

## Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

## Prayer and Praises

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## Introduction

This is the house of God, not just yours.

When we enter through the doors of Valley Ministries MCC, we are entering the sanctuary that God has given to us to feel safe from the judgment of others because of who we are. It is a place to feel loved and to feel like we are a part of the Body of Christ. In this sanctuary, we are all able to come together to worship, sing praises and pray to God. The **most** important reason that we come to Valley Ministries MCC, is to love God and to love one another. If we are here for any other reason, we are in the wrong place.

We should always feel safe upon entering our sanctuary, at all times. While it is sometimes difficult to withhold judgment or criticism of our friends/members, we still must love one another. As a community of faith we must build each other up and not tear each other down. Seventeenth-century English Puritan Richard Baxter reminds us of Hebrews 12 when he says, "All other sins destroy the church consequentially; but division and separation demolish it directly." In her article *Are Church Cliques Harmful to Your Spiritual Health?*, Jennifer LeClaire writes that while groups based on common interests are natural, when a group or clique becomes exclusive or elite—setting themselves apart from the rest of the congregation and tightly shutting up the entrance—it is harmful to church culture.

## Getting the Conversation Started

Some of the people who attend Valley Ministries MCC may have never felt shut out, always felt comfortable in their place in the church or maybe felt part of a “popular group”. We have to recognize that others have had experiences where they have felt unwelcome or shut out. For our church to grow and be healthy, it is important that we not only recognize this but talk about it and find solutions.

- It could be that new person that walks in the door and the first and second week they are welcomed and introduced around, but a month later forgotten.
- It could be the person that wants to sit in the front row and is told that the front row is reserved for the musicians.
- It could be the person that wants to be on a ministry team but even after asking about it, is never invited.

We must not forget, the church is not God. While God is the head, we are all parts of the church body. Every single one of us has an important role to fill if we are to grow and flourish. Not one role is more important or valuable than another.

In Ephesians 4:15-16 it says,

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

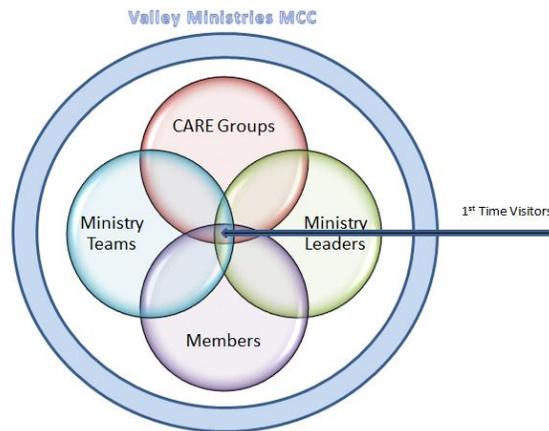
- Have you ever experienced feeling like an outsider at church or otherwise? If you feel comfortable, explain.
- Do you feel like you have been a part of a group that might have been perceived as “cliquey?” Did you do anything about it?

## Putting it All Together

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul writes,

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

While we may have various gifts and interests, no person or group is an island on its own. We are all joined together as the body of Christ.



Because Christ left His Spirit to live within us, the results of His working through us are very powerful. Through us:

- Our hands can soothe, as others sense God's touch.
- Our words can encourage, as others hear God's voice.
- Our presence can bring peace, as others sense God's compassion.
- Our eyes can bring hope, as others see God's light.
- Our hearts can bring healing, as others feel God's love.

Part of God's glorious plan to reach the world and bless the lives of others, is by working through God's people, the body of Christ. This includes Valley Ministries MCC.

Valley Ministries MCC has done some things to promote a warm and welcoming environment. We have a Welcome Team that greets new members as they walk in the door. We have name tags which were described as a "Welcome sign on the door of our heart" by one newer member.

We all have a responsibility to welcome others to the church. Not just the first time but in following weeks and even months. While the welcome team gets to them first, it is up to all of us to make everyone who walks in the door, feel the love of God, through us.

- As a church, what else can we do to make everyone feel welcome?
- As a CARE Group, what else can we do?
- As an individual, what can I do?