

BEST PRACTICES

FOR CONNECTING CLIENTS WITH

LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP



PASSING THE BATON

“I don’t care how many people you have that run fast. If the baton doesn’t make it—the race is over.” - Jon Drummond, Olympic Relay Gold Medalist and Olympic Relay Coach ¹

The relay race is that track and field event in which athletes run a pre-set distance, carrying a baton before passing it onto the next runner. Among sporting events, the relay stands out as a reminder that it isn’t always the best runners who win. Rather, success is about running your portion of the race and then successfully handing your baton off to the next runner; that is, one of your partners.

When it comes to pregnancy centers partnering together with local churches for long-term discipleship, the relay race is a great analogy, as a skillful handoff between centers and churches is essential for success. Long-term discipleship requires that those who profess faith in Christ become part of a local church, defined biblically as “a group of believers banded together for worship, edification, service, fellowship, and outreach; accepting spiritual leadership; willing to minister to all segments of society through the various gifts in the body;” and regularly practicing the sacraments.” ²

¹ Accessed at <http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/07/23/sports/olympics/the-fastest-baton-to-the-finish-line.html?hp>

² This definition is adapted from one given by David Dockery, President of Trinity International University.

“IF ANYONE COMPETES AS AN ATHLETE, HE DOES NOT WIN THE PRIZE UNLESS HE COMPETES ACCORDING TO THE RULES... .”

(2 TIMOTHY 2:5-7, NASB)

If connecting your center's clients with a local church is like passing a baton to the next runner, then how do you actually do this? To bring in another analogy, if pregnancy centers are a domestic missions agency sent, commissioned, and supported by local churches, then what does it look like for them to connect clients back to the local church for discipleship? In other words, what is the best way to connect women and men coming through your center with a loving, grace-based church? And further, how do you make discipleship connections in a way that respects client confidentiality and appropriately manages risk for the center?

Let's back up. We know how effective pregnancy centers are at reaching women -- and increasingly men -- who are considering abortion. Lives are saved and the abortion industry loses money as we provide compassion, hope, and help to parents in our communities. Our trained client advocates make genuine connections with clients, offer realistic alternatives to abortion, and share the gospel with anyone who is interested. We walk alongside them for a time, offering ongoing mentorship and practical support to clients through the center, but **if long-term discipleship is to happen, clients must be connected with a local church.** That's why it is crucial for a center to develop a plan for making a care/discipleship connection between clients of the center and a local church that is equipped to provide ongoing support to them. Grace-based, *Making Life Disciples* (MLD) trained churches are in an excellent position to provide this type of ongoing care and discipleship. "Grace based" is an important qualified because, as Peter Drucker has said, culture eats strategy for breakfast.³ This means a strategy or program like MLD (which is about compassion, hope, help, and discipleship) will do little if the culture of the church is not one of grace and acceptance.

³ For more on "grace based" churches, see here: <https://www.care-net.org/churches-blog/shame-based-vs.-grace-based-churches>

5 ELEMENTS OF MAKING THE CONNECTION

An effective discipleship connection, plan, or hand-off does five things well: it's relational, permission-based, respects confidentiality, minimizes risk, and works with a trained partner. Let's look at each of those elements individually.

1. RELATIONAL

Centers will often provide a client with a list of agencies, organizations, and churches that provide specific supports like a clothing closet, food pantry, job training, etc. This can be helpful. However, handing someone a list is rarely effective in building better bridges to discipleship. Our goal here is to facilitate a genuine relational connection with someone at a local church who is equipped and committed to getting to know the client and helping her or him navigate life's challenges practically and spiritually. For this reason, we like to talk about quality referrals as "care connections." These "care connections" typically address ongoing client needs for medical care, food, clothing, housing, therapy, child care, or government services. But most likely the most transformational care connections will be with a local church for ongoing spiritual support and discipleship."

2. PERMISSION-BASED

The client should always be in the driver's seat and should choose the church connection they feel is best for them. This necessitates two corollaries: first, that the client have a choice of whether or not to accept a connection with a local church and second, that the client be able to choose between several local churches. Again, our goal is not simply to send the client home with a list of churches to consider trying out on a Sunday morning. It's to facilitate a genuine relational connection with someone at

a local church who is equipped and committed to getting to know the client and helping her or him navigate life's challenges practically and spiritually. This is especially important in terms of their pregnancy and choices that will need to be made going forward, helping them embrace their life decision.⁴

To start making that connection, the client advocate should develop a sense of the client's receptivity by providing relevant information and asking good questions. The client advocate can easily introduce the care connection option when making a care plan with the client. She might say: "As we've gone over the things that you've said you need, we've put several things in your care plan. But one area that I've noticed might be missing is a source of regular relational and spiritual support -- you know, a lifeline to call when you are feeling a bit overwhelmed. Several faith communities in our area offer caring spiritual advice and encouragement. Their representatives are available to meet with you informally at a time and place that works for you, get to know you, and be there for you through this season and for as long as you need. Would you like to be introduced to someone who can provide this type of care?" If the client agrees, the advocate can tell her more about the church representatives, churches they are associated with, and the fact that, if she is interested, a church representative can call or text her to set up a meeting. If permitted by the center, the advocate can even offer a center client room as a location for their first meeting. After explaining the available options, another good question to ask is, "Do you have a sense of which of these churches or spiritual advisors you'd prefer to be connected with?"

In making church-related care connections, it is ideal for client advocates to obtain permission for a church representative to reach out to the client, rather than simply providing the client with a list of churches or a church representative's contact information. This is because a church representative is much more likely to follow through on initiating a connection than a client. If the client prefers not to make their contact information available to a church representative, however, the client advocate is free to provide church information through the standard referral procedure.⁵

4 From Care Net's *Client Care Essentials* (CCE) online course.

5 For information on referrals, see Care Net's *Understanding Client Care*, Volume 1, Chapter 12: Understanding Referrals.

3. RESPECTS CONFIDENTIALITY

As we eagerly make connections between clients and church representatives, it's important to establish and maintain healthy boundaries. Confidentiality boundaries are established by the center's policies and are promised to the client in our Commitment of Care and Competence.⁶ This means that when a client agrees to be connected with a church representative, the client advocate or other center representative can only share information permitted by the client. Depending on the client, this might be as little as the client's name and contact information. The client's story belongs to them and is something they may choose to share with the church representative -- or not. It's best to document these boundaries through a form⁷ signed by the client and confidentiality boundaries should be regularly reinforced through training provided to the center's client care personnel.

4. MINIMIZES RISK

Ideally there will be at least 3 church-based "care connections" included in the "Care Plan" or referrals provided to each interested client. The form the client signs documents the information that the client advocate has already communicated to them, including that:

- The church representative is not connected with the pregnancy center but with a local church/faith community.
- The services the client receives through the center are not dependent on her/his willingness to meet with a church representative.
- The center is authorized to share her/his specific information with the church/church representative.
- The client releases the center from liability associated with sharing this information.

Care Net does NOT recommend that the person providing primary care through the church also be the person providing primary care for a client through the center. This can create confusion for the client as to which services are offered by the center

⁶ Care Net's Commitment of Care and Competence can be found here: <http://affiliates.care-net.org/Portals/0/STS/Docs/Commitment-of-Care-Comp-6-09-C.pdf>

⁷ An editable sample *Care Connection Information Release* form is available to Care Net affiliates on the affiliate portal and a copy is also included on page 11 of this document.

and can significantly increase the center's liability risk if something goes wrong between the center's client and a church to which the center referred them.

5. WORKS WITH A TRAINED PARTNER

Each center is free to create their own requirements for partner churches -- churches with which the center will make a care connection for clients. It's difficult to overemphasize how important it is that church members who coach, mentor, or disciple center clients be prepared for the challenges involved in making that investment. *Making Life Disciples* provides basic training for churches on how to offer compassion, hope, help, and ongoing discipleship to women and men facing pregnancy decisions.⁸ This curriculum is designed to do three things:

- Equip the church to watch for and reach the abortion-vulnerable in their congregation.
- Equip the church with sensitivity to and healing resources for the post-abortive.
- Build better bridges that connect pregnancy center clients to local church discipleship.

Additionally, centers may require that church partners include a time in their training for each graduating class of church representatives to meet with a center representative so they can better understand the center's mission and role in relation to clients. They may also recommend that any church members who have experienced or participated in abortion go through a Christ-centered recovery curriculum before being connected with a center client. Another wise recommendation is that the church representative disclose the church's confidentiality practices to the center client at their first meeting.

Partner churches are typically listed on the *Care Connection Information Release* form. The center's client advocates are trained to go beyond a basic referral and facilitate a relational connection between interested clients and these churches. Ideally, the center pursues partner relationships with churches from several different Christian traditions in order to give clients options when making these care connections.

⁸ *Making Life Disciples* (MLD) is a training for churches, not for client care personnel within pregnancy centers. Care Net recommends that both male and female personnel that work with clients in centers be trained using Compassion, Hope, and Help. This is more robust training than MLD and is specifically designed for the center environment.

CONNECTION CORNERS

Anyone who likes doing puzzles knows the importance of starting with the corners. These are essential places of connection for puzzle pieces. Indeed every piece is connected directly or indirectly with a corner of the puzzle.

If you've ever connected people with each other, you know how important the connection environment is for those individuals. For example, you may want to connect basketball enthusiasts on the court instead of over tea. When it comes to connecting clients with local churches, there is a similar dynamic. You want to connect the right clients in the right way. In keeping with a permission-based model of care, the approach that works for one client may not be appropriate for another.

Pregnancy centers have successfully implemented three practical connection strategies, or "corners." We'll look at each of them and explore specific guidance that applies when making a connection with a partner church. These aren't the only ways connections between clients and churches can be made, but whatever way your center chooses should be consistent with the five elements outlined previously.

THE "CLIENT ROOM" CONNECTION

When the client is open to it, the client advocate is prepared to discuss church needs and preferences as part of a spiritual conversation. The advocate is ready to share information about the ways specific churches may help her or him; walking the client through the Care Connection Information Release and offering to - with their written permission - give their contact information to a church representative who is prepared to meet and receive them. In some circumstances, this may result in the client being invited to the center team member's own church. In this case, the team member

should not take the lead in ministering to the client on behalf of the church, but should connect the client with another prepared church member at or after the client's first visit to the church. The client room church connection should be tailored to the client's spiritual needs; wise church partners will likely also provide some level of assistance with material needs as well.

As noted previously, if the client is not ready to be contacted by a church representative, the client advocate may still provide them with the names of local churches or church representatives willing to assist them in the future.

- ***In Practice:*** A man on your client care team has a male client who is open to spiritual conversations. During the appointment, this client has mentioned some of his needs. The coach keys off of that in introducing the church connection: "Brian, I know you said earlier that there really aren't many guys you respect in your life. I once heard someone say that it's hard to be what you don't see. In your situation, that can mean that it's hard to be the kind of dad you'd like to be when you haven't seen anyone model being an involved and responsible dad. Some of the guys who helped me learn how to be a dad when I was younger go to my church. In fact, I still seek their advice when I run into a tough situation in my marriage or as a parent. There are actually several churches in our area where I know guys who would be available to hang out with you from time to time and work through parenting or personal challenges together. At Community Bible, there's Justin and he's available every Thursday night. He plays basketball at the community center and then grabs a bite to eat with another guy -- he'd love for you to join him sometime. My friend Adam attends Ourtown Christian Fellowship -- that's where I go too. And Bobby is at Christ Church of Ourtown -- he's just got the best sense of humor and I think you'd really click with him. If one of these men seems like a good fit for you, I would gladly have them reach out to you. I know they would love the opportunity to get to know you and chat about anything that's on your mind." If yes, the coach could walk Brian through the Care Connection Information Release form, having Brian choose which church representative he was interested in meeting and how he would like to be contacted.

- **MLD Specific Guidance:** Clients will often indicate their religious preference on an intake form and this can inform how to start a conversation about connecting them with an MLD-trained church. Also, when explaining MLD to a client, it is wise to use a term like “church representative” instead of “Life Disciple” leader or team. This is more easily understood. Then you can ask: “Do you have a sense of which church you’d like to be connected with?”

THE “OUTSOURCE” CONNECTION

This is a scenario where a center refers clients to one or more churches that provide services clients need. Any partnership relationship is disclosed to clients and clients are also given non-church options (if available) for the service. For example, in the category of parenting classes, the center has referrals to a free 10-week class provided at a local church, a \$30 six-week class provided at the Y, and a free four week intervention class provided by the county. The center provides incentive-based education points for all the classes. It is clear to the client that the service is being provided by the church or other organization and any information provided by the client is being provided to the other organization and not to the center. In this case, the church is a referral listed not in the church category but in the parenting class category. The client’s short-term need can be met and the goal of connecting clients to the church in a tangible way is accomplished.

THE “IN-HOUSE EDUCATION” CONNECTION

In this scenario, the center offers or provides a short-term class or educational event but works with a partner a church to run the program at the center for a specified time period. For example, members of an MLD-trained team are invited to serve as experts in presenting a parenting program for a specified number of weeks. Or, churches or church small groups are asked to co-host the class by providing a meal to the participants. The class is organized by the center and the center makes it clear to the clients what the role of the church members is.

- ***In Practice:*** The center group facilitator explains that "Julie Johnson is a licensed counselor and a staff member at Ourtown Community Church. If you would like to ask Julie a private question, you may email her at juliej@occ.org. Julie is a guest presenter tonight and is not affiliated with Ourtown Pregnancy Clinic." Or, "Ourtown Pregnancy Clinic would like to thank members of Ourtown Community Church for providing tonight's meal of roasted chicken, potato salad, and salad. And I understand there are homemade cookies for dessert. In addition to dinner, the members of the church have offered to pray over any needs you would like to share with them. On your table is a prayer card from Ourtown Community Church. If you would like to share a prayer request, you can write it down. You may share an anonymous request, or, include any contact information you would like to provide to the church and someone will follow up with you."
- ***MLD Specific Guidance:*** this model facilitates building better bridges between center clients and churches by simply by providing a context to eat and spend time together. Doing so will creates opportunities for natural relational connections—connections that are more likely to lead to friendship, belonging, and becoming part of a local church.

One of the authors goes to a church that sends and supports a missionary who is serving in a developing country. She has established a ministry that includes schools for disadvantaged children and professional training for survivors of sex trafficking. She also works closely with local churches to prepare them to receive, care for, and disciple the individuals she serves. She is a missionary sent and supported by local churches in the United States, who is serving and evangelizing people in a developing country and connecting them with equipped churches in their local area. Her work is amazing. In some ways, it's also a lot like our work. Like this missionary, we serve in pregnancy centers which are sent by local churches to serve the community. And like her, we are also called to be intentional in connecting those we serve, as they are interested, back to local churches.

It is our prayer that this resource envisions and equips you for the work you are called and sent to do.

SAMPLE CARE CONNECTION INFORMATION RELEASE FORM

[PLACE LOGO HERE IN HEADER]

CARE CONNECTION INFORMATION RELEASE

I _____ would like to be connected with a [church representative].
[Client/Patient] Full Name (print)

Please provide a spiritual care connection associated with (check all that apply):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church name / affiliation | <input type="checkbox"/> Church name / affiliation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church name / affiliation | <input type="checkbox"/> Church name / affiliation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church name / affiliation | <input type="checkbox"/> Any/I have no preference |

It's okay for a [church representative] to call me and/or text me at: _____.
Cell Number

Acknowledgment

I authorize [center name] to release a copy of this form and/or the information it contains, including the personal information I provided above, to the faith community organization(s) I have selected. I understand that each of these organizations offers life coaching and I desire to be contacted to receive spiritual care and/or advice. I also understand that this care is provided by trained individuals in connection with these local faith communities and not by [center name]; however, if space is available, I may choose to meet with the [church representative] at [center name's] location. I hereby release and indemnify [center name] from any legal claims I may have related to my privacy rights in relation to releasing the information I have provided above. I also understand that whether I establish a relationship with a [church representative] is entirely voluntary and I may refuse to sign this authorization now or refuse to meet with a [church representative] after signing this authorization. I know that my ability to receive services from [center name] now or in the future is not conditioned on signing this release.

Signatures

Client/Patient Signature (and guardian, if applicable)

Date

OFFICE USE ONLY

ID # _____

Care Connection Information Release (c) 2019 Care Net

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PARTNER CHURCH?

There are likely many churches in your community. Some of them equip and support your center. Others do not. Among the churches that work closely with you, some of them are well prepared to receive your clients, while others may not be.

Fundamentally, every partner church should be a Christian church. Whatever their Christian tradition or denomination, they honor Holy Scripture and seek to connect people with Jesus. More specifically, a great partner church is prepared to offer grace-filled spiritual care, practical support, and discipleship to people who have recently made a pregnancy decision or are still in the process of making their decision.

Here are a few additional characteristics of great partner churches:

- They aren't just a building, they are a **vibrant Christian community**. These are people who are ready to surround each other with love, friendship, and to share the resources they have.
- They offer God's **healing for sexual brokenness**. These people understand redemption and won't reject or push anyone to the margins because they have experienced sexuality in broken ways.
- They are able to **encourage God's people in faithful singleness and in marriage**. The congregation knows that faithful, healthy, loving, God-honoring marriage is the ideal context for nurturing children physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. But they embrace people who aren't experiencing this ideal and appreciate both singleness and marriage as God's good gifts.
- They are **equipped to disciple pregnancy center clients**. This church has mature believers who are prepared to walk alongside newer believers and teach them how to follow Christ.

We know you might still have a lot of questions about partner churches and your pregnancy center leadership should work through those questions together.

WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP MEAN?

As we use the term, discipleship simply means **teaching others to follow Jesus through example and instruction**. This can include sharing the good news with someone who doesn't know Jesus at all or it can include the long-term process of helping people love, obey, and trust Jesus fully. Consider these Scripture passages:

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

-- **John 8:31**

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

-- Matthew 28:19-20

In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned. ...For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach.

-- **Titus 2:7-8,13-15**

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

-- Acts 17:32-34



Founded in 1975, Care Net is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that supports one of the largest networks of pregnancy centers in North America and runs the nation's only real-time call center providing pregnancy decision coaching. Care Net is equipping and mobilizing churches to offer compassion, hope, help, and discipleship to those at risk for abortion.

VISION

Care Net envisions a culture where women and men faced with pregnancy decisions are transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and empowered to choose life for their unborn children and abundant life for their families.

MISSION

Acknowledging that every human life begins at conception and is worthy of protection, Care Net offers compassion, hope, and help to anyone considering abortion by presenting them with realistic alternatives and Christ-centered support through our life-affirming network of pregnancy centers, churches, organizations, and individuals.

Learn more about the impact Care Net is having on saving the unborn and promoting abundant life for families at: <https://www.care-net.org>