

## Living As A Welcoming and Compassionate Church, Group, or School Lynn Ripley

### Welcome

It always felt like home. So even today when I am in Michigan, I drive by the church and school that were a major part of my growing up years. What was welcoming? First, not only did people smile when I came in the door, they knew enough of my story to ask encouraging questions. "How is Pal doing with his new friend, Penny?"

Pal was my collie dog and best friend. Penny was a new puppy my Dad brought me for my birthday. That the Pastor and my Sabbath school teacher would know enough to want to hear about this part of my life made church home.

Our God given mission and vision statement invites us to truly become "healthy vibrant churches that actively connect the people in their communities to Jesus." Total Member Involvement is a key to a welcoming culture in our churches, church groups, new church plants, schools, and care homes. This is because it takes all of us, young and older, boys and girls, women and men, to reflect joy and caring to those whom the Lord will send.

### Compassion

Jesus' example, as One who came to serve, has drawn us to Himself and His advent message. *"Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom... When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless..." Matthew 9:36-38.*

We learn from Him how to truly serve others. In this Scripture, we can see why all people were drawn to Him. He knows each of our stories and is deeply interested. He was even able to take Saul, a radical sceptic and persecutor of the Way and fill his heart with compassion. Saul became Paul, the Lord's witness who helped many people meet Jesus.

Paul's life change is reflected in Philippians 1:7-8. *"So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God... in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus."*

### Healthy, Vibrant Churches and Schools

How can Jesus' welcome and compassion become a welcoming culture in our Man-Sask ministries? Here is a practical Bible study based on one found in *Experiencing God* (Blackaby & King pp. 218-219). It will help you and your church or school enfold new people and better care for the current members of your group. I would invite you to use it in a small group, Sabbath school class, or prayer meeting.

Read each of the following Scriptures together. Discuss them and under each one write a brief statement or summary of God's will for relationships in the church body the group found in that text. You may want to look at the context of these verses as well.

- a. Romans 14:1,12-13  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- b. 1 Corinthians 10:24  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Ephesians 4:25  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Ephesians 4:29  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Ephesians 4:31-32  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- f. 1 Corinthians 10:24  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Ephesians 5:21  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Colossians 3:13-14  
God's will \_\_\_\_\_

These texts, and many more, give us principles that speak specifically of ways God's people ought to live in relation to others. These guidelines teach us how to live Jesus' example. (They lead us beyond study, memorization, discussion, and debate.) When you have doubts about how to apply a Scripture, take your concern to the Lord. His Spirit can help you understand spiritual truth and give you opportunities to act on it.

Now take some time as a group to discuss these summary statements below. How did they match or differ with what you may have written for your study of the texts above?

1. Be patient and accepting of those whose faith is weak or those who are immature.
2. Don't be quick to judge others or put them in categories especially in matters that are disputable.
3. Don't be selfish. Seek the good of others even at your own expense.
4. Be gentle and truthful in all you say.
5. Build people up through your interest in them and your interaction with them.
6. Be an encourager. Build people up. Keep their life and needs as you speak with them.
7. Forgive one another as Christ forgave you. Don't let a root of bitterness remain between you and another.
8. Get rid of anger, inside fighting, and slander. Don't intentionally try to hurt another person (physically, emotionally, or spiritually).
9. Encourage one another in your joint worship of God. Make music together.
10. Die to self daily and submit to one another. Do this in reverence for Christ, who submitted Himself to death on the cross for you.

11. Be patient with one another, even when you have been mistreated or offended. Forgive even the worst offenses as God does.
12. Love one another.

Decide how you as a group will act on what you have learned.

Who will you invite to your next group study time?

What act of welcome or compassion will each group member practice this week?

Plan a group outreach service activity in your community this month.

Close your time of fellowship in God's Word with United Prayer\*

\* Group members focus on each segment together with short, sentence prayers, Scripture thoughts, and songs

Praise God	4 minutes
Confession	2 minutes
Supplication	5 minutes
Thanksgiving	4 minutes

In Anticipation

May God help us reflect welcome and compassion into our communities. May we fully follow Jesus' method of connecting people to Him. *"When he saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless... He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send **us** [as] more workers into His fields"* Matthew 9:36-38.