

ALONGSIDE CARE:
*A Vision for Churches to
Care for Women in Crisis*

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Published by:

Committee on Discipleship Ministries
1700 North Brown Road, Suite 102
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30043
Bookstore: 1-800-283-1357
www.pcabookstore.com

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ISBN: 978-1-944964-89-4
Cover design: Chip Evans

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Introduction

Before our Savior ascended into heaven, He left a final command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). The Church has been diligent to keep this command, bringing the gospel to the utter reaches of the earth. People of almost every tribe and nation have heard the good news and been baptized. The Church has also labored to teach the Bible to its congregants, both formally and informally. We’ve developed curriculum, studies, devotionals, commentaries, and more to help people understand who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. But there is one area of discipleship that can be easily overlooked in our churches: *the personal ministry of the Word*.

The personal ministry of the Word is face-to-face discipleship. It is when a follower of Christ, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, speaks the truth in love to a fellow believer. Paul encourages such discipleship in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 where he writes, “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” This is a different kind of discipleship than what is found in a Sunday School classroom, small group, or heard from the pulpit. It is personal. It is relational. It is practical. It is side-by-side. We call it *Alongside Care*.

If you’ve picked up this book, it is likely that you desire to see your church grow in *Alongside Care*. You want to be a church that cares for those in your congregation who are

hurting. You want to see your church reflect Paul's admonitions to "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15); "encourage one another and build one another up" (1 Thess. 5:11); and "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). You long to see the truths of the gospel brought to bear on the realities of life lived in a fallen world. You want the church body to care for itself.

For the purposes of this book, we ask the question: *What does it look like to care for hurting women in the church?* How do we walk alongside a woman who has been betrayed? Experienced a miscarriage? Is parenting children all on her own? What does it look like for the church to disciple women when they are hurting, suffering, and in crisis? What about when there is a church discipline issue? Who is tasked with engaging with a woman who needs instruction and care as she puts off sin and puts on righteousness? This book is an attempt to help churches consider what it might look like to develop a care ministry specifically for hurting women of the church.

What You'll Find in This Book

The book begins by defining what Alongside Care is and what it is not. It then explores the Bible's teaching on providing care for one another in the church. Next, it moves on to the practical aspects of developing an Alongside Care Ministry and how you can contextualize it to your local church. You'll find discussion questions at the end of each chapter to consider ways to apply the content to your unique context.

We've been intentional to have a variety of authors to participate in this project, who represent churches of different sizes and demographics. Their churches also implement Alongside Care in differing ways in their contexts. Each of these voices speaks into Alongside Care Ministry sharing stories, experiences, and bearing witness to what the Lord has done through such a ministry. While there is plenty of practical advice and wisdom contained in these pages, time and again readers will see that we encourage you to take what is written and apply it to the specifics of your church setting. This means, Alongside

Care Ministry likely will look different at each church.

The first three chapters focus on the “why” behind Alongside Care Ministry. In Chapter One, I will describe what is meant by the term “Alongside Care.” In Chapter Two, Karen Hodge and I will discuss the Bible’s admonition to provide such care, including how it grows and develops as an overflow of women’s discipleship ministry in the local church. Stephen Estock will then dig into the polity of the church and what it means for women to come alongside church leadership and assist them in shepherding women. He explores how an Alongside Care ministry is complementarian in nature and the ways this ministry serves both the Session and the church.

The remaining chapters get into the specifics of developing such a ministry. In Chapter Four, Cheryl Mullis encourages readers to consider their church context. This chapter takes a broad look at Alongside Care asking questions such as: What size church do you have? What are the needs? What resources do you already have access to? She encourages you to find ways to utilize your resources to meet the needs of women in your church. We then get even more practical as we consider what it would look like to develop a specific Alongside Care Ministry, a team of women who come alongside church leadership in caring for hurting women. Susan Shepherd joins us in Chapter Five, providing practical wisdom and insight on developing this ministry, including how to create a mission, set goals, and name the ministry. CB Campano then helps us think through the people involved in providing care, including the ministry’s coordinator and those who minister directly to hurting women. How do we determine who those people are? What strengths and giftings do they need? Then in Chapter Seven, Sue Harris explores the importance of training a team of women to provide Alongside Care. What elements are important to include in such training? Billy Haines and Jane Anne Wilson have together written Chapter Eight on keeping the ministry before the church. How is the ministry incorporated into the regular ministry of the church? How are the members made aware of and how do women access the ministry? At the conclusion of

the book, Stephen Estock and I close with some final thoughts on next steps, encouraging you to continue in the journey to provide *Alongside Care* to the hurting women in your church,

The Appendix includes helpful resources including recommended training materials as well as sample forms and documents.

We encourage you to gather your Session members, your ministry leaders, and those who have a heart for hurting women in the church. Read the book together. Discuss the questions. Then consider how you can implement *Alongside Care* in your specific context.

In Christ,

Christina Fox
General Editor