

Nazarene Compassionate Ministries

Course of Compassion

Course Objective: The objective of this course is to equip practitioners with a biblical foundation and a technical framework from which to lead, communicate and engage in a spectrum of ministries of compassion across Local Churches, Districts, Fields and Regions.

Module 1 - Foundations of Compassionate Ministry (I)

Module Objective: The objective of this module is for a student to begin to develop a basis from which to articulate how compassionate ministries express our relationship with God and how these ministries serve the mission of the Church of the Nazarene.

Learning Outcomes

- The student will be able to articulate the overarching mission of the Church of the Nazarene and where the primary locus of that mission takes place
 - The student will begin to be able to articulate some biblical perspectives of ministries of compassion relating to God as a compassionate God.
 - The student will be enabled to present to a cohort how compassionate ministries serves the mission of the Church of the Nazarene
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Readings

1. Read chapters 1, 2 & 3 of the course textbook: *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*
2. Read the Preamble to Section IV Government of *Manual: Church of the Nazarene*
3. Read the attached article: "A Change in Thinking" - by John Watton (see Appendix A)

Video Clips

1. <http://asiapacificnazarene.org/resource/making-compassionate-disciples-ncm-asia-pacific-john-watton/>
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Assignments

Exercise #1 – 250 words

Our denomination's mission speaks of Christ-like disciples. Describe what Christ is like? Support your answer from Scripture.

Exercise #2 – 250 words

Describe some of the characteristics that a healthy church has. Offer examples from your personal experience.

Exercise #3 – 250 words

God is said to be a compassionate God. Defend this statement from what you know of God and what you see in Scripture.

Exercise #4 – 500 words (total for questions A.-F.)

Course book application questions - *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* [Chapters 1, 2 & 3]

- A. On page #11 of our *Compassion* course book the authors write: “But what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares. When someone says to us in the midst of a crisis, “I do not know what to say or what to do, but I want you to realize that I am with you, that I will not leave you alone,” we have a friend through whom we can find consolation and comfort.”

How does this statement help to shape the spectrum of ministries of compassion in the local church?

- B. On page #14 of our *Compassion* course book the authors write: “We need to pay close attention to Jesus’ words and actions if we are to gain insight into the mystery of this divine compassion”. The authors further present that the important element when Jesus healed was not so much the cure of the sick but the deep compassion that moved Jesus. On page #16 of our *Compassion* course book the authors also write: “The mystery of God’s love is not that our pain is taken away, but that God first wants to share that pain with us.”

Write out the verses of the twelve occurrences in the New Testament of the Greek verb *splangchnizomai* (“to be moved with compassion”). Example:

1. Matthew 9:36 “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion (*splangchnizomai*) on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (NIV).

- C. Chapter 2 of our *Compassion* course book is entitled “Servant God”. On pages #24 and #25 the authors present: “Jesus’ compassion is characterized by a downward pull”...that “Jesus’ whole life and mission involve accepting powerlessness and revealing in this powerlessness the limitlessness of God’s love. Here we see what compassion means. It is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull. On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there”.

When responding to a local disaster, it is difficult not to bend toward the underprivileged from a privileged position or reach out from on high to those who are less fortunate below. What are some ways to organize a response in order to avoid this?

- D. On page #28 of our *Compassion* course book the authors write: “Nobody finds anything wrong or strange with attempting to help people who are visibly lacking the basic necessities of life, and it appears quite reasonable to try to alleviate suffering when this is possible. But to leave a successful position and enter freely, consciously, and intentionally into a position of servant-hood seems unhealthy. It is a violation of the most basic human instincts. To try to lift others up to our own privileged position is honorable and perhaps even an expression of generosity, but to attempt to put ourselves in a position of disrepute and to become dependent and vulnerable seems to be a form of masochism that defies the best of our aspirations”.

Describe someone that you know who has left a successful position to freely enter a position of servant-hood. What position did they leave and into what did they freely enter?

- E. On page #35 of our *Compassion* course book the authors write: “From the first words Jesus speaks in the Temple, “Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father’s affairs” (Lk 2:49), to his last words on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46), we are made aware that Jesus’ first

and only concern is to do the will of God. Impressed by Jesus' words and healing acts, we often forget that his entire ministry was a ministry of obedience”.

In what ways do you understand compassionate ministries to be a ministry of obedience?

- F. On page #37 of our *Compassion* course book the authors write this about Jesus: “He is not a great hero who performs acts of self-denial that no one can imitate.”

With regard to expressing God's compassion in our local churches and across our Fields, in what ways can we imitate Jesus?

Exercise #5 – 250 words

Teach a small cohort how compassionate ministries serves the mission of the Church of the Nazarene and write a brief reflection on how the cohort engaged with what you presented.

End of Module Summary - 500 words total

What is the most significant thing you learned in Module 1?

What previous experiences relate to what you read and learned?

How has what you learned changed your thinking about this week's topic(s)?

How will you use the knowledge gained this week in your life or ministry?

APPENDIX A

A CHANGE IN THINKING

by John Watton

My philosophy of Christian educational and discipleship ministries has been shaped through two decades of engagement with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries. A key question emerges: “What role does NCM serve in relation to Christian educational and discipleship ministries?” In this brief paper, I will seek to present an answer.

In the 1990’s I was asked by NCM to serve the five districts in Canada: raising funds and planning helpful projects overseas. After some years, my family moved to Africa to serve in an NCM capacity there. My understanding was that I would continue to raise North American funds to program worthwhile projects across the West Africa Field. Out of curiosity, I posed this question to our local churches there: “What does Nazarene Compassionate Ministries mean to you?” Two common answers emerged: 1) NCM = receiving Western money to sponsor our children 2) NCM = village water well drilling. So I began my role along those lines. However, my leader in West Africa, Mark Louw, halted me: “Do your job but do not write any projects”. His experience cautioned him that sometimes projects actually drive people away from healthy growth towards Christlikeness: with projects there are often valuable resources that are fought over.

Since everything that I understood to date about my role with NCM had been ‘project driven’, this paradigm shift sent me scrambling. I went to Scripture. I explored the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene. I read books. The result of that research helped me to better answer the “Why” of compassionate ministries: 1) the Great Commission’s ‘disciple-making’ focus firstly shapes the basis of what we are to do 2) in our Manual, we find: “It is in the local church that the saving, perfecting, teaching and commissioning takes place” (Blevins et al 51). So in its approach, NCM [and all other of our departments/ministries] must therefore be ‘disciple-making’ centric and ‘local church’ driven.

This means that we who are involved with NCM need to be keenly interested in supporting the raising up disciples...disciples who look more and more like Christ. So what does Christ look like? In Scripture we

discover many things about Jesus. He is: kind, gentle, bold, humble, missional, Spirit-filled, obedient to the Father. He: studies and knows the Scriptures, is a person of prayer, is child-friendly, is compassionate. Many other phrases describe our Lord. NCM is particularly driven by Christ's compassionate character; his disciples are called to grow more to be like him in this. The Great Commission includes the statement that we are to teach these disciples to obey everything that Jesus taught. One of the things he exemplified and taught is found in Luke 6:36: "... be merciful as your Father in Heaven is merciful" (New International Version Bible).

NCM's role is to help champion our local Nazarenes towards becoming and being people of mercy. Presenting this same idea through negative questions appears like this: "What if the number of local Nazarene churches doubles across the globe, but very few of them reflect God's compassionate nature?" "What if my own local church bursts its seams and every pew is filled, but no one is growing towards Christ's loving nature?" Is that success? In the positive, a picture can be painted in this way: "What if every one of our 30,000+ worldwide local churches rigorously exudes God's compassionate heart.... intentionally seeking to shed the love abroad in their every circle of influence?" The Church would be unstoppable; the gates of hell cannot prevail against such love!

What role then does NCM serve in relation to Christian educational and discipleship ministries? Nazarene Compassionate Ministries is a champion of our local churches to grow disciples towards the likeness of our compassionate Lord...to express the compassion of God through practical ways of loving neighbor. This forms the basis of success. There is deep joy in functioning within this foundational philosophy of ministry. Writers like Gallaty, Willard, Hawkins & Parkinson etc. greatly affirm this philosophy. Additionally, this philosophy does not cease with NCM; "Great Commission centric" and "local church focused" must form the foundation of every department and ministry of our beloved Church of the Nazarene.

After ten years of embracing this philosophy in West Africa, I again asked our local churches there: "What is Nazarene Compassionate Ministries?" ...and their response this time was: "It is where we minister with compassion." Yes!

Works cited

Blevins, D. et al. Eds. *Manual 2009-2013: Church of the Nazarene*. Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2009. Print.

New International Version Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984. Print.