

The

“Completing the

Pro-*Abundant* Life

Circle of Care”

Guide

Completing the Pro-*Abundant* Life Circle of Care Guide

Contents

Introduction	2
Section 1: BUILDING A BETTER BRIDGE = BETTER PARTNERSHIPS	4
Section 2: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK OF A BIBLICAL COMMUNITY	8
Section 3: COMPLETING THE CIRCLE OF CARE STRATEGY	11
Section 4: ACTION STEPS & CONCLUSION	19

Completing the Pro-Abundant Life Circle of Care

By The Caring Church Network

INTRODUCTION

Our hearts sank when we saw her. We hadn't seen Jamie in over 18 months but as we returned from lunch that day there she was, sitting anxiously and ashamedly in our waiting room...again. Despite all our counseling, gospel presentations, love, encouragement and overall help, she found herself once again trapped in the same destructive life patterns that first led her to us. This is far from what we had hoped and prayed for Jamie.

If you've worked long enough in a clinic and/or related non-profit social service, you've no doubt witnessed similar, disappointing outcomes. In fact, this repetitive cycle seems to be the norm for the majority of those we serve. There are a lot of factors for why this happens but there is always one common denominator. Very few of the moms we help, **make the leap from our clinics into a long-term, transformative, caring community of Christ followers.** That they make this connection to the body of Christ is crucial for it is God's chosen environment for their new life in Christ.

Every one of us who have been blessed with the consistent fellowship of kingdom-minded others could testify to its vast importance. It's the context by which all of us have laid hold of the abundant life Jesus came to bring. We have all needed Christ-centered, authentic community where we can be honest about our struggles, a place where we can receive grace and truth and still be loved and accepted throughout our sanctification. (James 5:16) We have all needed fellow sojourners to consistently encourage us, love us and spur us on toward love and good deeds. (Heb.10:24-25) We have all needed the help and care of a diverse community of others who possess certain gifts, skills and the resources necessary to move us forward in the story God has written for our lives. (Eph. 2:10; Acts 2 & 4) That type of community was and is God's desire for us and most certainly includes those we serve in our clinics.

RE-ASSESSING OUR APPROACH

So what is it about our current approach that may be hindering these moms/dads from wholeheartedly joining one of our fellowships? What is it we may not understand about them or ourselves that would otherwise make their decision to join us a no brainer? What are we missing? If we hope to transform our culture and break the cyclical, generational patterns of destruction we so often see in these situations, we

must ask, seek and overcome for the abundant life, not just *life*, is the mission God has given His bride. The abundant life for all involved is the success criteria by which we must judge ourselves and we must not stop short.

Therefore, the purpose of this guide is to give **our clinics**, our **partnering churches**, **their small groups** and **related social services** a proven, gospel-centric, Biblical strategy that **builds a better bridge, connecting the families we serve to a long term, caring community**. This strategy breaks the cycle of destruction by completing the circle of care for all involved. It aids in the restoration of a family's dignity, their sense of belonging and will shepherd them toward a life of purpose and righteousness in Christ.



(Note: This guide is not prescriptive. Every person we help will have a different story with a different set of circumstances. However, the principles you'll find here are time tested and proven to be effective in most situations. The methodology was in large part developed by the Crisis Pregnancy Center of Tidewater in Chesapeake, VA. We thank them for sharing the fruit of their labor with us.)

SECTION ONE: BUILDING A BETTER BRIDGE = BETTER PARTNERSHIPS

(For the purposes of this guide, unless otherwise noted, the word "Church" refers to the gathered, communing body of believers either in small or large group for the purposes of fellowship, prayer, encouragement, discipleship, worship, sharing and study.)

The first step in building a better bridge for these families is building better partnerships.

When the church, pro-life clinics and related non-profit ministries come together doing what each does well, we're able to more fully reflect the image and intentions of God to a fallen world. As a result, His kingdom advances and captives are set free. However, when we aren't working well together, when we stop short in the role God has called us to or go too far trying to fulfill a role we can't, the mission is thwarted, the kingdom doesn't advance and, in this case, cyclical, catastrophic outcomes ensue. Therefore, effective partnerships require we each know our roles and are faithful to follow through.

Let's take a moment to clarify the critical roles we each play so that we're faithful to complete the circle of care and bring about the kingdom change God has called us to.

THE ROLE OF THE PRO-LIFE CLINIC & RELATED NON-PROFITS

Let's start with our **pro-life clinics**. For decades now our clinics have been on the frontlines of a life and death struggle playing the crucial first responder role. Their mission in that pivotal moment is to do all they can to offer compassion, counsel and care to women in crisis tempted by abortion. Specifically, that compassion, counsel and care starts with a humble, non-judgmental heart and listening ear. It goes on to offer everything from pregnancy tests, ultrasounds and information on pre-natal through post-partum health care for both mother and child. From there it often moves on to incentive-based classes on parenting where they give out supplies such as bottles, blankets, formula, car seats, clothing, monitors, pack'n plays, etc. And there's more but the bottom line is, they offer help and hope at a crucial point when little can be found.

However, what our clinics can't do, what they aren't built for, is what moms tempted by abortion need most. **They need to know people will be there for them in significant ways beyond the nine months.** Struggling on their own is their great fear and we must be able to respond directly and quickly because it's THIS fear that often determines whether or not a single mom, especially those living at or below the poverty line, chooses life.

Clinics that are able to say with great confidence and provide immediate, specific, tangible evidence that, **"There are people right here, right now in our community who will be there for you in significant ways, not just for nine months but for a lifetime..."**

consistently see more moms choose life. When our Clinics can introduce these people to moms, especially during those decisive 72 hours after a positive pregnancy result, it has proven time and again to help change the minds of those moving toward abortion. **Unfortunately, many of our Clinics can't say or do this due to a break down in their partnerships with the long-term caregiver, the Church.** As a result, the best most Clinics can offer is a list of non-profits, government run institutions and information on grants that will meet a lot of their physical needs. Those services of course play a significant role in the overall pro-abundant life ecosystem but they too lack what these moms/families truly need, were made for and what the church was built for. Only the church can offer the fear-alleviating element of a committed community coming alongside them for a lifetime where personal, consistent, long-term shepherding can take place. It's the Church where God intended for them to have their dignity, purpose and sense of belonging restored.

Taking a step back for a moment, what we must remember in the pro-life movement, especially those of us on the frontlines, is that first and foremost we are ministers of the gospel. **As such, we must speak of the good news of this new kingdom in such a way that reaches to the deepest longings of their heart.** What we mean is, what these moms/parents truly want, what we ALL want more than anything, what Jesus passionately pursued and bled for on that cross to make sure we have, is the restoration of unending, unconditional love with our heavenly Father. That is the love we ALL were made for and therefore long for at the core of our being. Not only that, but we also long to know that our lives have eternal, transcendent purposes...purposes that give our finite lives infinite meaning and joy. Those together make up the abundant life and the Church plays the vital follow-up role in bringing that about.

So the question then is, **"Do the moms/parents leave our clinics knowing this is the life, this is the kingdom they long for? Do they know that this is where they'll find their dignity, righteousness and sense of belonging restored? Do they know it can only be realized within the context of a deep, abiding fellowship of a local body?"** This is the life they long for, what their child will long for and what we must be able to communicate and lead them into. Until we can speak broadly about this life like we just did and specifically about what that looks like, which we'll explain below, we will never be as effective in persuading moms as we might otherwise hope.

NOT THE ROLE OF THE CLINIC OR RELATED NON-PROFIT

Many of us recognize the first step on the path toward the abundant life, receiving Christ, may often take place within the walls of our Clinics. However, we all should understand that the rest is to be discovered and experienced among other like-minded Christ followers in an environment designed for a long-term relationship of grace, truth and love. This is often where some of our good intentioned clinics and social services get themselves in trouble. We recognize the family's great need for growth and shepherding but yet also see the existing gap between them and a local

church, so we attempt to reach beyond our role as a first responder and into ones intended solely for the church. Again, our Clinics and related Social Services simply weren't designed for the long-term care and discipleship these families need and they can't bring about that restorative sense of belonging the Church was designed for. When we try, we end up frustrating ourselves, burning out our volunteers and eventually failing those we love and serve.

Conversely, if those of us in the Clinic fail to reach far enough, if we become complacent in simply saving the lives of children and not providing the necessary bridges to effectively connect them to a long-term community of care, we fall short of the mission God has given us and His kingdom does not come.

We'll talk more below about a proven strategy Clinics, Churches and non-profits can use to better ensure an effective handoff takes place but for now just know that for the clinic, this often doesn't change much of what you're currently doing. It usually just means involving the church in a crucial part.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

If you look back through Church history, you'll notice wherever we spread we were a culture changing force. Careful study will show that the times we were most influential were when we sacrificially laid down our lives so that others could live. Whether it was rescuing discarded babies off the garbage heaps of ancient Rome, feeding others during famines at great peril to themselves, or holding the hands of the dying during the plagues of Europe, we had a reputation of sacrificing beyond measure, loving not our lives unto death, holding fast to the promise of the life to come and the world took note. Today, when it comes to the issue of abortion, our reputation is we'll only go so far. **Our reputation is we only care that the child is born and then once they are, we'll back away leaving mother and child to struggle on their own.** True or not we must understand this reputation is preventing countless numbers from turning to us in their hour of need (including our clinics) and as a result, we're missing out on opportunity after opportunity to love and serve moms at their breaking point. This shouldn't be.

If we want to return to that culture changing force, we must restore our reputation of being the go to place for compassion and care, **for as important as passing abortion restrictive legislation and launching thousands of clinics and related social services have been, they could never be as effective in changing the mind of an abortion tempted mom than the promise of a community of Christ followers coming alongside her in a significant way for a lifetime.** It's because this promise and tangible evidence has been largely absent that we believe the numbers of abortions have remained astronomically high. *

*(Note: As you may be aware the Center for Disease Control does collect statistics for abortions but it's only from those who choose to report it. You may also be aware that these numbers do not include accurate numbers for abortions induced through the now widely available abortive drug known as RU486. Usage of that drug is up 110% in the last decade. All that to say, no one

is certain where we really stand in the numbers of abortions in our land, but we would all agree the numbers don't leave us with a sense that we're changing our culture. We still hover around 2,300/day, 16,000/week.)

SHEPHERD EARLY. SHEPHERD OFTEN.

To change this reputation and have moms turn to us once again in their hour of need, we must show them love beyond measure, doing whatever it takes to give them the abundant life Jesus came to bring. This means the local Church must complete the circle of care by reengaging in the role God has always called us to. There are two things we must do.

1. We can start by making a public pledge to moms everywhere that we'll be there for them not just for nine months but for a lifetime. One place you can do that is at **ProMomProBaby.org**. It's an online attempt to change the church's reputation by connecting moms/families with churches who've pledged to be there for them for the long haul. **It's also a place where your small group communities can pledge to care for these families. The utilization of small groups is actually the cornerstone of this strategy.** (Again, more on this later.)
2. The second thing we need to do is stop taking ourselves out of the game by passing these families off to our Christian non-profits and government social services thinking, "they've got this." They can't and they don't. When our clinics' only option is to hand them off to our non-profits instead of a long-term community of care, it not only undermines our clinicians' ability to negotiate with the mom for the life of their child but it also prevents us from playing the restorative, sanctifying, life-altering and ultimately, culture changing role God meant for us to play.* Again, as caring and compassionate as our non-profits are, they aren't set up for the long-term, transformational care these families need. **Instead, they need good shepherds who will certainly guide them to and through these services when needed, but also to and through the things that will bring about newness of life and the oneness with Christ we spoke of earlier.**

We'll expand on the details of how to do this when we lay out the actual strategy but briefly we'll say this. It means we will commit to do whatever it takes to bridge that gap between the clinic and the church by mobilizing called individuals and families to humbly, initiate, welcome, serve, shepherd, sacrifice, listen and love. It'll mean fostering, adopting, babysitting, donating, discipling, mentoring and supporting in whatever ways God has called and equipped us...for their lifetime. This is what it means to be Pro-Abundant Life.

(*We also must not support those clinics with our finances/volunteers who are unwilling to build the necessary bridges that effectively connect the families they serve to our local bodies. Doing so only perpetuates the story we only care that the child is born.)

SECTION TWO: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE BIBLICAL COMMUNITY.

One last thing before we get to the strategy. We need to come to terms with something that has held the Church back in impacting these moms/families and ultimately, our culture.

In the introduction we emphasized the important role Biblical, authentic community plays in transforming every follower of Christ. Without authentic community we can't hope to have the kind of kingdom impact God desires. It is the foundation on which all of the resulting good must be built. In fact, we believe if we fail in creating this kind of environment, we'll fail those we're welcoming in from our clinics. Let us explain.

Biblical community is not the kind where you simply show up to your small group or Sunday school class only to give shallow updates and prayer requests; it is a kind of community where you live in open trust with one another or as Christian psychologist Henry Cloud says, with our "roof off and walls down." It's a community where you can reveal the dark corners of your inner world all the while trusting those you're sojourning with to give you grace and truth, in love, over time. This type of community sets us free because it deals a deathblow to that old pharisaical form of religiosity that puts us on a never-ending treadmill. It's a treadmill where we feel like we have to continually perform for God and others in order to be forgiven and accepted. This new kind of community puts to death the fatigue we experience in performance-based relationships that make us long for relief and therefore vulnerable to the lifestyle and vices we once knew. We are only able to live in community with others in this way when we rightly understand our own fallen-ness. We must understand that we're broken, weak and prone to addictions of all sorts and because we understand that about ourselves, we understand that is true of others as well. As such we're able to receive and extend grace and truth in such a way that gives us all room for His Spirit to work.

This kind of community, where we experience no strings attached unconditional love, where we're fully known and yet completely accepted, sounds a lot like the community we had with the Father before the Fall. It's what we were made for, long for and will be ours again one day in full. That's why the first community we're invited into through the gospel is the community of our Triune God.

In His prayer found in John 17 Jesus prays to the Father for us asking that we all, **"may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."** (vs. 21) This prayer like so many other instances in the Bible,* invites us once again to take part in the sacred fellowship we knew before the Fall. It's the kind of fellowship where we can be fully known and yet completely loved. It's a fellowship when rightly experienced and lived out can't help but change us, sanctify us. Freedom from our sin, shame and resulting coping mechanisms are found within. Our earthly fellowship was meant to be like it.

(Is.61:1; Lk.4:18; Jn.8; Jn.12)*

But let's be honest, this isn't something we do well today. We have a hard time letting our walls down. We have a hard time trusting others in our small groups, life groups, community groups or whatever your church calls it...with our sin. We still feel the need to hide our brokenness and put on masks, which by the way should make us ask ourselves, "Do we really understand the gospel? Have we not come to grips with the fact that we are all sinners and unworthy of the grace and forgiveness we've received?" Like the Galatians, this false gospel has deceived us, keeping us in bondage, unhealed and hiding. (James 5:16) It keeps us from experiencing the new lives won for us in Christ. We've allowed this counterfeit brand of Christianity to creep in and thrive in the church for far too long and it's killing us inside and out.

We believe the church desperately needs a renewal of this kind of community not just because of our own experiences and anecdotal observations but also due to a study done on the subject of abortion in the church. In a recent study, Care-Net, the nation's largest network of pro-life clinics, conducted a survey* with 1,038 post-abortive women. One of the most tragic revelations to come out of this report was 70% of these women claimed to be Christian with close to 40% of those indicating they had been to church at least once in the last month. In other words, abortion is a problem inside our walls. **Given that last statistic, it shouldn't surprise us that the study went on to reveal the vast majority of women believed the church was an unsafe place to talk about their unexpected pregnancy and options.** Additionally, non-church goers indicated they believed they were three times more likely to receive a judgmental and condemning reaction than a loving or caring one. As a result, 89% said the church had no influence on their decision to abort their child.

What does all this mean? Because the church is no longer a safe place to openly confess and struggle with our sin, because many of us choose to act as if we've got it all together, the church is no longer known as the "go to place" for compassion and care. **Hence, we've lost our ability to influence a society in desperate need.** Confronting this trend may be the most important thing the church can do to effect change on this issue and a whole host of others for that matter. (same sex attraction, pornography, racism, alcoholism, etc.)

*(The study can be found in the Church Resource Forums at ProMomProBaby.org)

The strategy we're about to give you rests on the foundation of authentic community. If you're not already part of one like this, we're going to ask you to start it. It's not just critical for us, it's critical for the moms/families we're trying to reach. The moms and hopefully dads we'll be serving come in already feeling "less than" than everyone else. Shame, guilt and self-condemnation are prevalent. They come in with preconceived notions that "everyone else here has it all together" and like many newcomers, will simply want to fit in...to belong. That leads to the falsity we just spoke of and will prevent them from experiencing new life in Christ.(2Cor.5:17) It's important they know from the very beginning that we're all recovering addicts of one form or another in that we all have or had idols and vices we run to for comfort and security.

If this is true of you, would you commit here and now to no longer live this way? Would you commit to living a life of “roof off and walls down” where you’re open about your struggles, your sin? If so, would you commit to starting a group with this as one of its pillars? This is what cultivates the kind of Biblical community that changes lives. Until we create this kind of environment, we can only offer them a false gospel.

One last barrier

There’s still one other reason for why we’re falling short in impacting our culture on this issue. We have a lot to learn about welcoming those who are different from us, those who have difficult or even tragic back-stories. We have a lot to learn about standing with the disempowered, the suffering, and the underprivileged. Remember, over 50% of the abortions committed in our land are done so by those living at or below the poverty line. They are the poor, the neglected and the marginalized. As a result, they have severe trust issues and they’ve built their walls high. **Welcoming them and entering into their lives is often messy and chaotic. Frankly, we have a hard time relating and, if we’re really honest, all this pulls at the most prevalent idols of our day... our comfort and security.** Grabbing these folks by the hand runs counter to our self-protective nature and when all is said and done we’d rather just pay someone from a non-profit to do it. The problem is, only we can lead them where they need to go. As we stated earlier, **if we pass it off to others, they’ll remain forever isolated, out there on the fringes of society, never reconciled and never restored to the life God dreamed up for them long ago.**

But here’s something else we need to know. If we continue with business as usual, handing them off to our non-profits, it’ll keep us from the lives we were meant to live. **The truth is, the comfort and security we think we want, the kind this world has to offer, simply can’t coexist with the ever-deepening intimacy and purpose we long to have with the Father.** It’s the great paradox of the Christian life and there’s no getting around it. If we want the life-abundant, we must deny ourselves, lay down the lives we’ve known and pick up our cross and follow Him. In other words, that life of showing up on Sunday, keeping your sin slate clean and giving to some good causes....it isn’t worth living. It just doesn’t satisfy. So, if need be, would you commit here and now to seeking out this life of deeper purpose and fellowship with our Triune God? Would you commit to throwing off the shroud of this false self and instead put on authenticity? Would you commit to a life of risk and faith no longer allowing the lie of comfort and security to deceive you? We challenge you to leave that life behind and our old ways of dealing with the abortion crisis and trade it in for the freedom, for the life Jesus spoke of when He set us free (Jn.8:36; Jn.10:10). The world, your loved ones and the Lord are waiting.

SECTION 3: THE STRATEGY TO BETTER ENSURE THESE FAMILIES END UP IN A LONG-TERM COMMUNITY OF CARE

If you've ever counseled an expectant mom in a clinic, one of the steps you've likely taken was to either invite them to your church or handed them a pamphlet of others you'd recommend. They, in turn, most always thank you, with some even taking you up on your personal invitation. However, it's also likely they didn't come back. Why? It usually has nothing to do with you or with your church service but it's more likely about soil. Yes, soil. To borrow from the parable of the soils, in order for seed to take root and grow it needs a soil that is ready to receive and sustain it. But not only that, a farmer needs to know its seed and how to best make it grow. When we simply invite someone, especially someone we barely know to a church service where they don't know anyone, to a place where they may have had a bad experience, we're well-meaning but unwittingly trying to sow seed in a manner that it's unlikely to stick. So how do we sow the seed in such a way that better ensures these families end up embedded in a long-term community of care? Let's look at a proven strategy that results in more families crossing what is otherwise a bridge too far.

Overview of how the Strategy works:

The process we describe below will enable a group(s) of people from a partnering church to develop a long-term, loving and restorative relationship with the family(s) in need. This group of called individuals/families will slowly but assuredly build trusting relationships with the families during incentive-based health and parenting classes held at their local clinic or other neutral site. Eventually, when the relational groundwork and trust has been laid (sowing seed in good soil), the small group members will invite these families to a series of shared meals in someone's home. **These meals will eventually be the genesis of a "small group/community group"** that will bring these families under their shepherding and long-term care.

Briefly, for the clinic, this means developing a more comprehensive partnership with a local church by inviting one or more of their called/committed groups to take part in the various classes they're offering to parents. For the church, it means raising up a team of called individuals/small groups that will take part in these classes and will lovingly shepherd these families now and long after the classes have ended. **(Note: We'll suggest a proven method for raising up these people/group(s) below.)**

Here's a link to a video made by the aforementioned Crisis Pregnancy Center of Tidewater, VA showing results for what the results of this strategy looks like.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/z64klhfqm32dzsf/MGE_FINAL.mp4?dl=0

Step 1: Become/Find a "Life Mentor". (This step is pre-emptive from the rest of the strategy but critical to maintaining the life of the child in the short-term.)

Upon receiving news that they are in fact pregnant, the mother and child enter into their most critical time. It's during the next 72 hours most mothers will decide to keep or abort their child. It's during those first three days when the mother begins to feel overwhelmed by the reality of how hard life with this child could be. To add to the pressure, if they open up to others, their voices are often ones promoting "the easy way out." It's during this time they need someone who can help calm their storm. This is when they need what we call a **"Life Mentor"**. They play a critical role with the abortion-tempted mother.

Clinics receive signed permission from the mother for a Life Mentor to text, call and even meet with them. *(Due to the mother's familiarity with the clinic it is best to meet them there for at least your first visit or a public place of the mother's choosing. Ideally, the mentor would be from a church that is nearest to where the mother lives or possibly even one she chooses from a list.)* The mentor's job is to reinforce what the Counselor at the clinic has already told them and that is to assure them that there are many people like themselves who are ready and willing to come alongside them not just for nine months but for a lifetime. It is also the mentor's responsibility to continue to talk with the mother about the things she longs for most in life (unconditional love, purpose and belonging) and how her best chance at those things will come in the context of a caring community of others coming alongside her. The Life Mentor will let the mother know they will begin to meet some of these people at pre-natal health and parenting classes should they attend. Again, it's the mentor's job to listen, love, encourage and paint a picture of long-term care and hope.

Step 2: Raising up a Team from your Church

(Note: In the overview of this strategy we mentioned the formation of a caring and called community of people from a local church coming alongside the mother/family(s) as soon as possible. This is THE critical piece of the strategy. Though the focus of this section won't deal with specifics on how to raise up a team we want to mention a great resource for you and your church. It is a discipleship course called "I am Sent" by the Sent Ones Network. (SentOnesNetwork.org) It's a six session course that helps people see themselves as God sees them; as His ambassadors, His ministers of reconciliation (2Cor.5:18-21) as "sent ones" doing the good works (Eph.2:10) He designed specifically for them long ago. It helps people discern where and how God would have them do those good works during this phase of their life. Generally speaking, it will help turn the culture of a church from consumers to "sent ones." You'll most likely need it or something like it to mobilize your church for this initiative and will benefit all your outward facing ministries.)

If you're reading this guide you may well be the person God has called to "Champion" this effort in your church. However, He's not going to send you out alone. The Missio Dei or Mission of God was meant to be done in the context of community. He sent His disciples out two by two for a reason. We need each other. Therefore, this strategy necessitates a team. How do you find them? Other than what was mentioned in the note above, God may have already brought some people to mind, but if not, prayer, as always is the best place to begin. Begin asking the Lord to lead you to others in your church who are uniquely called to minister to families facing unexpected/crisis pregnancies* or at least those you've noticed who have the gift of

mercy and compassion. Ask him to give you eyes to see and ears to hear, that your heart would be attentive to those He would have you talk with/challenge. Seek expectantly. If He's called you He has more than likely put this burden on others near you as well.

Ideally your team should include 3-5 family units. We will get into more of the details and commitments your group will be making in a minute but briefly, what you're essentially doing with this "team" is creating a small group or community group based on the foundation of authenticity we spoke of earlier. Like most small group's, your purpose is to "do life" together, fellowshiping, sharing burdens, prayer requests, meeting needs, encouraging one another, spending time in the Word, etc. You get the point. **But what's unique about this group from others that may form in your church, is that you'll have a missional focus of helping mothers/families with crisis pregnancies.** As you talk with others you can let them know the purpose of this team/group will be to embody Christ to these families. That simply means humbly serving, listening sacrificing, loving, babysitting and supporting them and each other in whatever ways God has equipped you. **It does NOT mean you all will be the sole caretakers of these families. It does NOT mean you will have all the resources they'll need to become all that the Lord has for them. But, it does mean coming alongside them, shepherding them to and from those things as needed when and where you can.**

By the way, if you're already part of a small group that lives by this foundation of authenticity, maybe all you need to do is talk/pray with them about making this your group's missional focus. Share the video we created about this strategy found here in this forum on the ProMomProBaby.org site.

*(Note: A passion to protect the unborn does not necessarily equate a calling to minister in this context. Members should not only desire life for the child but the abundant life for the mother/father and others involved. Members of your team should also be acutely aware that if not for the grace of God this could be them in this situation. This level of maturity/humility is necessary in order to minister effectively to those with a deep distrust of the church.)

Here are some bullet points on what this group is committing to and how it will minister to a family(s). (Incidentally, if/when you have more questions, please feel free to contact us at coaching@ProMomProBaby.org or coaching@CaringChurchNetwork.org)

Team commitments to each other and the family(s) you'll serve:

1. **If your team is new to each other and have yet to establish the kind of trust and authenticity we talked about, you should start out by committing to meet at least two or three times a month for fellowship and a meal where you can begin to establish this.*** As stated earlier, this means a commitment to live in a community with others where you can share freely---being fully known and yet fully accepted. This means giving and receiving grace and truth all in the

context of unconditional love. A word of caution though. Don't wait for others to open up. Set the tone yourself from day one. It's been said, "if you want others to bleed you must hemorrhage."

*(For the first three to four meetings, you will meet just with those who you challenged to start this group with. You will add the family(s) in need from the classes at the clinic at a later date.)

- Elements of your time together should include:
 - **Sharing a meal together** where everyone brings something to contribute. This will become an important aspect of your time when you begin to invite the moms/dads/kids you're ministering to. Without going into the psychology behind it, being able to contribute helps restore one's self worth and value. Being able to contribute and receive freely helps restore normalcy and your sense of belonging in a community of others. (Some groups have found that meeting right after church on Sunday for lunch or an early dinner were good times to gather.)
 - **Typical fellowship** where you share updates, thoughts on current events, passions...getting to know one another.
 - **Time in the word.** Talking about how God's word relates to our daily lives is key. The principles it gives, the conviction it brings, the love it shows us about God, etc are all vital to learning how to follow Jesus in the everyday stuff of life.
 - **Sharing prayer requests, struggles, failures, victories, praises, needs, etc and then praying together.** The vulnerability on display during this time is what changes lives. When people can experience grace, truth, accountability, encouragement and unconditional love over time, the facades come down. When the facades come down the freedom we were meant to have and was attained for us in Christ can begin to be experienced and normalized.

2. **Attend at least half of the prenatal, post partum and parenting classes conducted by your partnering, pro-life pregnancy clinic.** (Some of you must be there each time.) These classes, which most clinics conduct, teach the prospective parent(s) essential things about the care of themselves and their child before and after birth. These classes are incentive based meaning the parents receive free items such as bottles, diapers, car seats, blankets, pack n' plays, etc, for their attendance and participation. **Your group's attendance and Spirit-led participation is the game changer in building that effective bridge of trust and care.**

- These classes typically last anywhere from 8-20 weeks. The importance of your attendance, especially early on cannot be overstated. **This is where your group will begin showing these families you are committed to them.** This is the early presence of an encouraging, long-term community of care” we spoke of in the introduction. **This is where you will begin to listen, serve, love and sacrifice.** For instance, when they receive diapers or a car seat or pack’n play for attending the class, you will help them carry them to their car. When they need a ride to/from the class, you will provide it. When they share something difficult about the situation(s) they’re in, you will listen and empathize. You will show vulnerability by sharing your own struggles and failings in life and in parenting all the while being careful not to monopolize the time and make it about you. This is where the foundation for the long-term friendship/relationship starts.

3. **Commitment to Ongoing Care and long-term Discipleship**

When we talk about your long-term commitment to this family(s) we want to make sure you all understand this upfront. **No one is expecting your team to be THE sole source of care for the families you help.** No small group is equipped or resourced like that. It's unlikely that you'll have all the necessary skills, gifts, finances, networks, etc, these individuals and families will need. Some will need counseling, day care, job opportunities, transportation, etc. There are multiple organizations, non-profits and individuals inside and outside your church that are called and equipped to help “be”/“do” that for them.* This is one of the reasons why we need all aspects of the body of Christ communicating and working well together. We need to know who and/or what organization can provide or assist with all these differing needs. Our clinics are often good sources for this sort of information. ProMomProBaby.org will provide this information as well as more and more non-profits register.*(Note: Hopefully those organizations provide in such a way that empowers those they serve and doesn't unwittingly steal their dignity and self-worth. For more on that subject we recommend the widely acclaimed book When Helping Hurts by Corbett and Fikkert.)

Having said that, as a group that *HAS* been called to shepherd and care for these families, **it is your responsibility to help guide them to and from those people, entities, etc that are equipped to help them beyond your ability for as long as it takes.** This is extremely important.

What we don't want to happen is what often does in these situations. Often times, when there is no hand-off to a local church or in this case a small group, our clinics will simply refer these moms/families out to various non-profits that can meet their physical needs. Unfortunately, once these families end up in that realm, operating by themselves with our non-profits, apart from shepherds, their connection to the church / small groups is lost along with the opportunity for discipleship and the long-term, restorative care they need. When the church/small group is left out of the equation, cyclical, generational destruction occurs.

This is why we need to introduce these families to your small group early on. We need to establish a strong shepherding bond between them and your small group during the classes before our clinics start referring them out to other related service organizations. In fact, it would be best if the clinic hands off that responsibility to the small group altogether to make sure our connection to them is retained. In other words, members of your small group would shepherd the family(s) to and from our Christian non-profits. Again, our non-profits can and should help meet many of their physical needs but they aren't equipped for the long-term shepherding, restoration and soul care that your church and small group was uniquely made for and they need. The goal is a lifelong connection to the body of Christ where they're growing in their love for the Lord and others. In short, this is discipleship. This is where your group and eventually others in the church, will fulfill that role. Many will not know anything about the Bible or how to study it. Many won't know how to pray or the importance of it in building intimacy with the Father. Many won't know about worship, service, evangelism, giving, etc and how all of it sanctifies us, giving us what our hearts long for most and preparing us for life eternal. You will model this during small group and one on one when appropriate. One day others within your church will be able to help fulfill this role as well. This is how discipleship is meant to happen. This is what you're committing to.

(As an aside be aware that the family(s) you're helping are most likely new to the Christian worldview and have little to no knowledge of the kind of love and sharing modeled for us all in Acts 2 & 4. In some cases, it'll be difficult for them to receive freely. In other cases they'll still think they've got to "work you" to get what they want/need. Be patient and expect setbacks. It's all part of their sanctification. The family you're caring for may even "disappear" for a while at times. Keep after them. Reach out with calls, texts, meals and any acts of love and service the Spirit guides you to.)

Step 3: The Invitation to the **"Shared Meal"**

In the overview to this section we talked about an Invitation to "Shared Meal." It's the next crucial step in your relationship with the family(s) your loving and serving.

When you hear of someone coming to saving faith in Jesus you often hear stories of how that person **"belonged before they believed."** This simply means that people, in their journey toward faith in Christ, often find themselves strangely drawn to hanging out with a group of Christians. They're drawn in by the authenticity and unconditional love they see and experience. They're drawn in by the personal stories of how other lives have changed because of Jesus. As a result, they too begin to share. They too begin to feel accepted, flaws included....and before they know it, they feel like they belong. From there, it's often just a short step to believing and receiving the message

and gift of Christ's love and forgiveness. This is the dynamic we're attempting to create during the clinic's classes and what we call the **"shared meal"** strategy.

Up until this point in your relationship with your new friends, you've mainly spent time with them on neutral ground, the pregnancy clinic or maybe even a cafe. It's not your place and it's not theirs. There are natural boundaries there and it has kept your relationship somewhat impersonal. It's been a relatively safe place for all involved but now, as with any deepening relationship, you need to begin to break down those barriers and an invitation to the group for a shared meal in someone's home is a great next step.

Now if you're reading this step for the first time, having never met the families, this can sound pretty intimidating but please hear this. At this point in your relationship you will have already laid some significant relational groundwork. Through your serving, listening and caring, you've in many ways made this next step a no-brainer for the family. Most will definitely say "yes" especially when they hear other families from the group will most likely be coming. This is because for over a month now you've been loving, serving, listening, sharing with and caring for the moms/families all in the context of the class at the clinic. You've been building trust. You've put yourself in their shoes and invited them to hear about your mistakes and failures in your decisions and parenting. You can now take this next step.

1. The Invitation:

As with any event, this will take some planning, effective communication and attention to detail but basically, someone will need to make an announcement, someone will need to hand out the address for where this is taking place and someone will need to call/send out a reminder to all involved.

The announcement/invitation could sound something like this. At the end of the class time have someone from the church group get up and say something like:

"About every other week some of us get together and share a meal at one of our homes. Well, as we've gotten to know you all and have come to love you, we wanted to invite you all to come too.

Typically everybody will bring something to contribute to the meal. Basically, we just eat, hang out, hear about what's going on with each other and pray for one another. No one has to pray by the way. We've all just recognized how important it is to "do life in community with others" and we wanted to invite you all to join us.

Name is passing out a card with the day and time and address and phone number. You all can bring a side dish or a drink or a dessert if you like. You choose. Either way, we hope you will come.

2. The shared meal:

We confess that we don't fully understand why Jesus often chose the medium of a meal to hang out with the lost and/or needy but nonetheless that was the case. Maybe it had to do with finding common ground. After all, rich, poor, sinner, saint, we all need food and drink. Hunger and thirst are something we all share. Maybe He wanted to give us a foretaste of what the heavenly banquet would be like. When God invites you to partake in His life, the life He's planned for you, He does it by restoring your sense of belonging. You are no longer an enemy or an outsider or a servant looking in. You are invited to sit at His table as His friend, as His child. Or maybe it just gave Him a moment to get a word in while others chomped away! Regardless, this was something He modeled for us so we should take note.

Your meal with your new friends shouldn't feel contrived or scripted. In fact, we suggest you just let it flow. Relax and allow yourself to enjoy the meal and their company without thinking about where you can break in with a mini sermonette. Instead, play the long game. Let them simply observe your love and care for one another. This is just the beginning of what is likely to be a long, up and down journey. Apply the same principles you employed during the class. Love, serve, sympathize, laugh, share, listen and trust. Trust that God is there working whether you see it or not. There'll be time on this journey for deep, gospel centric conversations but it probably won't be during your first few meals and could take place in other contexts altogether.

After the meal, possibly during dessert have someone kick off a time of sharing. Feel free to share something from the Word. Share needs, victories, struggles, and even some prayer requests. Stop and pray as needed or asked for. Remember to be vulnerable, authentic. It's not our perfection, as if that was possible, that appeals to others. It's our recognition of our sin and where we've found grace, forgiveness and peace. **In fact, if you hide your sin all you'll do is teach them to do the same.** Healing and freedom never comes down that street. Recognize that this small group will become a major source for their spiritual growth...and yours too.

SECTION 4: ACTION STEPS / CONCLUSION

Next Steps for Church, Clinic or Non-Profit Leaders

1. **Pray for healthy Partnerships.** Depending on the role you're currently in or see yourself stepping into, take the first step by praying. Pray each of us would fully understand the specific role we're to play. When we're fulfilling the role God has called us to, His kingdom comes as it should. When we settle for less or reach too far, we hinder what could be done in the lives of those we serve.
2. **Ask those in your spheres of influence or those you'll be laboring alongside to read this guide** and discuss what changes need to be made or what conversations need to be had in order to fulfill your God-given role more effectively.
3. **Decide what are the first three steps you must take** and date to be completed by in order to get "out of the gate" or bring about change.
 - a. For instance, depending on your role, make a list of either churches, clinics or church members you'd like to give this booklet or share the video and by what date.
 - b. If you're a leader in your church, clinic or non-profit, what job description(s) need to be changed or new hires need to be made or laypeople that need to be challenged in order to make this happen and do it by such and such date? What training or discipleship equipping is needed in order for this to be implemented? Do this by what date?
4. **Register your Church, Clinic or Non-profit on ProMomProBaby.org** so that moms know they won't be alone, that there are significant, tangible help and resources available to them. Life decisions need life support. Register so that you can network and develop better relationships with those around you who are advocating for the abundant life of these families.

Next Steps for Small Group Leaders

1. **Pray for healthy partnerships.** It's incredibly important that we're all on the same page. Pray that our clinics, your church and related non-profits would fulfill the roles God has called them to so that the people we serve end up in your long-term caring community.
2. **If called to start a small group/community group that focuses on moms/families in need, begin to pray about whom you should ask to join you.** Who else shares your passion for families in this situation? Who do you know that exhibits high

levels of compassion, humility and responsibility? What individuals can you share the video or this guidebook with?

3. **Share this strategy (guidebook and video) with your current small group/community group.** Is there anything that needs to change about your current group situation so that these families end up in an authentic, grace, truth and loving environment? If your current group isn't onboard with your desire to shepherd these families, would you consider starting a new group? Who could you ask to join you?
4. **Share this strategy (guidebook and video) with your Church, Clinic, and related Non-Profits.** It will help them see how important it is that we all work together to bring about the kind of response God desires from us.
5. **Begin praying for the family(s) you'll be serving.** Pray they would know that God is pursuing them. Pray they would begin to trust you and your small group members early on. Pray for your group. Pray the Lord would grant you wisdom, courage and strength for the days and months ahead.
6. **Register your Small Group/Community Group on ProMomProBaby.org** so that our clinics and non-profits can contact you and better connect you with the families they're currently serving. Register so that moms can see there are people out there who will love and care for them and their child not just for nine months but for a lifetime. Life decisions need life support.

If/When you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at coaching@ProMomProBaby.org or coaching@CaringChurchNetwork.org. We're here to help. May His Peace and Grace be upon you.