

Pastoral Care in Life Groups at Coro – Notes from Training Session (April 2020)

[Colossians 3:12-17](#) - beautiful picture of communal life together - more tricky to express this at the moment, but important to keep thinking about the key elements of what we're trying to be as we are a fellowship together

Role of Life Group leaders in pastoral care

- Often first people to know about issues, but not expected to carry all the burden
- Two ways in which we can pastorally care for our groups and group members: proactive and reaction

Proactive pastoral care

- How people deal with crisis is often impacted significantly by their maturity in Christ
- Strong foundations in Christ can prevent the pastoral crisis from also becoming a faith crisis
- Example of someone being able to say: "My world has fallen apart, but my worldview hasn't"
- Lots of faith questions can only be dealt with when people are feeling okay and have time and headspace to ask questions, think deeply - crisis often robs our ability to focus and hold complex thoughts in mind
- Don Carson (New Testament scholar) is excellent on this: he argues that any human living in this broken world will eventually encounter evil or suffering in some form, and he identifies six theological pillars that need to be in place before that time to help people deal well. His book, 'How long, O Lord?' covers these, and also a [one hour talk on the topic](#):
- Finally, it's important to create an environment in your group where people trust each other and feel safe enough to share deeply and vulnerably. If a group member is dealing with very raw or large issues, it may be necessary for the group to protect other members who may be unsettled by these issues - splitting into prayer triplets to protect sensitive members or providing other spaces for the person who needs to share, etc, can be helpful

Reactive pastoral care (when a crisis or pastoral issue emerges)

- You don't need to be the expert or deal with this by yourself, especially if you feel out of depth or overwhelmed yourself - knowing the available resources is helpful. Here are some useful ones:
 - Always please feel free to talk to the **Staff, Pastoral Care Team or Elders** at Coro
 - The **Coro pastoral care email**, pastoralcare@corouniting.org, goes to the head of the pastoral care team and to the pastoral staff
 - There is a group of **people who pray regularly for the church** and pastoral issues, on Wednesday mornings. You can phone or message Trish Roberts to ask for items to be included in this prayer list
 - During the COVID-19 crisis, the government has set up a support line for anyone feeling overwhelmed, distressed or needing **mental health support related to the COVID-19 pandemic**, available 8am-8pm seven days per week

- For **mental health emergencies**, people can call the mental health triage on 13 14 65 - this enables them to do an assessment on the phone which can potentially avoid a long wait in the ED
- Apparently, the government is currently offering a **full rebate on Mental Health Care plans**, so cost should not be an issue for anyone wanting to see a psychologist for support
- Some notes about referring or connecting others with resources:
 - Be discrete and appropriate with what you know, and make sure that the person you are seeking to help is happy for you to let others know what is happening
 - Make sure that if someone is speaking about issues covered by mandatory reporting such as child abuse, you alert them to the fact that you will need to disclose this information
- Practical care can take the form of meals, shopping, washing, child-care, etc - it can be good to suggest practical ways rather than asking how you can help
- One of the best supports that church members can offer each other in crisis is to listen well. Asking good, open questions and allowing the person to share - being a non-anxious presence - can be a great gift. You might also like to encourage the group as a whole to offer this, or for the individual to develop a network of listeners, so that it doesn't always fall to you/the same people

During our current crisis

- You may find groups are willing and eager to meet more frequently, but for shorter amounts of time. Online catch-ups can be wonderful, but most people would feel drained after a 2 hour session!
- Expect that pastoral crises in our church may become more frequent: with so much added anxiety, strain, restrictions, tensions in households, financial pressures, the onset of winter and especially if we start to see more community transmission of COVID-19. Setting up structures and leadership in your group that doesn't rely on one person is a good idea
- Please attend to your own spiritual well-being, self-care and support networks. Our groups will all be better served if our leaders are in a good place! (And we want you to be in a good place for your own sake as well)
 - Our Elders have each 'adopted' a few Life Group leaders to check in with more frequently than I would be able to care for each of you. You should receive an email, text, call or some form of contact in the next little while, if you haven't already
- One of the best ideas for pastoral care is just getting group members to identify what their needs are and how others might be able to serve them. For those who have practical needs and especially in groups where many are self-isolating entirely, the young adults at church have indicated that they are happy to do shopping or similar tasks for those who are unable
- Many groups are finding it helpful to use a combination of phone calls, WhatsApp groups and Zoom to facilitate the individual connections, brief check-ins and casual sharing and deeper connection and Bible input