

Caring for the Flock April 26, 2026

Intro: the highlights of 36 years of ministry. **PAC** where I served for 6 years, getting a call, on a Sunday morning, no less, from a nurse, who attended the church; in a labor and delivery of the local hospital unit to help a couple who was trusting the Lord to provide a child through adoption since they were childless; walking into a hospital room that husband and wife 9 months into pregnancy finding out their child was dead, still in the mother's womb. **VVAC**, where I served for 20 years; walking out of the hospital with a friend who had done everything he could do to help his wife's battle with cancer after she had just taken her last breath on earth; and helping a local family, who were not connected to our church, have a memorial service for their fallen son. He was one of the early casualties who gave his life for our nation in Iraq. **TVC** participating in memorial services for those we only got to know in the sunset of their lives; helping at least three different Shell Point teams deal with sudden, unexpected loss of a coworker, and going to more 90 and 100 years old birthdays than I ever dreamed of.

All of these had one thing in common: during them and especially after them, **others were around them caring for them**. Caring for one another is not always fun nor easy; no one ever said it would be. However, the degree of difficulty does not remove the responsibility. And in God's economy, it is front and center... especially in the church.

Let's go back, back to the beginning

God created the heavens and the earth. And he created man and women to live here. He created a garden as a provision for Adam & Eve, providing work, food, and connection place with God (**Gen.3.8** Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...). God knew that he needed to care for the humans he created. In fact, he continues to sustain all life on the earth (**Acts 17.25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.), which means he continues to provide all that we need. We are absolutely dependent on his care, both for our physical needs and our spiritual ones, as well. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, and God's gracious response to their choice, we need a Savior who will provide (care) for the biggest need of all, forgiveness.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to love one another as ourselves. The Bible is full of both commands and examples about our relationship to one another.

Love One Another (John 15.12)

Honor One Another (Romans 12.10)

Greet One Another (Romans 16.16)

Have Fellowship with One Another (1 John 1.7)

Be Kind to One Another (Ephesians 4.32)

Forgive One Another (Colossians 3.13)

Care for One Another (1 Corinthians 12.25)

Live in Harmony with One Another (Romans 12.16)

Pray for One Another (James 5.16)

are just a few of the “one anothers” in scripture. Some lists are as many as 35 (or more) descriptions of the care we, as followers of Jesus, should be exhibiting in our lives. That’s why the word “community” is an integral word in our Mission Statement. “We are building a community” reminds us that the work in progress here at The Village Church is not just with our individual lives but with our communal lives as well. Among other things, the church gives us the opportunity to exercise the growing faith he has given us. An example in our own context comes when we are asked to evacuate our homes because of an impending storm. Three times Eleanore and I have joined with 1000 or more of our closest friends on the second floor of the parking garage to stay safe during a hurricane. Each time we are amazed at the way in which the residents of our community care for one another in that unique setting. And not only residents, but to see the sacrificial service of our Shell Point team members providing for all our needs during that time, recognizing that they have wives and children at home while they are serving us here. That’s a community that truly cares for one another.

If you are a Shell Point Retirement Community resident, you experience its many facets of care:

- Healthy Living Coordinators, auxiliary, chaplaincy, and court reps.
- The Larsen Health Center with its physicians, rehab professionals, nursing aides, activity coordinators, and skilled nursing team

How do we care for one another in The Village Church? Let me tell you some of the ways:

- Provide weekly opportunities to worship God in our Sunday Services. These are gathering opportunities.
- Teaching ministry of Pastor Andy and others from the pulpit
- Our Prayer Ministry on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday evening
- Small groups, Bible Studies, CLS classes, Church Library
- Deaconesses' visitation
- Women's Connections events
- Hospital visitation and Healing Services
- New connections visitation
- Individual, creative caring that happens all the time (this week)

In addition, 9 years ago, the Elders decided to develop a new model for shepherding. Scripture is very clear on their responsibility, given by God, to care for His children. It's based on **1 Peter 5:1-4**, which is as follows:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

The Command: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care

The Right and Wrong Way:

- not because you must, but because you are willing...not a duty, but a demonstration of love
- not greedy for money, but eager to serve...sacrifice self for others
- not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock...treating you sheep the way you would want to be treated

The Reward: you will receive the crown of glory...Jesus will reward (incentive) shepherds for their ministry!

Taking into account the uniqueness of The Village Church, a purpose statement was developed for our Shepherding Ministry: **To provide elder support, encouragement, and assistance to those associated with The Village Church as a part of its mission of forgiveness purpose and hope.** We began first with those who were members, both regular and associate, of our church and divided them between the 21 Governing and Shepherding Elders. It was a hefty load initially, with some 400 members divided amongst the elders, with each shepherd having almost 20 (or more) sheep. We tried as much as possible to build on existing relationships when we started, certain it would make it easier if connections were already in place. We also used geographic location, knowing that having a shepherd who lived close by would be advantageous. We continue to use those strategies.

Thankfully, in recent years, we have added to the number of Shepherding Elders, from 9 to 18. In addition, last year the Governing Elders decided to add to our number of shepherds by creating a position called Lay Shepherd to increase the coverage and effectiveness of our shepherding ministry. Amenable to a specific Elder, we now have 5 spiritually qualified women that are shepherds to other women in our church. The Governing Elders recognized that having a female shepherd option for other women, especially those who are single, would be a blessing to the entire church. In fact, if there are any women who already have a shepherd that are interested in this option, let the young ladies at the table in the Lobby know and we will help you. In addition, because of the current number of shepherds, we are able to add some Regular Attenders to our Shepherding Ministry. If you are not a member but are interested in having a shepherd, please let the young ladies know and we'll see what we can do. As of today, we are shepherding 385 sheep at The Village Church, with 35 shepherds.

What are shepherds at The Village Church asked to do? We have had, and continue to have, a lot of discussion about this. Scripture does not give specific instructions on the activity of shepherds. When we began, we considered a number of unique qualities of our church, our shepherds, and our sheep, and decided that simplicity would be our target. The shepherds are asked, in their role as shepherds, to do two things: pray for their sheep and connect with their sheep so that they are praying effectively.

Our denomination, The Christian & Missionary Alliance, lists prayer as one of our Core Values: **Prayer is the Primary Work: It is the foundational work of God's people.** If you look on the wall in our Lobby, where our Core Values are displayed, you will find the following: **The Work of Prayer, the unreserved dependance on the practice of prayer.** God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the best caregivers ever, and the prayers of our shepherds on your behalf are where great care begins.

In addition, Jesus said in John 10, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." We want your shepherd to know who you are, some things about you, some blessings you've experienced and challenges you've faced (and still face). We want your shepherd to know his sheep so that their prayers on your behalf truly reflect what you are facing. If that's the case, you will have continued opportunity to maintain and strengthen your relationship with your shepherd. You will be cared for, from God, through your shepherd.

Truth be told, it would have been a lot easier to give every shepherd the exact same strategy in order to be successful. One size fits all! Like "create a group, get them together every other week or once a month, led a devotional, and pray together. And don't forget to feed them. That's it!" However, we chose to trust the shepherd to figure out the best way to connect with and pray for their sheep. Taking into account their availability, their personality, their sheep, they decide what works best. Some of our shepherds meet one-on-one with their sheep, some use the telephone, some email and text, some get their sheep together in a group. If it works for the shepherd and the sheep, go for it. However, it probably means that your shepherd isn't doing what another shepherd does. "O, I wish my shepherd baked bread for his or her sheep on their birthday." Yes, that does happen! But remember, you have a relationship with your shepherd who is praying for you.

How about the role of the sheep? Remember: keep it simple. Pray for your shepherd and connect with your shepherd so that your prayers are spot-on. Unlike real sheep in a field, who are not made in the image of God and don't speak our language, you are a fellow Christ-follower who is trying to love God and others every day. You should be thankful that Jesus has decided that He could delegate some of his shepherding responsibilities to qualified leaders in the church in order to care for His flock. Stay connected with your shepherd. Let them know what's going on. Encourage your shepherd. Pray for them. Ideal shepherding should be a two-way relationship with both the shepherd and the sheep playing their God-given role. If you are not connecting with your shepherd, if the relationship just isn't working, let me know and I will help you.

Bringing this to an end, just a friendly reminder that all of the shepherds in The Village Church are imperfect. And not only that, but all the sheep in our church are also imperfect as well. Thankfully, we all, both shepherds and sheep, have a Chief Shepherd who is watching over everything that's going on. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd, because he laid down his life for the sheep. He paid the penalty for our sin and invited us to join his herd. Let's close by speaking, in unison, the psalm we all know that describes our Shepherd.

Psalm 23 (Read by congregation in unison)

The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me;

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Let's pray...