

Knowing the Condition of the Flock
Pastor Jim Alblas
Pioneer Christian Reformed Church

One of the great things about living in a smaller town such as Cedar Springs is being familiar with the people of the town. Running into the same people over and over again creates a sense of familiarity and appreciation. When I go to the grocery store, I look forward to having my groceries scanned by people whose names I've learned and whose hard work I've come to appreciate. Or when I go to the bank I enjoy making transactions with tellers who recognize me and ask how my family is doing. My personal favorite is when Shirley, one of the friendly door greeters at Meijer, spots the redbox dvd in my hand and even though I'm alone knows its for the kids and mentions how she hopes they will enjoy it. However, despite getting to know some of the people in town, the relationship only goes so far. Simply put, there's only so much dialogue we can have in our brief encounters.

Sadly, I think sometimes that's how it is in the church. While we know each other and appreciate the people whom we attend services with, often times our relationships with fellow believers are of the surface variety. Sometimes we keep to ourselves and don't strive to develop our friendships with one another. But this is not how God wants us to live. In Proverbs 27:13 we find an interesting verse that applies to this concern. It says *Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds*. Since the original audience were people who frequently dealt with sheep, goats and other farm animals, the teaching was there to remind them that if they knew their flock well and took care of them, they would experience great blessings. The flock would provide for them good things such as milk, clothing and food. Though not as many of us interact with these types of animals in our day to day lives, the passage still very much relates to us. As believers in Christ, together we make up a flock and it is our call to know the condition of the members of it. In other words, we should be investing in the lives of those we share that common faith with.

One of the reasons that we need to know what's going on in each others lives is because our condition changes from week to week. People are not like the books on my shelf that stay the same; sometimes people are doing well and other times they experiencing difficulty. Checking in with people and getting to know them helps us to better care for one another and it deepens our relationships. Jesus once asked His disciple, Peter, if he loved Him. When Peter answered yes, Jesus told him to then love and take care of His sheep. While some take that to mean that it's the job of the leaders in the church such as the pastor, elder or governing board, its actually the responsibility of all the believers. Galatians 6:2 says *Carry eachother's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*. Similarly, Colossians 3:16 says *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom*. We are eachothers sheep and when we strive to put aside surfacy relationships and dig deeper, just like the original audience, we will find wonderful blessings. When I think about the nourishing food and drink that the goats provided, I think about how today our caring words strengthen eachother and help us to keep going strong. And when I think about how the sheep provided clothing, I think about how we clothe one another with words of comfort and care.

And while this is something that we should work on especially with the people that we see regularly in our home churches, its not limited to just them. On behalf of The Cedar Springs Ministerial Association I'd like to invite you to a service of unity this Sunday morning at 11AM at Morley Park. Many different congregations in town will be joining together for a special service of praise, worship and messages from God's Word. Not only will this be a great time of Christian worship but its an excellent opportunity afterwards during lunch to take the time to get to know the condition of a member of the flock you haven't met before. Perhaps for some it will be the start of a regular practice. If you're relationships with other believers is somewhat distant, strive to get closer and experience the joy that comes from walking with one another closely.