systemized responses to providing care and to the individual, religious or political reasons that have motivated care for those in need. Knowledge doesn't always translate to action. In this final lesson, let us see if, as deVinck writes, "something brand new trembles at the far edge of our minds."

Last week's challenge

Share from the challenge you chose to do during this past week.

The Gospel message

There are many ways to care for individuals and families in times of need. We show that we care by taking time to be with someone or by offering a meal or by praying for someone during a difficult time.

It is often harder to know how to care for groups of people. How do we make a meaningful difference in the lives of people who are homeless, who have immigrated here from another country, who are hungry or poor, illiterate or unemployed? Such life circumstances seem overwhelming and often cause us to leave their care to someone else — the government, nonprofit agencies or missionaries, for example.

The gospel makes clear, though, that caring for one another is personal and is not optional (Luke 10:25-35; 16:19-31). God's commandment is unequivocal and all inclusive: Love one another as I have loved you.

» Getting into the act

Following are three short scenes that each require three readers. After each scene is read aloud, respond to these questions:

- Do you see care being shown in this scene? By whom? How?
- What motivations, if any, do you see in those suggesting or providing the care? (Possible answers might include compassion, empathy, fear of change, ownership, caution, wisdom.)



The Holy Spirit writes
no more gospels
except in our hearts.
All we do from mo-
ment to moment is
live this new gospel
of the Holy Spirit. We,
if we are holy, are the
paper; our sufferings
and our actions are
the ink. The workings
of the Holy Spirit
are his pen, and with
it he writes a living
gospel.

– Jean Pierre de
Caussade,

- If you were in this scene, describe what your actions would be.
- Scriptures tell us Jesus lives in each of us; describe the Jesus you see in each of the characters in the scene.

Scene One: Doing Our Part

Narrator: George and Bill are two elderly men who have attended church all of their lives. Both have lost their wives within the past three years. This Sunday morning, they are on the way to the Men's Bible Class when they stop to read a poster on the church bulletin board.

George: What do you think this poverty class is they're promoting?

Bill (with a chuckle): I hope it's to tell us how to live on a fixed income!

George: Look at this. Did you know most people in the world live on less than \$2 a day? Maybe we should look into this class.

Bill: Nah, that's for the young folks. Let them fix the world's problems. We've already done our part.

Ask the questions above.

Scene Two: The Food Pantry

Narrator: Mary Elizabeth has run the church's food pantry for many years. She goes weekly to buy supplies for it, and attends every service committee meeting to make a report. She arranges for volunteers to staff the pantry, and if no one can come, she staffs it herself. She's sitting in a committee meeting now.

Pastor: The church believes we're being called to expand our food pantry ministry to reach a larger group of people in the community, and today we're going to discuss that option.

Mary Elizabeth: But we already serve some 20 people a week. We can barely provide for them. How could we expand it?

Pastor: Well, we might look at partnering with other church food pantries in the area – combine our resources to offer more food, more volunteers, more visibility to get the word out.

Mary Elizabeth: But this is our ministry. I don't think that's a good idea.

Ask the questions above.

Scene Three: Strangers Among Us

Narrator: Charlie and Maria Atkinson are a young married couple who joined the church two months ago. Maria is an immigrant from Colombia whom Charlie met in college. They have a heart for others who have come to the United States and are trying to get their citizenship and establish a new life. The Atkinsons are meeting with their pastor to discuss this issue.

Charlie: So, that's why we want to start an outreach program here at the church ... to begin an English as a Second Language class and to refer people to agencies in town that can help them with their legal papers. What do you think?

Pastor: Well, those are fine ideas, Charlie, but you're talking about a lot of work. Where would we do this – we don't have much unused space. How would we staff this?

Maria: There are ways if we just have faith! This ministry is needed now!

Pastor: Yes, but let's begin more slowly, do our research, meet with those interested in this issue in the church. Let's plan as well as pray so the effort won't collapse six months down the road.

Ask the questions above.

The Spirit's leading

Information only has value as we let it filter through our minds and into our hearts. It has often been said that the longest distance is the 16 inches from our minds to our hearts, yet Jesus tells us "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37; NIV).

What we've studied so far explores what we know about our neighbor, whether what we know is scripturally based or socially based, and where our own ideas and beliefs about caring for those in need may originate.

Many of our churches are filled with people like George and Mary Elizabeth and Charlie and Maria whose hearts are opened wide, who serve faithfully in the best ways they know, and who sincerely desire to model Jesus' teachings of compassion and mercy. All of us worship and serve among a great cloud of witnesses from ages past to the present day.

Yet, as we mature in our spiritual journey of faith, there will be moments when the "gentle and quiet whisper" of God, as *The Message* says in 1 Kings 19, catches our attention. It may be a thought that won't go away or an idea that begins to take shape. We have purposely encouraged awareness of the Holy Spirit's leading throughout this unit of study. As Jesus taught us, it is first and always a person's relationship with the Divine that inspires obedience through action. The Spirit walks alongside us every step of our journeys.

Obedient to love

While we were sinners, undeserving of God's mercy, God chose to love us. God lives in us and that love is made complete in us. We are all one in the love of God, all "aliens and strangers on earth." Because we believe in God, we "are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 2:8).

Out of this joy and gratitude, we offer our hands and feet, hearts and minds to care for one another. This love is our offering of thanksgiving to the Living God of all. We step out in faith, knowing and relying on the love God has for us (1 John 4:16). It is not ours to know the end result of our actions; it is often not ours even to know the next step! The Spirit moves before us and informs us on a need-to-know basis. We trust the end results to God.



The church founded by Jesus is intended to be the embodiment, the incarnation, of who he is so that he might be seen, discovered, known, experienced in the local corporate life of those who have been invaded by him. I emphasize the word local. What would a true expression of Christ's body look like today, in the neighborhoods where we live, if it really embodied the essence of Jesus lived out corporately?

I think the central question for those of us who are in Christ and are eager to obey his "follow me" is how to be authentic church in the 21st century. How can we learn from our unfaithfulness to God's covenant in the past? How can we embody, incarnate, become the local expression of Christ's body now?

*N. Gordon Cosby,
Sermon*



Class exercise

Share your thoughts on what you've learned and experienced in the past weeks.

- Do you feel or believe differently in any way about helping the poor?
- What excites or frightens you about what you've learned?
- What confuses or inspires you?
- Do you feel challenged in a different way personally?
- Where would you like to see your church go from here?
- What would it take to get there?



Silence before God

Dream about next steps for the ministries of your church. What would they look like? What would be your role in them?

Next steps

Finish this unit by filling out Teaching Leaflet F titled "Next Steps" and returning it to your class leader.

Read this closing prayer together

*Lord, open our hearts wide
 may our compassion and capacity to care
 be far greater than we are,
 may our fears and concerns and hesitations
 evaporate as mist
 in the light of your Son.
 Lord, our lives are yours
 Lead us to give them away with abandon
 in your name and for your glory. Amen.*

—V. M. Kabat



When we come to a clear understanding that we are all brothers and sisters in the house of God – whatever our race, religion, or nationality – we realize that in God there is no distinction between haves and have-nots. We all have gifts to offer and a need to receive. I am increasingly convinced that one of the greatest missionary tasks is to receive the fruits of the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering as gifts offered for the salvation of the rich!

— Lifesigns by Henri J.M. Nouwen



Teaching Leaflet

Legacies of Care Lesson Six: Looking Forward

“Next Steps”

Where would you like to go from here?

- ☐ I would like to continue with the next Walking Alongside unit of study, “Biblical Foundations of Ministry.”
- ☐ I would like for these studies to be taught churchwide.
- ☐ I want to spend more time learning about what my church does to help others and how I can be involved with those ministries.
- ☐ I would like to volunteer in an existing church ministry.
- ☐ I would like to talk to the pastor about a new ministry.

Please contact me:

(name): _____ (phone) _____

WALKING ALONGSIDE

ADDRESSING POVERTY IN COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

PARTICIPANT EVALUATION



Help us improve the “Legacies of Care” study.

_____ I was able to relate and engage with the information, even though much of it was new to me.

_____ There was too much/too little information.

I especially enjoyed:

_____ Context for today

_____ Small group discussions

_____ Challenge

_____ Other

_____ Silence before God

_____ Background information

_____ The charts and Teaching Leaflets provided enough/not enough background.

_____ The lessons were easy for the class leader to present. If not, what would improve them? _____

_____ I wish there had been more time for: _____

_____ I wish we had spent less time on: _____

_____ I liked/disliked the quotations from ancient and contemporary theologians.

_____ I visited the Walking Alongside Web site to get more information.

_____ The study challenged me in unexpected ways? If so, how?

_____ The study disappointed me, because _____

Other comments: _____

Please return to: Vicki M. Kabat

Center for Family and Community Ministries

Baylor School of Social Work

PO Box 97320

Waco, TX 76798-7320

