

C.L.O.W.N. SQUAD
LEARNING TO CREATIVELY LOVE OUR WONDERFUL
NEIGHBORS

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
Drew University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Ministry

Advisors: Rev. Dr. Leonard Sweet
Bishop Dr. Donald Hilliard
Rev. Dr. Robert Duncan

Larry Oksten
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey
March 2015

UMI Number: 3701439

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI 3701439

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Au

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower
Parkway
P.O. Box 1346

Abstract

C.L.O.W.N. SQUAD – LEARNING TO CREATIVELY LOVE OUR WONDERFUL NEIGHBORS

Larry Oksten

1st UMC of Glassboro,

Glassboro NJ

The purpose of this ministry project was to help 1st United Methodist Church of Glassboro, NJ connect with their community. The intent was to strengthen the outreach and hospitality ministry in the church in such a way that it became a part of the church's DNA. The goal was to set up a process that was an integral part of all decisions in the church and would be used to connect with the community.

The project proved that community could be taught and nurtured. It also helped show the importance that scripture places on community. We used sermons, bible study, teaching, and projects to find ways to engage with each other and the community around us. During the project, attention was taken to involve every aspect of the church and to encourage the church to participate in community building ways.

Dedication

Thanks begin with Ginny Oksten. Any degree, “honor”, or award belong to her.
You are my partner, my love, and my life. Thanks you! Thank You! Thank you!
I love you. All I am is because of you.

Thanks to my kids for their support...David, Kyle, and Madeline.

Thanks:

To my professors: Dr. Duncan, Dr. Sweet, and Dr. Hilliard.

To the best CoHort EVER! SweetHilliard cohort you rock.

Thanks to Liz O' Keefe, June Longley, and Aimee Cooper for proofreading.

Thanks to the First UMC of Glassboro for supporting me throughout.

All Glory and Honor goes to Jesus...Our God is indeed Greater!

Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
The Idea of Community is Born	6
CHAPTER 1 NARRATIVE OF OPPORTUNITY	9
Who Am I?.....	10
Who Are They?	12
Who Are We Together?	13
Learning to Love – Clown Style.....	15
CHAPTER 2 SEEKING GOD’S VOICE	18
Community	23
Hospitality.....	25
Love	27
Mission.....	28
CHAPTER 3 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER	31
Teaching.....	31
Introduction Class.....	32
Class 1 – Character Development.....	33
Class 2 – The Art of the Dance.....	34
Class 3 – Props and Costumes	35
Class 4 – the Art of Falling Down	36
Class 5 – Pantomime	37
Class 6 – The Missing Piece	38

Training.....	40
Implementation	41
CHAPTER 4 EVALUATION TIME	46
Evaluating the Teaching	46
Evaluating the Training	48
Evaluating the Project Implementation.....	50
CHAPTER 5 IT’S OVER NOW WHAT??	54
A Problem Arises.....	54
Solutions are Investigated	55
Moving Forward in the Church	56
The First “W” – Why?	56
The Second “W” - Who?	57
The Third “W” – What?	57
The Fourth “W” When?	58
The Fifth “W” – Where?.....	58
Moving Gorward in the Community	59
CHAPTER 6 PERSONAL REFLECTION	65
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION	69
APPENDIX A R.A.K. CARDS	71
APPENDIX B C.L.O.W.N. SQUAD BIBLE STUDY	72
APPENDIX C SERMON LINKS.....	99
APPENDIX D TRAINING AGENDA.....	100
APPENDIX E SERMON EVALUATION.....	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	105

INTRODUCTION

LET'S PLAY!

I used to often go to the zoo often with my family when I was younger. I remember going around and seeing the majestic lions, powerful rhinos, and slippery snakes. However, no zoo trip would be complete without two stops. The first one was to the Monkey House.

It was there that monkeys playing, shrieking, and swinging would mesmerize me. It was incredible to see the energy and excitement they had going about their normal day. The monkeys simply looked like they were having fun. Those animals brought a smile to my face each time that I was there. It was incredible to witness.

After a trip to the monkeys, I would beg my mom and dad to take me to see the otters and seals. These animals also were filled with energy and just seemed to enjoy their life. I never really analyzed why I liked to see these animals so much but I did know that I enjoyed them. Leonard Sweet explained it well, "God did not put us here to work like beavers. God put us here to play like otters."¹

I loved to play as a child. I would play with neighborhood kids or imaginary friends. I would play games that others had taught me or make up games. Hours

¹ Leonard Sweet, *The Well-Played Life* (Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 21.

upon hours I would find myself at play. I could not sit still and I did not want to do anything else. I was learning to enjoy life and express my enjoyment by playing.

As I became a teenager the games changed but the playing continued. I learned the excitement of playing team sports. This was a great time of playing with friends trying to accomplish goals. We learned to use games and playing to grow together and to be better than we could be by ourselves.

Something happened though, as I got older. I had more responsibility and more things that I wanted to accomplish. Play no longer was part of everything that I did. I learned the “importance” of work. Accomplishment of goals set by bosses, instructors, and others became a priority that I had to learn to accept.

I still found time for play but it was no longer the primary part of my life and I would often go days, if not weeks, without finding time to play games or be involved in play with others. I made choices about what was going to be important and those choices often revolved around “success” and “failure.” I had to focus in on those things that would get me to my goals; oftentimes those things were work related.

Play versus work became something that was a constant struggle in my life. Which one would be the focus of the day? Is this activity play or is it work? Can we be involved in play before the end of the workday? These questions became the focus of much of my life.

Reconnecting at church helped me rediscover my love of play. I often was amazed at the joy of people in the church as they found themselves involved in the ministry of the church. Whether it was being involved in youth ministries or

outreach ministries we experienced play springing forth in the “work” we were called to do.

It seemed to me that church was the place where fun and play could and did coexist. This idea of play was enhanced the more I got involved in the local church. I saw opportunities to be engaged in play and at the same time make a big impact in the world. I could do “mission” and enjoy myself. It was about a state of mind. Play and a long sense of community were being rekindled.

The Idea of Community is Born

I remember the moment as if it happened yesterday; it was a gorgeous May day in 1978 in Paulsboro, N.J. There was electricity in the air and it seemed as if everyone that I knew was gathered in the police parking lot with me. All around me were bands, cars, and fire trucks. I looked around and there they were, my teammates. This was the year that Kiwanis were going to be champions.

It was baseball season and this was the opening day parade. Baseball season was here. This was the time of year that I waited for anxiously each and every year. It was time to get my uniform and join my team and head out for the Opening Day parade. I couldn't wait.

The parade was the annual event in Paulsboro when I was a young kid. It was the time when people came together. It was the smell of spring and the feeling of the sun on me. It was the promise of another baseball season. It was the hope and promise of a new season.

These parades brought together a town. They allowed us to be with each other and enjoy each other. The parades were a time of togetherness that I can't remember feeling at any other point as strongly. These were moments that would last a lifetime.

I think this memory is my first understanding of community. The idea of community was laid out before me. It was there in the faces of my teammates and it was there in the songs of the band. As we walked down the street that day I was a witness to a sea of faces. Some of them I knew and some of them I didn't.

However, whether I knew the faces or not, what I did know was that I was part of something bigger than myself. This town was alive. We were drawn together in this moment. It was time for us to celebrate. It was time for us to have fun. It was time for us to be together.

We walked through the town that day and marched into the Little League complex and the excitement continued to build. We were ready to play ball. It was that simple, the community had gathered and we were about to join together and play. It might have been Kiwanis versus Sportsmen club that spring day but the community was playing with us.

I didn't realize it then but I do now, "play is contagious."² What we were doing was engaging and encouraging everyone to play along with us. Community and play go together. We might not have used that language but we lived it. We were participating in the promise that is contained in community.

² Robert Neale. *In Praise of Play* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969), 85.

I have no idea who won that day and I think in many ways that is the point. The lesson I have carried with me is that in the experience I learned the power of community. I know most of the people that gathered that day didn't care if we won or lost because they were caught up in the excitement. It became clear to me over the years that people wanted to be connected to someone and everyone was looking for relationship.

Over the years, the way I found and sought out community and play may have changed. Yet, it was in those moments in Paulsboro that I was able to live out community to engage in play. It was something that was instilled in me so many spring days ago.

CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVE OF OPPORTUNITY

“If we closed our doors would anyone notice?” This is the question that started a journey. This question was asked in a bible study in the fall of 2012 at the First United Methodist Church of Glassboro. The question stopped people and we really were engaged in the conversation that followed. Who am I? Who are you? These are questions we all struggle with.

We began to look at how we were impacting our community. What feeling did the community have about us? Were we vital to the life of the community? Did they consider us or include us when plans were being made?

The C.L.O.W.N. Squad project started as a response to that conversation. We discovered a rule that would be one of our guiding lights. It is “number one of the Bozo Commandments; the immutable law and sacred law when you put on the red wig is that you never talk down to a kid. You treat him just like he’s a person.”¹

This commandment is one we believed needed to be extended to all people. All people deserve to be treated with the care and concern that is often only afforded to those we like or respect. Bozo’s number one commandment was important as we began to talk about what real community should look like. We

¹ Larry Bozo Harmon and Thomas Scott McKenzie *The Man Behind the Nose: Assassins Astronauts Cannibals and Other Stupendous Tales* (Harper Collins ebooks, 2010), loc.1257.

continued to look at Larry Harmon and his alter ego as we began to explore the idea of creating C.L.O.W.N. Squads in our community.

We began to wrestle with what is universal to us in our journey as humans. Larry Harmon wrestled with these same questions as he developed the character of Bozo the Clown. His answer was to go tell his version of the good news to anyone who would hear it. Harmon worked on “spreading the gospel of laughter, love, and big red noses”² everywhere. Harmon’s belief was that love and laughter were universal and as we continued to work on the project so did we.

Who Am I?

I was raised Roman Catholic and after graduating from high school I distanced myself from church for almost 10 years. That changed when I got married. My wife was raised as a United Methodist and we got married in a United Methodist church because of her upbringing. Soon after our wedding we started attending the local United Methodist church. We settled into a nice routine of church attendance and I started comparing and contrasting the ways of the United Methodists and the Roman Catholics.

As I became more and more involved in the church, I would find myself engaged in conversations about what it really meant to be a church. It seemed as if too much time was being spent in meeting and planning for what we might do someday. We seemed to have an often times adversarial relationship with the community. We would spend much time talking about how the community was “lost”

² Ibid., loc. 1976.

and “sinful.” Some would see real need in our community and felt our church not being very proactive in dealing with it. Instead, we would spend our time planning how to “save” the world.

I sensed a call into ministry that seemed to focus on actually being a positive presence in the community. I began the candidacy process in the church and began to pray about God’s call on my life. On September 11, 2001 things changed. Everything became clear. It became apparent that religion had the potential to bring the worst out in people but that a relationship with God and community could really change things.

In July of 2002, I began my journey as a pastor in the United Methodist Church. I was appointed to the New Brooklyn United Methodist Church in Williamstown, N.J. At that point, I was still relatively new to the United Methodist Church and was a bit hard headed. My firm belief was that church was pretty easy, “love God, love each other.” This simple formula was the key to it all.

For the next ten years of my ministry I continued to try to teach people that simple little formula. I struggled to show them why it was so important and the impact that it could have on them and their community. Needless to say, it was not smooth sailing. Instead, I would often meet with resistance and this resistance would often show up in unexpected people. I soon learned that for many people being comfortable and without conflict was more important than the simple message being taught.

Who Are They?

In 1823, over 20 people formed themselves into a Methodist class thus becoming the second church in Glassboro, N.J., the first being St. Thomas Episcopal Church.³ The church soon became a vital part of the community in Glassboro. Its members were involved in many different facets of the town, both politically and economically. The church became very active in the temperance movement and did what they could to support the World War 1 effort.

In the 1930's the church began an intentional and sustained outreach into the community. The church continued to grow increasing financial problems that the community and the country were facing. In the 1940's the church continued to reach out and attempt to be a beacon to a community who now saw their nation involved in another war. In the 1940's Rev. Robert Howe became the pastor of the church. This began a time of continued growth and impact for the church and the community.

In 1968, Rev. Howe left the church. In 1971, Rev. William Thielking became the new pastor. During Rev. Thielking's tenure the congregation built a new church building and forged relationships with many local organizations that would use the church's facilities and resources. In 1986, things began to change once again. Rev. Thielking left the church. In addition, money became an issue for the church. As the community continued to change and Glassboro State Teachers College became Rowan University a growing disconnect was evident. The church began to focus more and more upon its own problems and soon lost its footing in the community.

³ Susan Bassam Muaddi, *The Old Town Clock Church: Forward Through the Ages* (Morgantown, Pa: Masthof Press, 1999), 23.

Decades had passed and a church that was once a vital part of the community was now in many ways a simple afterthought. Membership and finances were very unstable during this time and conversation and focus began to be centered on these problems. The connection to the community began to suffer even more.

Life seemingly was entirely inwardly focused. People began to worry about how bills were going to get paid. Any attempt to be involved in the community was balanced against the church's bottom line. The church stopped being a light in the community.

Who Are We Together?

In July of 2012, I was appointed to the Glassboro United Methodist Church. This was a church with proud tradition and a storied past. It was also a church that had lost touch with its community and had become stagnant. It was a church that needed to get uncomfortable and learn how to tell its story again.

We were forced to skip over the normal easing in period for churches and pastors in transition because that summer Super-storm Sandy hit the Jersey Shore. Many of our people were affected or knew some people who were. All of a sudden being an active force in the community was not just a talking point it was a necessity. This event provided and opportunity to re-imagine what our future could look like and our future would be. Many small projects and collections were started. New partnerships with other United Methodist Churches along the Jersey Shore were also started. We also began to intentionally form relationships in our community. There was new life forming in the church.

On other fronts, Glassboro has struggled as Rowan University has expanded its presence in the community. There is a growing unease between residents and the university. The community is seeking to find its identity and struggling to be comfortable with its new neighbors.

The church had not been very intentional in a sustained outreach to Glassboro and Rowan University. The church had participated in the local food bank, Glassboro Unity Day, and Rowan vendor day among other things. However, we had made limited traction in becoming a vital part of Glassboro.

The challenge the church faces is to understand its call to be a vital part of the community once again. The church that has been a part of Glassboro for 190 years must now try to answer a very important question, "If we closed our doors would anybody notice?" Wrestling with the implications of this question will help the church to once again understand its mission in this community.

The "glory years" of this church were years where things like hospitality, community, love, and mission were at the forefront. More recently, this church forgot how to tell its story. It is a story of a God who created us to be in community with each other and with God. It is a story of a God and a church of radical hospitality. It is also a story of a church in mission. Our challenge really became how to tell the story in new ways.

As all this was happening and we were looking to make changes in the church, I entered Drew University to begin the D.Min program. As I began to share what was happening at Drew and what was going to be happening in the church, I noticed something intriguing. The people of the congregation were starting to get

excited. They had seen the response of the church and the community to Superstorm Sandy relief work and now we were talking about engaging the folks in even more intentional community building. They were ready and it was time to talk about the project.

For this project, we created a team of people who engaged in community building. This was done in part by Random Acts of Kindness (R.A.K.'s), Random Acts of Kindness Scavenger Hunt, and Loads of Love events within our congregation and our community. It was also accomplished by preaching, teaching, and training events held in our church and in various other places.

This project relit a passion in a church that had forgotten their story. The project provided a chance for people to engage, encourage, and enrich each other and the community. It was a powerful avenue and an enjoyable process for those involved.

“If we closed our doors would anyone notice?” This might have been the question being asked but I think as we moved beyond that we saw the answer in a whole new way and the answer was as obvious as the bright red nose of Bozo the Clown.

Learning to Love – Clown Style

Larry Harmon was a veteran, actor, musician, and entertainer among other things. He also had an alter ego, Bozo the Clown. Larry Harmon's Bozo would become a huge cultural sensation for several generations of people throughout the

world. Harmon believed that love and laughter were universal.⁴ It was this belief that pushed him to find new ways to tell his story of love and laughter to the whole world.

Harmon's example is one of adapting the delivery to the world around you while also maintaining the focus on the story. The story is what is vital. For Larry Harmon the story is laughter, but for the church the story is the life giving power of the Gospel. What our goal needed to be was a way to reconnect the changing community to that story.

Our work would require us to think about our community in new ways. It would entail us to find ways to connect the powerful life-giving story with a community that needed to hear it. It would require is looking at the community with the eyes of Jesus and the eyes of a clown. We would see with eyes that saw each person as a child of God. We would see with eyes that saw that the worth of each person was determined by God and not by society.

The challenge we faced was how we could go from "business as usual" to a new paradigm of ministry. The church was at a crossroads of its own choosing. The decisions that were to be made would chart the course for the future of the church. There were questions that needed to be answered. The project would be designed to help the church evaluate these questions and to answer them honestly. The project would be part of a process of self-evaluation. It was time to look at these questions:

⁴Harmon, *Man Behind the Nose*, loc.1956.

Questions:

How could the church make the transition from an inward focus to reclaim a prominent place in the community?

Could the church do the work that was necessary?

Would the church do it?

The answers to these questions were going to be the focus of our project. Each step that we took and each decision that we made together would determine the fate of the church. Larry Harmon's gospel of fun, laughter, and joy would stretch many in the congregation. It would be foreign to many in the community. This was going to be an exciting moment for the church and the community.

CHAPTER 2

SEEKING GOD'S VOICE

We began in the beginning. In the Genesis creation stories we see how God intended things to operate. We see God's plan for humanity beginning to take shape early in the creation accounts. God has placed man in the garden and surrounded him with all succulent fruit from the trees and all the ingredients to enable him to be as creative as God designed him to be:

“Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin^[d] and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.^[e] The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.”

— Genesis 2:8-14¹

Creation was happening. All around there was life and the potential of life springing up. God has begun to create an awe-inspiring place for the man to play. This was the moment that God had something else to say. The man and God were on the precipice of a new thing. Something spectacular was about to happen

¹ New International Version.

The scene had been set and now God had the man look around and told him to eat and play with no limit:

“The LORD God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it. ¹⁶ Then the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard” Genesis 2:15-16²

We have been presented with life how it was meant to be lived. This idea being presented in the garden is one of completeness. It is the true biblical meaning of shalom, fullness of life. This fullness of life is one filled with freedom and filled with play. Eat anything and do anything; it is all before you. As Huizinga says, “Play...is in fact freedom.”³ God has created for man the ultimate playground.

God creates and declares that this playground is good; day after day the pattern repeats itself. In fact, after creating humans, God surveys all that has been done:

*“God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.”* Genesis 1:31⁴

In the second chapter of Genesis we see that it may be “very good” but there is more to the story. After the animals have been created and man also has been created through the breath of God there seems to be a problem. God says things

² New English Translation.

³ J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), loc. 190.

⁴ The Message.

aren't good, let alone very good. Man is alone and there is no suitable partner to be found and no one suitable to play with. It is then that woman is created to be a partner to man, a playmate. Community has been formed. Despite the fact that man was with God there was more needed for him to be complete, we are created to be in community.

"The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone.

*I will make a helper suitable for him."*⁵ Genesis 2:18

It all starts with community, despite views from some to the contrary. We see the power of real community in the book of Acts in the bible. We see people living together and caring for each other and community growing day after day. Real community changes things.

*"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*⁶ Acts 2:46-47

This project that we initiated was designed to help the congregation be intentional community players, enhancers, and builders. Accomplishing this was going to take buy in from many different parts of the congregation. Initially the work would begin trying to encourage people to look towards what the future could be for the community. We would be finding ways to engage people where they are while using their strengths to make positive changes.

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Who do you see when you look at the "other?" Wrestling with these two questions becomes foundational as we

⁵ New International Version.

⁶ New International Version.

move from community into the dance of hospitality, love, and mission. Often times we view others through a Genesis 3 lens and look at ourselves through a Genesis 1 lens. Finding a bridge between these two views is vital to living out real community.

We tend to view ourselves through the Genesis 1 lens of “imago dei”:

*“So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”*⁷—Genesis 1:27

We claim that identity of being a child of God proudly. However, we often look at the “other” as fallen and cursed. In the lens of Genesis 3:

*Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”*⁸—Genesis 3:17b-19

In attempting to create community we need to find a way to form a bridge between the Genesis 1 lens and the Genesis 3 lens. Identifying the bridge will enable us to see everyone as God sees us and that is as a child of God.

As we engage with the Gospel story the bridge becomes clear for us. Jesus and the cross is in fact the bridge that emerges. Jesus’ work on the cross shows us a new vision of what is. It is a vision of contrasts. It is a vision that understands that

⁷ New International Version.

⁸ Ibid.

within us all is the “imago dei” promised in the Genesis 1 story but also acknowledges we remain fallen and in need of restoration (Genesis 3). The cross’ new vision brings this clearly into focus. “The cross has become the most powerful symbol of this new vision...a symbol of death and of life, of suffering and joy, of defeat and victory. It is the cross that shows us the way.”⁹ The cross becomes the bridge.

Hospitality in the congregation and the community is an outpouring of the love of God and neighbors that Jesus spoke of as being the greatest commandments.

“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’ ” - Matthew 22:37-40.¹⁰

Community lived out in hospitality, love, and mission are the legs of the Christian dance. Working together these legs perform a dance so beautiful it can’t help but bring glory to God in such a way that people will be drawn to see. We are created to be with others in mission inviting others to take part in this journey through our radical hospitality.

“Be like me,” Jesus said, “just as God sent me, I am sending you...so go and change the world.”¹¹ However, understanding how the Father sent Jesus is key to our story telling. Jesus surrounded himself with a group of people who journeyed with him. He also spent time in community with his father through prayer. Jesus’

⁹ Henru Nouwen, edited by Michael Ford, *The Dance of Life: Weaving Sorrows and Blessings into One Joyful Step* (Notre Dame: Ava Maria Press, 2005), 164.

¹⁰ New International Version.

¹¹ John 20:21 New International Version.

mission to the world did not begin until his late adult life after having being surrounded by community.

During his time of public ministry, Jesus still found time to be in relationship with others and enjoy the world that had been created by God. Jesus spent time with friends¹² and with others.¹³ It is in finding this balance of community, hospitality, love, and mission that we best follow the example of Jesus. Recapturing this focus for the community of Glassboro United Methodist will help the church move forward as a powerful witness for the Glassboro and the world.

Community

“One Love! What about the one heart? One Heart!

What about - ? Let's get together and feel all right

As it was in the beginning (One Love!);

So shall it be in the end (One Heart!),

All right!

Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right;

Let's get together and feel all right.

One more thing!”¹⁴

Feeling together and okay in community, Real Easter Community, is the foundation of who we are in our Christian dance. This first leg of our faith is an important one that plays itself out time and time again throughout the biblical story.

¹² Luke 10:38-42.

¹³ Luke 19:1-10.

¹⁴ Bob Marley, (1977), *One Love*, On *Exodus*(album). Kingston, Jamaica: Island.

From Adam's need of an ezer , to Paul's need of a Timothy, we are witnesses to God's plan for us.

Real Easter Community starts with a special relationship, our relationship with God. The journey to being in relationship with God begins with God, according to German philosopher George Hegel. "The only way to know God was in relationship to God, and the only way to be in relationship with God is for God to offer himself to us. God can only be known as God is...as loving relationship."¹⁵

Relationship does not end with our relationship with God. Instead, real relationship with others finds its genesis from there because of our relationship with God we strive for more. However, we often find ourselves seduced by the world's values. We were created to desire God first and when we don't we see that "we are a culture craving relationship...we live and work in a sea of humanity, but we end up missing out on the benefits of regular, meaningful relationship".¹⁶

The relationship leg of our life is vital to the dance. We have the desire for relationship deep inside of us, "a desire for real communion has been part of you since you were born."¹⁷ It is a desire for authenticity that we need "real communion not simply affection. Communion born of relationship with God and others."¹⁸ This

¹⁵ William Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 61.

¹⁶ Andy Stanley and Bill Willis, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Colorado Springs: Mutinomah Books, 2004), 24.

¹⁷ Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

desire is a driving force behind much of what we do. We yearn to connect and to find partners for our dance.

Hospitality

*But tell me, did the wind sweep you off your feet?
 Did you finally get the chance
 To dance along the light of day
 And head back to the Milky Way?
 And tell me, did Venus blow your mind?
 Was it everything you wanted to find?
 And did you miss me
 While you were looking for yourself out there?¹⁹*

Left alone we often wander aimlessly in search of something. In community we have learned we begin to be who we were created to be, but we still are searching for space and to welcoming. In politics we often hear of the need of a big tent. I would suggest that those who walk with God understand the idea of a big tent better than anyone. The story of Abraham and Sarah and their entertaining angels²⁰ speak to us early about the importance of hospitality. Real community lives itself out in acts of hospitality. Living out hospitality forces us to see the “other” as God sees us. We see in the guest the same things we see and know about ourselves.

We are reminded of our identity as a child of God and see the same in the stranger before us. “Living in hospitality is remembering who we are as Christians,

¹⁹ Train, (2001), *Drops of Jupiter*, On *Drops of Jupiter*(cd). New York: Columbia.

²⁰ Genesis 18:1-8.

the second step is recognizing who the stranger is, standing before us.”²¹ The authentically lived out dance of hospitality between stranger and host is one in which each takes the lead and each learns to follow. “Because the guest is actually more than just a guest, but is Christ, then there is another surprise as well. Christ becomes the host and the host becomes the guest. When we attend to the guest we are not left unchanged.”²²

When we start from the foundation of relationship and community we begin to understand something very important about hospitality. It is not about someone who fits a certain mold or has “earned the right” for us to be nice to them. Instead, it is a realization that we are called to be in solidarity with the stranger. “Hospitality does not entail feeling sorry for someone and trying to help. We cannot write out a check, drop off some groceries, or pay a heating bill and consider ourselves hospitable,”²³ instead we are called to suffer with people. This is where the dance of hospitality takes us.

As we laugh, work, play, eat, and live together we will notice the tent continues to get bigger. The act of hospitality becomes not an act, but instead an integral part of who we are. Living in community with each other is an act of always understanding we are not created in isolation. Hospitality then becomes the path of creating safe places for all of God’s children to live out their purpose.

²¹ Amy Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville:Abingdon, 2001), 45.

²² *Ibid.*, 50.

²³ *Ibid.*, 109.

Love

“Hear with your heart and you won't hear a sound

Just Stop [stop], 'cause I really love you

Stop [stop], I'll be thinking of you

Look in my heart and let love keep us together, what ever.”²⁴

People have been singing about it for generations. Poets have been trying to describe it futilely for an eternity. Movies have been trying to portray it since the dawn of film. Yet it remains elusive. Love. What is it? In many ways it can be described as the glue of the universe. Jesus tells us the importance of it and states that the bible is not the bible without it.²⁵

What makes us seek relationship and community? What makes us offer hospitality? Listening to the words of Jesus we know it is love. For us, love must be the key to the dance that happens in our lives. In the Gospel of John we see the way it should be, “My first love is Jesus. My second love is people because Jesus loved people.”²⁶

Living out the love of God is shown by how we love the “other.” Authentic hospitality is done in love and in desire for community. Love becomes the reason why we dance. It is the reason God creates and the proof of God’s existence.²⁷ It is

²⁴ Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield, (1973), *Love will Keep Us Together, On The Tra-La Days Are Over*(album). England: MGM.

²⁵ Matthew 22:36-40.

²⁶ Bob Farr, *Renovate or Die: 10 Ways to Focus your Church on Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2011), 22.

²⁷ John 3:16.

the music that we hear as we dance. As with any dance, the choice becomes ours.

Will we allow the music to lead us or not?

Mission

“Take me to that other place

Reach me

I know I'm not a hopeless case

What you don't have you don't need it now

What you don't know you can feel it somehow

What you don't have you don't need it now

Don't need it now

It was a beautiful day”²⁸

Understanding need is important. Understanding the cost of that need is even more important.²⁹ Once the cost has been counted, plans that have been developed must be completed. In Asbury Park, N.J. there is remnants scattered along the shoreline of a once promising future. Rebuilding had begun in earnest. This would be the moment to move the city into the future. Yet, a decade or so later there are uncompleted buildings that have become an eyesore for a community. It is a constant reminder of uncounted costs.

Mission becomes how we show that we are followers of Jesus, a disciple. “Disciples of Jesus are full of Christ. But we are most fully Christ when we are at play.”³⁰ Mission is play. This dance of the Christian life is play for us. As we watch a

²⁸ U2, (2000), *It's a Beautiful Day.*, On *All That You Can't Leave Behind*(cd). Dublin:Interscope.

²⁹ Luke 14:28ff.

³⁰ Leonard Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't have to be such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, Ill: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 243.

dance unfold we need to see movement happen to fully appreciate the artistry. The movement of this Christian dance is mission. Mission is the verb of Christian life. It is the action of moving forward. It is the go.³¹ Mission is how we in community dance out our hospitality in love with the world. Mission is our dancing out the cost that Jesus not only counted but also paid.

Mission is how we dance out our obedience to God. It is in mission to a world that we begin to live out the “imago dei” that exists in each of us but is most fully lived out when we are in community.³² Mission is movement. It is a movement of community towards the world with the intention of “bettering peoples lives for the sake and purpose of Christ, no matter if the person will be a Christian some day.”³³

Looking at mission as more than an obligation opens up a new range of possibilities. It allows us a chance to integrate the theology and the action behind the theology. It gives us the okay to take church outside the sanctuary into the world. Mission becomes an integral part of who we are.

Questions abound when we look at mission in this way. We begin to wonder why church has lost this focus in the first place. We begin to question whether the church can once again reclaim this focus. We challenge barriers and boundaries that have been placed before us. We look back while moving our focus to the future.

³¹ Matthew 28:19-20.

³² Genesis 1:27.

³³ Barr, *Renovate or Die*, 32.

Mission for us becomes not a committee in a church but our *raison d'être*. A people formed for community live out love and hospitality in their mission. Identifying that mission is then crucial for the community. It is the premise of this project that our mission is in community building.

CHAPTER 3

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The Local Advisory Team (L.A.C.) was recruited with the idea of bringing a diverse group of people together from the church. The team was brought together and then the project was developed in its entirety. The L.A.C. was comprised of members of the church exclusively. This group contained young adults and other adults of all ages, all of whom had shown an interest in working with the community.

The project's intention was to find practical ways to engage with the community and to create something that would be both repeatable and transferable. There were three main components to the project: teaching, training, and implementation. Each piece was created from input from the L.A.C.

Teaching

The main avenue of the teaching happened in a bible study and a sermon series. (Appendix B). The bible study was held for seven sessions. The study itself was designed around the lessons that are taught at Ringling Brother's Clown College. Each lesson had a game that would be used to help teach the main point of the session.

The Lessons:

Introduction Class

1. Class 1 – Character Development
2. Class 2 – The Art of Dance
3. Class 3 – Props and Costumes
4. Class 4 – The Art of Falling Down
5. Class 5 – Pantomime
6. Class 6 The Missing Piece

Introduction Class

The introductory class focused on the concept of calling in scripture in our life. The premise of the class is that we are all called to live out the calling of a C.L.O.W.N. lifestyle. The class spent time exploring the calls of Abraham, Samuel, and David. The takeaway from that class was that each person has a calling and the question becomes will we answer that call?

The class started with a time of prayer. After the prayer, each person was asked to talk about images of clowns. What did they think of when they thought of clowns? Was a clown a happy thing or a scary thing? The class spent some time unpacking these images. It was a playful time but also a powerful time as we talked about fear, excitement, and energy.

Class 1 – Character Development

The class again began with prayer. After the prayer, review of the introductory class happened. We touched briefly upon the images and discussion about clowns. We also reviewed the idea of calling in scripture. We then moved into the lesson.

This class then began with an activity, “Follow the Leader”. This activity had everyone gather in a circle with one person in the middle. One of the people in the circle was determined to be the leader. This person would do various actions and other people in the circle would follow. The person in the middle was tasked with trying to determine who the leader was. This task was to help the group see the difficulty in figuring out who to follow and who a leader really was.

The first class then began to follow along the path of Clown College and we wrestled with character development. In Clown College an important part of the training is focused on who and what the clown will be. This emphasis on character is important for us as well. For the student in Clown College, as well as each person who follows Christ, it is vital that we realize what is important to us.

We looked at the following three questions:

What is your foundation? – Jeremiah 29

Who are you following? – Luke 5:1-11

Where is your focus? – James 4:1-17

Answering those questions helps us to develop into the people that we are called to be. When our foundation is built on God what we can then do is look beyond our present condition and grasp onto the hope that is promised us. When

we follow Jesus we are filled with the promise of abundant life. Once our foundation is set and we follow Christ it helps keep our focus on the path Jesus sets for us and then we are not distracted and disengaged by struggles, conflicts, and sorrow. Instead we continue to focus in on God.

Class 2 – The Art of the Dance

The class again began with prayer, once again we moved into a review of the previous week's lesson. This week's activity was called the "web of relationship". Each person again was in a circle and they were given a huge ball of yarn. The people would hold onto a bit of yarn and throw the ball across and around the web. At the end of the exercise we talked about connectivity of the people. Each person was important to the web. We all are connected and each person is vital. Without just one of those persons the web and the relationship would be altered.

The second class focused on the importance of relationships. In a community that is struggling and different factions are vying for a voice, it is important for a follower of Jesus and the church to remember that every person matters. People are broken in this world and broken people tend to have unhealthy relationships. The question for us then becomes what do we do about the brokenness?

The class discussed and worked through the need for restoration and healing. In our community we have people dealing with poverty, job insecurity, divorce, homelessness, and other issues. The question becomes how do we engage the community in such a way as to ensure that everyone feels as if they have a voice

and that they are a welcome part of the community. If, in fact, everyone is searching for relationship then what type of relationship are we willing to offer?

We explored the biblical case for relationship¹ and also the biblical mandate for radical hospitality². God realized we were no good alone and Jesus taught us the importance of welcoming all. We found that these stories still had the power to speak to a world in need of restoration. Working through these passages, the class began to develop a plan for and understand the importance of learning the “art of the dance” with the community.

Class 3 – Props and Costumes

This class again began with prayer and then a review of the previous week’s lesson. We started the class with an activity called telling the story. We handed out a bag with many different household items in it. Each person was asked to pick something out and begin telling a story about the item. After 45 seconds the bag was passed and a new item was selected. Each person would use their item and add to the story already being told. At the end of the activity we talked about how important each person was to the story and how it was important to make space for each person to tell their story.

The class would then began and dealt with the importance of hospitality. Hospitality for so many is just the act of opening the door or offering a meal to friends, but real hospitality is so much more than that. An important component in

¹ Genesis 2:18-25.

² Luke 15:1-31.

hospitality is helping the outsider or poor feel welcome, which at times requires more than food and drink- it calls for a recasting of social relations. Including the “other” in one’s circle of friends or business associates, sponsoring an outsider, welcoming a servant, or mentoring an apprentice can be acts of hospitality.³

We understand that real hospitality does not simply happen in our houses or in the church. Real hospitality and community happens when we acknowledge the “other” and use the gifts God has provided us to encourage relationship and restoration.⁴ The art of welcoming and including requires us to not see the stranger as the world sees.

We are called to know that the stranger is more than the widow, sick, or hungry but rather it is Christ himself. To offer hospitality to others is to offer it to Christ himself. In receiving others we receive Christ, in rejecting them we reject Christ. To recognize Christ at the door is not easy...it is rarely the Christ we expect.⁵ Hospitality for us becomes our response to God’s abundant love.

Class 4 – The Art of Falling down

We started this class with prayer and a time of review. The activity that followed was called the “Silent Game”. This activity asked a series of volunteers attempt to “act out” a series of predetermined phrases with just facial expression. After the activity we talked about what it was like to succeed in guessing or how it felt to fail guessing the phrase.

³ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 13.

⁴ 2 Kings 7:7-24.

⁵ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 50.

The class then dealt with the reality of failure. A broken people in need of restoration are bound to make mistakes, so what happens then? This is a question we wrestled with as we looked to the biblical story. What we discovered is that falling down is just part of the journey.

Moses, Jonah, and Peter are three of the people we discussed. God used each of these men mightily and yet each of them made big mistakes. What we notice in their accounts though is that their mistakes did not define whom they were as God still accomplished great things through each of them. The lesson for us then becomes do not be afraid to fall down.

Class 5 – Pantomime

The next class started with prayer and review. We then went into an activity geared towards storytelling. We gave each person a beginning and an end of a story and then had them tell the middle. The exercise forced the participants to use their imaginations to create a logical flow of the story. We then discussed the difficulty in telling a story when we know the beginning and the end. We also spent a little time discussing the benefits to knowing the end of the story as well.

The class then dealt with the idea of learning to tell the Story in new ways to a new audience. We look around our community and see that the world is not the same. Our neighbors look different and have different dreams and visions. They engage in the world in different ways. So as clowns had to learn to tell their story in a larger three-ring circus, we must find ways to do the same thing in an ever-changing world.

Learning to tell our family story in the world today means finding ways to bring people together. It is the act of living lives that radiate the truth of God's love. We understand that one way we form identity and community is by telling family stories. Our stories as Christians tell not only who we have been but also who we long to be.⁶ Who we long to be are a people of Real Easter Community.

Class 6 - The Missing Piece

We started this class with a prayer and then review of all we had covered in the previous sessions. Our evening activity was called "The M&M game" Each person would select three pieces of candy from a bowl. We would go around the room and the person would answer questions based upon the colors of the candy that they selected:

Red: Favorite Hobby

Green: Favorite Food

Yellow: Favorite Movie

Orange: Favorite place to travel

Brown: most memorable moment

Blue: Wild card - any question

After the activity we looked at three different questions. How did it feel sharing with the group? Were some things harder to share than others? What benefit is there in learning more about others?

⁶ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 280.

The final class then dealt with what Real Easter Community looked like and how becoming a member of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad could help us attain that type of community. The bible paints a picture of real Easter Community⁷ for us. It shows us that it is a group of people that focus in on God and each other. It is a community based upon the love God has for us and also ensuring that those within the community feel that love in their own lives.

Real Easter Community can only begin by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁸ A people without the vision provided by the Spirit will not succeed⁹. However, a group that has the Spirit will begin to show some of the signs of Real Easter Community. These signs are littered throughout scripture and include being a people of prayer, peace, joy, love, compassion, trust, patience, kindness and mercy.

Living out Real Easter Community incorporates the things Jesus spoke about¹⁰ and the things Jesus did¹¹. When these things become a priority in our lives then we will begin to see glimpses of this community.

The sermon series followed along with the bible study week by week. Our intention throughout Lent 2014 was to engage the church in the idea that the C.L.O.W.N. Squad would be our way to make a mark in the community. We would be learning how to engage and develop community in a new way. Throughout the

⁷ Acts 2:42-47.

⁸ Acts 2:1-4.

⁹ Proverbs 29:18.

¹⁰ Luke 4:18-19.

¹¹ Luke 9:10-17

sermon series and bible study people were challenged to begin to understand what the dance of community looked like when it was lived out.

Training

There were two different types of training that were going on during the project. We were engaged in small group training at the church and at a local convenience store headquarters. This training dealt with what it meant to be a member of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. The training was broken down into different modules and each module had a teaching component as well as an activity or a game that would illustrate the lesson of the module. (Appendix D).

The small group training focused on giving people hands on tools and experience with living out the mission of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. We looked to engage people with theology, practice, and examples. We looked to build cohesion in the teams and get them to work together.

The second type of training that was done was large group training at two local church revivals. The first revival was a standard three-night revival and the training was done in a sermon and question and answer format. The second church revival was a one-day event geared towards the youth. This training was done with games, teaching and conversation. The purpose of these training events was to once again introduce the concepts of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad project and also teach groups how to implement pieces of the project in their own context.

The training in both venues was hands on. We used imagery and activities that would enrich and encourage the teams and people being trained. The teams were given tools and other resources to move forward with the idea of the

C.L.O.W.N. squad. In addition, each training group was assigned a point person from our team that would be available to coordinate and assist in any planning.

Implementation

Random Acts of Kindness (R.A.K.) Cards

It was decided by the L.A.C. that the Random Acts of Kindness (R.A.K.) Cards (Appendix A) would be the centerpiece of the project. It was believed that this would be a simple activity that everyone could easily participate. Each person that was participating in the project could use the cards in a variety of ways. After performing a Random Act of Kindness (R.A.K.) for someone the “doer” would give one half of the card to the “doee.” The purpose of doing the R.A.K. would then be explained.

The other half of the R.A.K. would then be brought back to the church and collected. Finally we put up paper hot air balloons in the church that would represent each R.A.K. that was performed. These balloons would be a visual reminder to the congregation of what we were doing.

The R.A.K.’s were talked about in church, meetings, bible studies, and through every other form of communication we had. There was a constant reminder of not only the cards, but also the reason we were doing the acts of kindness. We had the cards available at every church function and gathering and assured all those who wished to take them could have as many as they wanted.

Conversation about the R.A.K.’s began to happen in local stores and organizations as more and more people started being impacted by them. People began calling the church or sending emails to the church to ask about the program.

We even received some feedback from other groups that wanted to participate in the program with us.

Loads of Love

The Loads of Love event was another way to show the community that we were excited to be a good neighbor. We started having conversations with a local laundromat in town about blocking out a few hours one afternoon to take over and help folks do their laundry. We decided to do it for four hours one Sunday afternoon. We paid for every customer's washing, drying, laundry detergent, and fabric softener during that time. In addition we provided, food, and drink. We also had a small team of people who were there during the time and engaged the customers in conversation and assisted with the laundry in whatever way that they could.

The patrons were engaged with the volunteers and enjoyed the interaction. A festive environment was created in which laughter and music permeated an area that was often silent and dreary. We witnessed the patrons, owners, and volunteers conversing with each other and sharing their own stories.

Random Act of Kindness Scavenger Hunt

The Random Act of Kindness Scavenger Hunt was an afternoon long event that tied in much of the community of Glassboro. We had teams of four or more people go around town and do various R.A.K.'s . In addition we had the teams go to various places in the community that they may not have been familiar with and learn some of the history of the area.

Teams were sent to a local nursing home and engaged in conversation with some of the residents. In addition, teams went to local supermarkets and bagged groceries. Some of the other stops included bagging leaves at various residents' homes, paying for someone's meal at a fast food restaurant, and buying movies for people at the local Red Box. We also had the teams stop at the local VFW and Glass Museum to learn more about the history of the community.

The Scavenger Hunt was the final piece of the project. We viewed it as a celebration and as one final way to do some kindness in the community as we wrapped up our work. The teams competed for prizes and were timed on how fast they completed their tasks. We ended the Scavenger Hunt with a meal at the church where we all gathered together.

The Scavenger Hunt was the place where the Random Acts of Kindness were lived out in the community. We challenged teams to engage with the community. We looked to create space where connection could happen. This event was one filled opportunity and passion for neighbor.

Social Media

Social Media was an important part to this project. We had a Facebook page and a Twitter account set up exclusively for the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. We also used the church website to promote C.L.O.W.N. Squad functions. A link to the Facebook page was included in each R.A.K. card and we encouraged people to post their experiences with the Random Acts of Kindness.

The Facebook page also became a place where people would post about other acts of kindness that they had seen or witnessed or heard about. This became a dependable and ever present way to continue to tell the story of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. This page was also promoted during all church activities and events. It became a way for people to share things they had heard or seen about how kindness was making a difference in their community and the world.

The page became integrated in sermons and bible studies at the church. Several people were given administrator access to the page. Each person was tasked with not only ensuring things were being updated but also to keep an eye out for videos or other stories which would tell the story of Random Acts of Kindness in the world.

Facebook and Twitter were also used during the sermon series and the bible study. We incorporated a process in which we tried to engage people before, during, and after the event. Social media would be used as a way to engage people throughout the week. The idea would be to use questions and other illustrations to spur dialogue.

We incorporated a process in which we tried to engage people before, during, and after the event. We would ask questions Tuesday before the sermon or bible study and try to elicit responses and create places for dialogue. During the sermon or bible study we would assign hash tags that people would use to encourage conversation during the event to connect with those who were not able to be with us. Finally, we would ask questions on social media after the sermon or

bible study once again trying to keep people connected with the ideas and stories that were talked about.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATION TIME

Each piece of the project was evaluated. The evaluations were done in several different forms. Surveys, group interviews, and individual interviews were done as we looked at all parts of this project. The evaluations were reviewed by the L.A.C. and were used to help formulate plans for expanding this project into the future.

Evaluating the Teaching

The Procedure

The main instrument used to evaluate the bible study was a survey form (Appendix E). This form focused on three main areas; content, delivery and format. The forms were handed out at the end of each class, filled out and returned that night. The surveys were reviewed by the L.A.C. at the completion of the bible study.

The sermon series was evaluated in two main ways. Two groups of people were asked to take part in the evaluation. The first group was handed

sermon evaluation sheets (Appendix D). The second group was asked to take part in focus groups that would meet and discuss the sermon each week. The forms and notes of the focus groups were evaluated by the L.A.C. after the sermon series was concluded.

The Results

The surveys for the bible study were reviewed by the L.A.C. The results were discussed and two things were noted. In 100 percent of the surveys the content was considered to be “valuable” or “very valuable” to incorporating the scripture and lesson with the participant’s life. The second things highlighted was that over 80 percent of the people thought that the activity that accompanied the bible study was an effective means to incorporating the lesson in a hands on way.

The activities in the bible study were designed as “ice breakers” that would parallel the lesson for the evening. This was a new feature of bible studies at Glassboro Methodist Church. Typically the bible studies were lecture or discussion based. This addition was well received.

Two things stood out as we looked at the evaluations of the sermon series. The first thing that became evident was that visuals were a very big part of the sermon series. The mascot for the series, “Randy the R.A.K. Clown”, was well received by most people. The mascot was a wooden life sized cutout of a clown that was dressed up, piece by piece, as the sermon series continued. Each week another article of clothing was highlighted and attached to the cutout. “Randy” was left in the

front of the sanctuary throughout the series and was a constant reinforcement for the congregation of the importance of Random acts of Kindness.

The other visual that was used in the sanctuary was tied into the R.A.K cards. Each R.A.K card that was returned was then represented by a paper cutout of a hot air balloon that was attached to the walls in the sanctuary. Again, this became a constant reinforcement of the lessons we were hearing during the sermon series.

The second notable takeaway from the evaluations was evident in the comments from the survey results and the focus group. The results of both evaluation tools showed that a strong majority of people found a strong connection between the scripture text, the message, and their everyday life. One member of the focus group said that they found the sermon series “Was not only touching on important topics but showing us how to apply the scripture to how we live our lives and the importance of community.”

Evaluating the Training

The Procedure

The small group training was evaluated using surveys and individual interviews. These evaluations and interviews were done after the training was complete. The evaluations again focused on both content and format. The interviews also focused in on these same areas.

The evaluation of the revivals was also done by surveys and individual interviews. This time the group of people who organized the revivals took the evaluations. The reason for this was we were evaluating not only the effectiveness of

the training but also whether the training met the expectations of the organizing team. The L.A.C. reviewed all the evaluations and the interviews after each phase of the training was completed.

The Results

The results of the small group training were a bit underwhelming. The evaluations showed that a majority of people found the training to be “beneficial or very beneficial” in connecting the training with everyday life. The evaluations showed a higher than expected minority that had trouble making the connection. As the L.A.C. evaluated the results of the evaluations and interviews this was the area that was the most surprising.

The L.A.C. spent quite a lot of time reviewing the training and conducting follow up interviews. The conclusion that emerged was that those who took part in at least one other form of teaching, bible study, or sermon series, were more likely to have connected the small group training with everyday life. Those that were experiencing C.L.O.W.N. Squad for the first time in the training often enjoyed it but did not immediately see the connection to everyday life. One person interviewed said, “It was a good time and we learned a lot but I am not sure how I can use this when I go back to work.”

The evaluations of the revivals were a little more positive. The results reviewed by the L.A.C. showed that a large majority of the people believed that this was an effective way to teach the importance of community. All the group

organizers also believed that the training was right for the event. One organizer said, “The excitement and hands on training was exactly what the kids needed.”

Evaluating the Project Implementation

R.A.K. Card

The Procedure

The evaluation of the R.A.K. cards took several different approaches. Interviews were done with several members of the congregation. In addition, several people were identified that were recipients of the R.A.K. cards and they were interviewed as well. Two of the adult Sunday school classes were used as focused groups and interviewed.

These groups that were interviewed were asked to explain their interpretation of the project. They were asked to talk about goals and outcomes. In addition, they spent time in conversation about the impact noticed in the community. The groups were encouraged to share experiences and anecdotes that they observed. These groups and those interviews went a long in helping identify the results.

The Results

The results of the interviews of both participants and recipients were very positive. One participant, when asked about the experience said, “Having the cards with me kept me constantly looking for opportunities to do something for someone.

I always try to be helpful and kind but this helped me make it a more important part of my life.”

The focus groups were also very receptive to the process. One remarked, “It was very exciting walking into the sanctuary each week and seeing how many balloons would be hanging up.” The focus groups also were asked about the cards’ impact on the church. A large majority of the people asked agreed with one person who remarked that she believed that the program brought an “energy and excitement” to the church.

Loads of Love

The Procedure

The evaluation of the Loads of Love activity concluded with interviews of people who were customers of the Laundromat during our event and also with the owners of the laundromat. The interviews focused in on the recipients experience and their overall impression of the event. The interviews with the owners focused on their interaction with the customers and the volunteers.

Interviews were conducted before the event with the owners and then during and after the event follow-up with the owners happened. In addition, some interviews were conducted with people who were drawn into the laundromat by all the activity. Questions were asked about their impressions as well.

The Results

The results of these interviews were all very positive. Of the people surveyed only one had a neutral experience concerning the event. This person said that “there has to be some hidden agenda, people just don’t do things like this.” However, every other person interviewed had a very favorable response. The overall view of the responses evaluated by the L.A.C. was very positive.

The interviews with the owners were also evaluated by the L.A.C. These interviews were also very positive of the experience. One of the owners stated that he was “amazed by the energy and excitement by everyone involved.” These interviews showed a recognition by the owners that the community that uses their facility is in need of “connection, as they often look alone and sad.”

R.A.K. Scavenger Hunt

The Procedure

The evaluations for the scavenger hunt were broken down into three areas. Surveys were given to each team that participated in the hunt. In addition, interviews were done with people who “worked” the scavenger hunt at the various stops. Finally, interviews were completed with the team that set up the scavenger hunt.

The surveys were completed at the end of the hunt as each team returned to the church for the luncheon. Interviews were done with the people who “worked”

the event after the event was over. These were completed by phone. The interviews with the team that organized the scavenger hunt were done in a group setting the week following the completion of the scavenger hunt.

The Results

The results of the surveys were very interesting. The overall majority of team members had a very positive experience. The groups gave high marks to the activities that involved them serving people in the community. The groups also had positive responses about the scavenger hunt stops that were learning experiences about the community.

The results suggested to the team that we had begun to achieved what we had an envisioned. The event had gotten people to engage in the community in meaningful ways. It had encouraged people to be present in the community and to spend time with others. The results seemed to suggest that this was exactly what many people were looking for in a church community.

The one negative response that was repeated by a near majority of teams was that there was a need to build into the scavenger hunt more time for interaction between the various teams and the people from the community. The belief stated by one team was “if we are trying to build community and show kindness we need to have time to do that.”

CHAPTER 5

IT'S OVER WHAT NOW?

The C.L.O.W.N. Squad project was one in which the church was challenged to be uncomfortable. The congregation was encouraged to recapture the feeling of play and fun that is an innate part of all of us. The project was designed to encourage and foster community. It was an ambitious endeavor and in many ways it was successful.

A Problem Arises

However, one thing unexpected happened as we started to roll out the program. It became apparent very quickly that there was not a universal love of clowns. Together we learned the word coulrophobia, the fear of clowns. It is a real thing. It is an affliction that may impact about 2 percent of the adult population.¹ Perhaps it is the lack of circuses in the world today or movies and television giving us images of scary clowns. It could be the crazy outfits or the makeup as well that draws a little hesitation and even fear.

Some people look at a clown's makeup and think they are hiding something. Our country also learned that there were more types of clowns than Ronald McDonald when we learned of the serial killer John Wayne Gacy, who dressed as a

¹ Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, "The History and Psychology of Clowns Being Scary," *Smithsonian* (July 2013) , <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-history-and-psychology-of-clowns-being-scary> (accessed January 2015).

clown for children. So there are varied reasons why people may fear clowns. No matter what the reasons were, the reality that there was a problem became something that could not be ignored. The L.A.C. met to begin to look at other ways to present the program.

If the main ideas behind the development of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad were important enough we needed to explore ways to lessen the imagery of the clown. Was there any way to do this and still maintain the integrity of the project? We needed to resolve this situation before we could move forward. Was it possible that fear of a clown nose and a rainbow wig were going to shut down our project before it really kicked off?

Solutions are Investigated

The original plan had been for a real clown to be a constant visual throughout the project. Instead we set certain goals and used the clown costume as a “punishment” that the pastor would wear if certain goals were met. One of those goals were a certain number of teams had to sign up for the Scavenger Hunt. Another goal was for a certain amount of money to be raised for Relay for Life.

In addition, we used a cutout of a clown during the sermon series as a “safe” visual to remind people of what we were trying to accomplish. It was also decided to find a lot of comic depictions of clowns to use in sermon presentations, bulletins, and other printed materials.

The C.L.O.W.N. Squad members were all given t-shirts to wear that identified them as members of the squad as opposed to expecting them to dress in clown

paraphernalia. This gave them a presence in the community and the t-shirts helped them be visible but also not be a distraction. These changes allowed the project to continue unimpeded. The L.A.C. met with a few other stakeholders in the project and developed some plans for moving forward.

Moving Forward in the Church

After the project wrapped up, the L.A.C. came together to evaluate and talk with different groups in the church to see if there was a desire to move forward into the future with C.L.O.W.N. Squad. There were several different questions addressed by the groups as they met. The questions are known as the “Five W’s”: Why, Who, What, When, Where.

The First “W” – Why?

Why should we? Why does it matter? Why us? These “W” questions came quickly and easily. The answers, thankfully, came almost as fast. The questions all had a foundation in the idea of purpose. Does any of this matter to anyone? The group that gathered had to decide how to address this.

Conversation centered on the “why” us question. Had this project opened up an identity for us as we moved together into the future? What had we uncovered about our own identity that made us believe that moving forward this was a vital part of who we would be.

The group decided that there was a definite need in the community. This need was based upon the idea that people are looking for folks who actually practice

what they preach.² It was decided that the C.L.O.W.N. Squad would be one way that we would live this out.

The Second “W” – Who?

Who will be responsible for this project moving forward? This question had to be addressed before we went any further. The church had to decide whether there was a group of people who could follow through with the program moving forward.

The conversations included people who were involved in the Scavenger Hunt, Loads of Love, and R.A.K. card pieces of the project. A group of people was recruited to take over the administrative pieces of the project in the church. They would ultimately answer to the pastor as the project evolved.

The Third “W” – What?

This question became very difficult to define. The response the group finally settled on was a basic one. What will be the mission of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad moving forward? This question was talked about and debated for quite awhile. The group wanted the answer to be clear and concise.

The conversation focused in on what the project had accomplished up to that point. The group wanted the C.L.O.W.N. Squad to be more than just one event after another. The idea would be that the idea of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad would be

² Diana Butler-Bass, *Christianity after Religion* (New York:HarperOne, 2012), 36.

incorporated into the mission and ministry of the church. Finding ways of “Creatively Loving Our Wonderful Neighbors” would be a foundational piece of what the church would do moving forward.

The Fourth “W” – When?

The question that developed with this “W” became very apparent very quickly. The question that was developed was, “When will the C.L.O.W.N. Squad start back up?” Now that the initial phase of the project had ended the group needed to come up with a timetable for the continuation of the project.

The plan that was developed was designed with the United Methodist Church(UMC) structure in mind. Each church in the UMC conducts an annual meeting. At that meeting plans and budgets are approved for the following year. With this in mind a plan was developed to present to the church at the annual meeting. This plan would provide a budget and a plan for the C.L.O.W.N. Squad to start back up in January 2015. The annual conference approved the plan.

The Fifth “W” - Where?

The final question addressed became a simple one to identify. Where will the next stages of the project happen? This question simply had to assess two different things. Would the project continue only in the church or would it be run in and throughout the community as well?

The group very clearly and quickly decided that the project would be one designed to interact with the community. The initial direction of the project would

be honored and the focus would be engaging the community in different ways. The group made plans to find ways to engage the community in conversation to see how the project could be implemented moving forward.

Moving Forward in the Community

Throughout the project there had been conversation with various groups in the community about the C.L.O.W.N. Squad project. Conversations began with the schools, local non-profit groups, and Rowan University student groups. The conversations were attempts to build partnerships and interest in starting up C.L.O.W.N. Squads.

These conversations pointed us to many different opportunities as we planned to move forward. We continued to see where our experience and gifts would enable us to make the biggest and longest lasting impact. As these programs and groups were identified, stakeholders were also identified and dialogue and planning began.

Local Non-Profits

Tutoring

Conversation began with the Boys and Girls Club and Robin's Nest. Both of these local non-profits are working with children, youth, and families. These groups are well established in the community but are typically looking for more volunteers. The dialogue with these groups focused on how the C.L.O.W.N. Squad could partner with them.

These conversations focused on two particular ways that the C.L.O.W.N. Squad could be of assistance. One way that the Squad would assist would be in tutoring programs. Two teams of tutors from the Squad would work with these groups starting after school programs.

The program would start with these two teams and then expand as needed. The teams would work with the two organizations and their leadership to set up schedules and curriculum that would be used. The teams would evaluate the tutoring every quarter to ensure the effectiveness.

Shopping

A program was also discussed with a local group who operate the Samaritan Center. The Samaritan Center houses a food bank and clothes closet for needy families in the community. The food bank works like a typical food bank in our area. Residents show up and present their ID and are given a bag of food. There is no input from the person receiving the food as to what they would like.

The new program discussed by the Samaritan Center and the Squad would be giving the clients input into the type of food they would be receiving. Each client would receive a shopping list which they could use to select a predetermined number of items. This list would also include a selection of meat, seafood, and fresh produce.

The food would be delivered the week after the list was dropped off to the Samaritan Center. Each client would be allowed to use this program once a month.

This program would not be designed to replace the need for the food bank but would instead be a supplement to the program.

The school nurses in the community would provide the list of clients for this pilot program. This list of clients will be used as a resource for potential other projects which will include financial training and job training.

Local Schools

Community Meals

In September, permission was sought from the local school board to host a free community Thanksgiving Day breakfast. The school board granted the approval and then the planning began. The planning team consisted of local student groups, Rotary Club members, school administrators, staff, and members of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad.

The meal would be at the local high school before the annual Thanksgiving Day football game. It was billed as a way to connect with the community and support the local team. Local senior citizens, students and their families, and clients of the local food pantry were all targeted for invitations. The day would include food and music provided by students and The Glassboro Methodist Praise Band. Over 300 people attended the event.

This event would be the first of what is planned to be at least 2 community meals a year sponsored by the schools and the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. The events will continue to focus on connecting people with the community and providing a safe place for people to interact and connect with each other.

Character Development

One new phase of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad project will be a character development program. This program was presented and received approval from the school board in October. It will be introduced at the High School in January 2015 and then rolled out to the Intermediate School and Elementary schools in September and October of 2015.

The C.L.O.W.N. Squad program will be presented to the school children initially in an assembly. Every day our children are asked to make many choices, "In a modern day coffee shop there can be over 82,000 choices for a drink from the menu...Americans today make more decisions in a single day than some of our ancestors did in a month or perhaps a year."³ Surrounded by so many choices is it any wonder our children sometimes make decisions that do not honor and elevate life?

The assembly would speak to the desire that everyone has to be in relationship. The teaching priority will be on showing the worth and value of every person. It will point out that the decisions we make impact everyone. There is a need for everyone to be noticed and for everyone to be included. The teaching will conclude with introducing the R.A.K. cards. The R.A.K. cards will be the catalyst for the program.

The school will be divided by classes; freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior. The classes will be given R.A.K. cards to be used in the school and in the community. When the R.A.K. cards are returned they will be recorded. The school wide program

³ Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion*, 41.

will last for six weeks. At the end of six weeks the class that has recorded the most R.A.K. cards will be awarded with a pretzel party. In addition two members of the winning class will each receive a \$250 scholarship.

Rowan University

Conversations were conducted with several student groups from Rowan University. These conversations were designed to help find ways to introduce the C.L.O.W.N. Squad into the university life. We discussed different pieces of the project that would appeal to the students. We ran into many difficulties finding connections that were conducive to everyone.

The main hesitation seemed to be finding things that would inspire others to join in and yet not be too time consuming for the students. The conversation continued for quite awhile and several things seemed to resonate with the groups involved. The students believed that “one off” events might be the best way to introduce the concept of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad in their context.

With that in mind we will be inviting the student groups to participate in two events with us in 2015. The first event will be the Scavenger Hunt and the second event will be a “Homecoming Event” to be held in August of 2015.

The Homecoming will be a cookout for incoming freshmen and first year students and their parents. At this event we will distribute welcome bags that will include C.L.O.W.N. Squad information as well as church information. This event will feature games that will encourage bonding.

Glassboro Community

Scavenger Hunt

All of the other pieces of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad activities will lead up to the annual spring Scavenger Hunt. This event will be showcased as a celebration for a “job well done”. It will be an event where random acts of kindness are highlighted and rewarded. It will also be an event that allows the community to come together and grow in understanding and connection with each other.

The Scavenger Hunt can be positioned to be a community wide event that includes each of the groups that are part of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad during the year. It also has the most potential to bring leaders from Rowan University, our schools, and other community leaders together to help in the planning, administration, and implementation of the hunt.

The Scavenger Hunt will be “marketed” as the event for our church each year. We will be looking to form relationships with the community throughout the year that will include sponsors, participants, and volunteers. This will enable the church to be connecting with and planning with members of the community throughout the year. The church will incorporate the administrative costs of running the event and various programs into its operating budget moving forward. This will show the commitment of the church to the process moving forward.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL REFLECTION

It seemed so easy when I began this process. See a problem, develop a solution to the problem, bring people together to share the solution, and then sit back and watch the “magic.” The only problem is on the way to the magic show, I was faced with a reality I did not envision. The reality I did not know was that the stakeholders who were invested in each group that I was trying to bring together (community, Rowan, schools, church) all had their own hesitations and fears that made progress seem almost impossible at times.

Each group would voice a desire to build community but when it came time to participate in the process there was a hesitation on many people’s part to work together. There existed a level of distrust that I was not fully aware of until it appeared. This hesitation confirmed the need for community building but also made the process of community building more and more difficult to accomplish.

The process was almost derailed on several occasions because of the distrust. We continued to talk to the stakeholders in the group and looked to create a safe place for them to voice concerns and hesitation. We did what we could to bring people together and have them share their vision for the community. Slowly but surely we began to make progress.

We also noticed through this process that within each group there existed a few people who were “all in.” They wanted to participate in any way necessary and often times came in with their own ideas. The Scavenger Hunt originally started out as a softball tournament until people with other passions joined the team. The Loads of Love event was a suggestion from someone who had driven by a local laundromat and saw it filled with people.

The “secret” to this project was the ability of the project to empower people to claim ownership in various pieces of the project and to help expand the project in new directions. We started with an idea of what we wanted to do, a big picture. Welcoming more people to the conversation brought focus to the big picture. It was this process that helped us break the big picture down to workable pieces.

The ongoing involvement with the schools was another thing that started as an afterthought and has now expanded to community meals, scavenger hunts, school assemblies, and many more ideas that we are in dialogue about. The schools remain one of the places where I see the most potential for the C.L.O.W.N. Squad to make deep inroads and to have the most long lasting effects.

As the project begins to spread in new directions it is an interesting time. I have struggled with and worked with the concepts of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad for over 2 years. As these ideas have evolved over time it is in many ways like watching a child grow. I am not really sure the direction it will go but I am excited to see how far it has already come and where it will go. I simply know that this project has touched many people in the community in profound ways.

As we continue to review, pray, and plan the possibilities seem endless. What had started as a project has evolved into a theology and a methodology. We have begun to look deeper into how we can move forward into the community. Conversations have begun with the schools and the community that have been incredible to watch.

This process has been one of learning how to dream big God-sized dreams and try to help live them out. It has been a process that has had its frustrations and its challenges. Yet through every step of the way there has been those “thin moments”. Moments in which we caught glimpses of what kingdom living would be. It was these moments that helped us see the potential of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad if it would be lived out.

Each semester of this project was an experience to participate in community building. Together the church worked through sermon series planning and bible study planning. We met and worked through the training and implementation of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. We planned the scavenger hunt and talked about the impact it could have in our community moving forward.

This project forced the church to reevaluate how it would live out its call to be the church. The project ultimately has implications for every part of the ministry of the church. The question we faced was it worth the time? Was there a simpler way to do it?

For the 1st United Methodist Church of Glassboro it was decided that the C.L.O.W.N. Squad was exactly how we planned on living out the mission of the church. It would be how we chose to play in our community living out the call to

“Love God, Love each other”. We have chosen to be the church that looks with the eyes of Jesus and hear with God’s ears. These decisions will be what drives us and moves us forward over the next few months and the years ahead.

The project might be over but the C.L.O.W.N. Squad continues. We have gone into the community and listened to the stories. We have seen the impact. We have witnessed the power of people coming together. This project has helped us be a vital part of our community when many had begun to question the church’s ability to be an integral part of society.

I have heard stories of people who received a blessing in the form of a random act of kindness. I have talked to people who learned something new about their community during the Scavenger Hunt. I have seen a church wake up to its call to “love God and love others.” I have been impacted as well by seeing young and old dancing the Christian dance of community that is lived out in hospitality, love, and mission. That dance is a beautiful thing to see!

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

So you want to start the C.L.O.W.N. Squad. The question you must ask yourself is where do I start and what do I do? I would suggest that you spend substantial time with your church in conversation. The church has to be ready to let you cast a vision. It needs to be ready to play.

To go where you need to go and do what you need to do, the church needs to want to be a player in the community. It needs to look around and see the potential and the possibility that exists when you start engaging your community.

If I had to start this process again in a new location, I would ask the church five questions and if they said yes to each one of them then I would think that we were ready to move forward.

Are you uncomfortable?

A church that IS comfortable isn't ready for radical change.

Are you able to dream?

A church that is dreaming is ready to invite God into the dream.

Does your church have passion for people?

A church that is not extending hospitality is not ready to move.

Does your church invest in mission and ministry?

A church that is not willing to invest in itself is not ready

Does your church love to have play?

At the end of the day this may be the most important question.

The church that can answer yes to these questions is on the way. The C.L.O.W.N. Squad can be a reality. You are on the cusp of inviting your church to head on a new journey. It is a journey in which you will meet God and the community in powerful ways.

Good luck.

Appendix A

R.A.K. Cards

R.A.K. Card

This is another Random Act of Kindness brought to you by the

C.L.O.W.N. Squad

We are Creatively Loving **Our** Wonderful Neighbors

Tell us about your experience:

Facebook.com/ClownSquad881

Twitter: @ClownSquad881

Email: ClownSquad881@gmail.com



Sponsored by Glassboro Methodist Church

What was the R.A.K.:

Date:

Initials:

Appendix B

C.L.O.W.N. Squad Bible Study



C.L.O.W.N. Squad Manual

Learning how to

Creatively Love Our Wonderful Neighbors

Table of Contents

Introduction - Answering the Call to a C.L.O.W.N. lifestyle

1. Class 1 – Character Development
2. Class 2 - The Art of Dance
3. Class 3 – Props and Costumes
4. Class 4 – The Art of Falling Down
5. Class 5 – Pantomime
6. Class 6 The Missing Piece

Introduction Lesson

Answering the Call to a C.L.O.W.N. lifestyle

Let's start with a definition:

C.L.O.W.N. means – Creatively loving our wonderful neighbors.

The call to a C.L.O.W.N. lifestyle is a call to be in the world building community and being in mission. We are created to be in relationship with God and with each other. The work of the C.L.O.W.N. is to live out those relationships in bold ways.

Together we are going to be going to C.L.O.W.N. School together. For generations Ringling Brothers had a Clown college in Florida that would train a special group of people the art of being clowns. Over time people stopped desiring to be a clown. So the school closed down. Ringling Brother runs a smaller version from time to time now. However, the number of people desiring to be clowns remains at all time low levels.

I think that new generations of people are ready to once again answer the call to be clowns maybe not at the circus but maybe at an even more important Big Top, our community

So let's get to know each other....Two truths and a lie

Before we get to our Call...

What makes up a Call?

Famous Call Stories in the bible

Genesis 6

Who was called and what did the call look like?

1 Samuel 3

Who was called and how was the call discerned?

1 Samuel 16: 1-13 –

Who was Called? What was notable about the person called?

A Call from God isn't often as straight - forward as we would like.

So let's talk about Abram.

Scripture

Genesis 12:1-3

What do we know about Abram's past?

Look at Genesis 11, Joshua 24

What do we know about Abram from this account?

What was Abram's Call?

How About us? Where does the call to be C.L.O.W.N. 's come from?

Genesis 12 passage

Mark 12: 30-31

Class 1

Character Development – Being a member of the C.L.O.W.N. squad is not simply about a costume or makeup or even a joke or two. It is foundationally about showing the world what is important to you. It is too easy in this world filled with social media and constant “noise” to lose yourself and try and be something you are not.

It is vital that we start first and foremost with understanding what is important to us. We need to be able to identify particular values that are spawned from our morals that are not up for negotiation. In other words instead of blindly going through our lives we know exactly who or what we are following.

Character ultimately coming from knowing: **What is your foundation? Who are you following? Where is your focus? .**

Follow the Leader Activity

What difficulties did you experience playing this game?

If you were a leader what trouble did you have?

If you were in the middle, what trouble did you experience?

How about the other distractions?

Character Development – What is it?

So let's talk about what matters to us?

What are some of the non-negotiables?

What competes against those things for your time?



Foundation

Jeremiah 29:10-14

What hope can be found in this passage for people?

What role do we play in the living out of this hope?

Following

Luke 5: 1-11

How does Simon react to Jesus' request?

How does Simon react to the amount of fish caught? How does Jesus respond?

What did Simon, James and John leave behind?

Focus

James 4: 1-17

Where does conflict come from?

How can we counter that which is causing conflict?

According to James, where is the root of sin?

Class 2

The Art of Dance – The beauty of dance can be found in the movement and fluidity of the dancers. Dance is at its most powerful when it tells a story. For a clown, dance is a way to interact with the audience(community).

A famous dance, Thomas (Tommy the Clown) Johnson, came up with a “clowning” style of dance to enhance the storytelling ability of clowns at birthday parties. This style of dance today is known as Crumping.

At its core, dance’s power is its ability to bring people together and to elicit emotion in those participating and watching. It helps build and fortify relationship. When clowns learn to dance at Clown College they are learning a powerful art of storytelling. The story plays out through the dance and it is a story of relationship and love.

A Web of Relationship

Questions to think about?

What would the web look like if you weren’t part of it?

Why do we each need to participate?

Why are relationships so messy sometimes?

What happens if we stop asking questions and we stop talking to each other?

A member of the C.L.O.W.N. squad also needs to understand the power of dance. For us, it is an act of bringing people together and helping bridge relationships between often-disparate groups of people. C.L.O.W.N. squads can also play an important role in restoring relationships that are broken and in need of repair. Dancing with our community means we are always looking for ways to encourage relationship and bring folks together. We understand that everyone matters.



The Importance of Relationships

Genesis 2:18-25 –

“It’s all good...very good...well not so fast?”

What was the problem?

How did God try to fix it?

How did God fix it?

Why were Adam and Eve not ashamed?

The Need for Radical Hospitality – No one Left Behind

Luke 15:1-31

Why were folks upset at Jesus?

The Lost sheep

Why go after the one sheep? Why leave the 99?

Who are the lost sheep in our world?

The Lost Son

Let's talk about the Lost son?

Is he alone?

The misnamed parable

Class 3

Props and costumes –

P.T. Barnum and William Cameron Coup changed the modern circus in many ways. They changed the Big top from a predominantly one-ring circus to a multi-ring circus. Many acts all at one time. Their innovations brought to life the 3-ring circus that many of us remember from our youths.

The idea of the three-ring circus though changed the role of the clowns completely. The effectiveness of their comic dialog was lessened greatly. They soon transformed their acts to the use of wild costumes and props and big grand gestures that would draw notice of a large crowd to themselves.

The clowns still had a powerful story to tell. It was a story of love, laughter, and kindness and welcome. They just needed to learn how to tell it differently to a new audience. The skills learned at Clown College allow the clowns to do just that. They learn to use Props and costumes and “big” tricks to bring attention to the story. The story had remained the same they just needed a new way to tell it.

Let’s tell a Story...together

What Made telling the story easy?

What made telling the story hard?

What happens if you didn't get to tell your part of the story?

The C.L.O.W.N. Squad Member needs to learn how to make big sweeping gestures to tell a story. We need to get people's attention to the power of love, kindness, laughter, and welcome. Being a squad member means that we also need to learn to tell the story in such a way that everyone will understand it and feel welcome to participate in the story telling.



But I have nothing to offer

1 Kings 7:7-24

What is hospitality?

Is Hospitality important?

What do we know about this woman?

What does this tell us about God's mission for us?

What happens when we show hospitality to others?

Acts 28:1-16

Why is Hospitality shown?

Is this the way Hospitality is displayed today?

What happens when radical hospitality is lived out?

In these first accounts who are the people showing Hospitality?

What happens when we hang around with “THEM”?

Luke 14:1-14

Paint the scene....

Place yourself in the place of the man who was sick...How would he feel?

Verses 7-14

What are the priorities of the people at the banquet?

What happens when we hang out and tell the Story to the type of people Jesus hung out with? (Hint: Luke 7:34)

Class 4

The Art of Falling Down –

A Star is Born! Joseph Keaton was born into a vaudeville family. When Joseph was about 18 months old, his family was with Harry Houdini. The young Joseph took a tumble down a long flight of stairs and was unhurt. Houdini said that was a real “buster”.

In Houdini's day "buster" was used to refer to a fall that had the potential to produce injury. It soon became a family nickname for young Joseph.

Young "Buster" soon joined his family on stage. The act became very physical and there were complaints of child abuse. However, young Buster never seemed to get nicked up at all. He had mastered the "Art of the Fall".

Today we start with "The Silent Game"

How did it feel when we were unsuccessful?

How did it feel when we were successful?

The C.L.O.W.N. Squad Member needs to understand that we are called to be a constant presence in our community. We need to find ways to connect with people and help them know the powerful story of Jesus Christ. So what happens when we aren't successful? What do we do? Have we ever been unsuccessful as a group and as a church?

So how do we define failure as a person? How do we define failure as a church? Should we take any satisfaction in failure as a The C.L.O.W.N. Squad Member?



Numbers 20:1-13

What was the mistake made?

Why do you think it made?

Have you ever made a similar type of mistake?

Did Moses recover?

How?

What does that tell us?

A running fall hurts real bad

Jonah 1:1-17, 2:1-10, 3:1-10

How did Jonah fall?

Did he recover?

How does this impact us today?

Pride goeth before a Fall**Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75**

Why was Peter so convinced that he would not betray Jesus?

Why do you think Peter denied Jesus?

What warning does this give us as C.L.O.W.N. Squad Member?

Class 5

Pantomime-

Telling a story is a very important for a clown, a member of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad , and for the church. Learning to communicate our story is key in everything we do. So tonight we look at storytelling.

Storytelling Exercise

First and Last

What is it like trying to tell a Story when we know the beginning and the end but have to fill in the blanks?

What made it hard?

What parts were easy?

Being a member of the C.L.O.W.N. Squad means having to be ready willing and able to tell your story and THE STORY at a moments notice. The good news for us is that we know the beginning and end of these stories. God loves us. God saved and saves us.

So the question for us is to learn how to tell a story that matters to people of today. How can we take the stories of Jesus and the scriptures and make them come alive for people in our community?



Acts 18: 1-28

Where is Paul?

What is Paul's Goal?

What "tricks" does Paul use to tell the story?

Matthew 13:3-9

What is the audience for this parable?

What images can we use to tell that same story today?

Luke 15:4-7

What do we know about sheep?

What can we use today to tell that same story?

Can we just use modern images and “narraphors” to tell the Gospel story?

]

What is the point of storytelling?

Story.... Mahatma Gandhi said the following ”the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”

Tell me that story

Class 6

The Missing Piece + Community = Real Easter Community

Being a member of the C.L.O.W.N. squad means that we have chosen to be part of something. We have had to make choices to get to this point.

We have been building week after week pointing towards this moment. Living as a follower of Jesus means that we realize and value the importance of community. So the questions become for us why is community important? What makes Christian community? What does the bible tell us about community?

A real Easter Community is a group of people that share dreams, achievements, and fears.

M&M game

How do you feel about sharing with the group?

Are some things harder to share than others? Why?



Acts 2:1-4

Paint the picture of what was happening?

What changed?

Acts 2:42-47

What was this community able to accomplish?

Why were they able to accomplish that?

Biblical Attributes of Real Easter community

Ephesians 4:11-13

Ephesians 6:18

James 5:16

John 13:15-17

Matthew 5:16

John 17:23

Galatians 3:28

2 Corinthians 5:18

Luke 24:53

Appendix C

Sermon Links

Sermon : Three Ring Circus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oVT3OYV2Xs>

Sermon : Dirty Hands

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfXF8weqzcE>

Sermon : Working with God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKvPyL8IHf0>

Sermon : Easter Take it to the Streets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agW-8UhlAks>

Appendix D

Training Agenda

Why Missions? -C.L.O.W.N Theology

Larry Oksten - PastorBlueJeans@me.com

Module 1 – Community (2 Truths and a Lie)

Scripture: Genesis 2:18

Theme: We need Relationship

Main Focus: Despite being in the garden with God and all of creation, God noticed man needed a partner. We are created for relationship with God and each other.

Module 2 – Hospitality (sign relay)

Scripture: Romans 15:7, Luke 10:25-37

Theme: We are called to welcome all.

Main Focus: There shall be no strangers in the Kingdom of God. Just as Christ welcomes us we are called to welcome others always remembering we were once the outsider.

Module 3 – Love (Nametag Game)

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-38

Theme: Love. Love. Love

Main Focus: Love of God is lived out with our love of the other. We have no choice but to extend the hospitality and love to others building relationship.

Module 4 – Mission (follow the Leader)

Scripture: John 20:21

Theme: Being a follower of Jesus means being sent.

Main Focus: We are a people of mission. This means we are called to free, heal, release, and tell the story.

Module 5- True Community (String Game)

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Theme: Drawing people together by sharing and breaking bread together.

Mirroring real Community.

Appendix E

Sermon Evaluation

Allen, Ronald J. Preaching: An Essential Guide. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002.

1. What is the good news from God at the heart of this sermon?
2. Does the sermon honor the integrity and otherness of the biblical passage of the topic on which the sermon is focused? If so, How? If not, what could the preacher do to increase that dimension?
3. Is the sermon theologically adequate? Are the claims appropriate to the gospel? Intelligible (understandable, consistent with other things Christians say and do, seriously imaginable)? Morally Plausible?
4. Does the congregation relate the text or topic to the congregation in a responsible way?
5. What is the significance of the sermon for the congregation? What are the specific points of contact with the local context? Could the preacher bring the sermon more fully into the world of the congregation?
6. Did the sermon move in a way that was easy to follow? Describe the movement of the sermon. Comment on things the preacher did that helped you stay on track with the sermon. Not points at which the sermon was not as clear as it could have been. What might the preacher do differently?
7. Did the preacher engage the sermon in an engaging fashion: Comment on different aspects of embodiment: the sense of spirituality, presence and tone; the voice eyes, gestures, and other movements and pauses.
8. At what point did the sermon most connect with you?
9. What in the sermon, most helped with this connection?
10. At what point was the sermon most distant, or otherwise difficult, for you? What made it so?
11. What in the sermon most frustrated the sermon's ability to connect with you?
12. What is the most important thing you want to tell the preacher about this sermon?

(Allen, 2002)

Allen offers a preaching "handbook", not what he calls a "full blown introduction to preaching". Within his 7 chapters offering significant areas for consideration in the preparation of a sermon, he speaks with integrity about the need to cover both the content of the story and the context of the listeners. The book concludes with a creative series of 12 questions to guide sermon feedback.

Sermon Evaluation Group – Sermon Evaluation Worksheet

1. What I heard in the sermon, in one sentence, was?
2. What did the pastor say to you?
3. The pastor engaged me most when he...
4. What difference do you think the message of the sermon will make in your life?
5. In what ways were you challenged or drawn to greater responsibility in your areas of Christ-like living?
6. Did the Pastor's: style and/or method of delivery help or hinder the hearing of the sermon's message? Please explain.
 - a. Grammar and/or language
 - b. Use of stories and/or illustrations
7. What would add to the sermon, or what would you omit from the sermon?
8. After reading the scripture lessons, which scriptural text would you have used? The same, another verse?
9. What emphasis would you have made in the sermon? The same, another topic?
10. I have a question... or suggestion... (Please fill in if you do.)

(Hummel, 1981)

Sermon Preparatory Group Evaluation Questions

1. What did you feel about the Pastor's leadership in the sermon preparatory group?
2. How would you describe the sermon preparatory group experience
3. In light of the sermon preparatory group, how did you experience the sermon preached?
4. Did you feel free to discuss and suggest your ideas in the sermon preparatory group?
5. In a few sentences how would you explain the experience of the sermon preparatory group to others?
6. If you participated in this process again, what would you suggest to be included or omitted from the group?
7. What would you like to tell the pastor about the sermon preparatory group?

(Hummel, 1981)

Sermon Evaluation Group – Evaluation Questions

1. What did you feel about the Pastor's leadership in the sermon evaluation group?
2. How would you describe the sermon evaluation group experience?
3. In light of the sermon evaluation group, how did you experience the sermons preached?

4. Did you feel free to discuss and suggest your ideas in the sermon evaluation group?
5. In a few sentences how would you explain the experience of the sermon evaluation group to others?
6. If you participated in this process again, what would you suggest to be included or omitted from the group?
7. What would you like to tell the Pastor about the sermon evaluation group?

(Hummel, 1981)

Works Cited

Allen, R. J. (2002). *Preaching: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

Hummel, F. E. (1981). *A Shared Approach by a Minister and Congregation in the Preparation and Evaluation of the Weekly Sermon*. Madison, NJ: Drew University.

Bibliography

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Living Together*. Trans. John W. Doberstein Munich, Germany: SCM Press Ltd, 1954.
- Branson, Mark Lau. *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*. Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2004.
- Butler Bass, Diana. *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*. New York: HarperOne. 2007.
- Butler Bass, Diana. *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith*. New York: HarperOne. 2012.
- Carlson, Thomas. *The Indiscrete Image*. Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press. 2008.
- Chapin, Ross. *Pocket Neighborhoods: Creating Small-Scale Community in a Large Scale World*. Newtown, Ct.: The Taunton Press. 2011.
- Cupit, Don. *What is a Story?* London: SCM Press. 1991.
- Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. New York: Random House. 2012.
- Farr Bob. Kay Kotan. *Renovate or Die: Ten Ways to Focus Your Church on Mission*. Nashville, Tn: Abingdon Press. 2011.
- Gibbs, Jeanne. *Reaching all by Creating Tribes Learning Communities*. Windsor, Ca.: CenterSource Sysytems LLC. 2001.
- Halter, Hugh. Matt Smay. *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*. San Francisco, Ca.: Jossey-Bass. 2008.
- Harmon, Larry “Bozo”. Thomas Scott McKenzie. *The Man Behind The Nose: Assassins, Astronauts Cannibals and Other Stupendous Tales*. New York, NY..Harper Collins e-books 2010.
- Hinnebusch, William. *The History of the Dominican Order: Origins and Growth to 1500 Volume One*. Staten Island, NY. : Alba House. 1965.
- Howard, Tharon. *Design to Thrive*. Burlingtin, Ma. : Morgan Kauffman. 2010.

- Howard, Thomas. *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspectives*. Washington, D.C. : The Catholic University of America Press. 2013.
- Huizinga, Johan, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston, Ma. : The Beacon Press. 1944.
- Lambert, Joe. *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. New York: Routledge. 2013.
- McCann, Justin Abbot. *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press. 1952.
- McRobbie, Linda Rodriguez “The History and Psychology of Clowns Being Scary,” *Smithsonian* (July 2013) , <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-history-and-psychology-of-clowns-being-scary> (accessed January 2015).
- Muaddi, Susan. *The Old Clock Church: Forward through the Ages, A History of the Glassboro Methodists*. Morgantown, Pa. :Masthof Press 1999.
- Myers, Joseph. *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan. 2003.
- Neale, Robert. *In Praise of Play*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1969.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Reaching out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Garden City, NY. : 1975.
- Oden, Amy. *And you Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*. Nashville, Tn. : Abingdon Press. 2001.
- Salen, Katie. Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, Ma. : MIT Press. 2004.
- Savage, Carl. William Presnell. *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Approach for Faith Communities*. Louisville, Ky.: Wayne E. Oates Institute. 2008.
- Schnase, Robert. *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. Nashville, Tn: Abingdon Press. 2007.
- Slaughter, Michael. *Unlearning Church*. Nashville, Tn. :Abingdon Press. 2008.
- Stanley, Andy. Bill Willits. *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building Small Group Culture*. Colorado Springs, Co: Multnomah Books. 2004.
- Sweet, Leonard. *The Gospel According to Starbucks*. Waterbrook Press. 2007.

Sweet, Leonard. *The Well-Played Life*. Tyndale Momentum. 2014.

Willimon, William. *Conversations with Barth on Preaching*. Nashville, Tn. ; Abingdon Press. 2006