



LESSON PLANS FOR Living Together

**PRINCIPLES FOR AN INTENTIONAL, CHRIST-CENTERED LEARNING COMMUNITY
CAN BE APPLIED OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM**

Stories by Anita Palmer

An intentional, Christ-centered community

is like: a) a garden

b) a family

c) a harbor

d) all of the above

Congratulations. You answered correctly.

A garden, a family and a harbor each offer insights into the idea of an intentional, Christ-centered community.

This year, PLNU's School of Education is examining metaphors such as these as it endeavors to strengthen its vision and mission in the context of a Christian university. (See the Q & A with Darrel Falk, dean of the School of Education, on page 3.)

The students the school serves are primarily adults who have their first degree and are moving onto a credential or a graduate degree. These students come to PLNU not only

to further their careers, but also to be nurtured by a caring faculty and staff who bring Christ into the classroom and God's Spirit into the office environment. They seek a harbor, they want to belong to a family, and their budding career is like a garden that needs to be tended.

The idea of Christian community is, of course, something important outside the classroom, as well. In fact, as Christians, we all need a protected place in which to grow. We all need nurturing, watering and time. And a healthy family provides wise guidance within a safe environment where one can experiment and fail, be challenged, and grow toward a Christian world view. Sometimes life blows us off course, or into a tempest, or against rocks that threaten to sink our ships. We need a calm harbor in which we can drop anchor, repair our vessels, restock provisions, renew strength, and regain direction.

So how do we foster this intentional, Christ-centered community?

For School of Education Director of Site Development David Haney, fostering an intentional, Christ-centered community requires servant leadership. Servant leadership refers to the idea that those who have authority ought to

express exceptional humility and willingness to care for others. Jesus washing His disciples' feet is a classic example of servant leadership.

"People probably get tired of me talking about it," laughs Haney. "But I believe that we are an example when it comes to serving others. We need to step up to the plate and take care of people's needs."

In practical matters, taking care of people means we need to be aware of them. "We have to take the time to get to know each other, and, to some degree, to like each other. You have to spend time together," said Haney, who while he was director of PLNU Arcadia emphasized relationships centered on a shared belief in Christ.

His successor at PLNU Arcadia, Karen Davis, also emphasizes a heart of service.

"By serving others, we truly seek the best for them and not for us. Whatever we are doing, we are doing so as God's agent. We believe we are an extension of God's love, authority, grace, truth and holiness. Since we are Christ-centered, we want to magnify the Lord, not ourselves, so others will want to draw closer to God," said Davis.

For the School of Education, this might mean rescheduling a course to a time when most of the working professionals who need to take it are available. It might mean taking extra time to personalize an academic plan. Or it might simply mean having lunch together.

Dr. Don Burnard, director of PLNU Bakersfield, puts it this way, "From the outset, we have been intentionally defining our program as Christ-centered and service oriented. The service orientation really speaks to what we do. Being Christ-centered speaks to who we are."

As part of his efforts to build a Christ-centered community, Dr. Burnard says he meets regularly with his adjunct staff, something not many counterparts in the industry do. He, his staff and fellow faculty explore ways of reaching diverse populations not only academically but also spiritually. It's evident their concern for others runs deep.

One additional metaphor the School of Education is using to understand how to foster an intentional, Christ-centered community is the notion of a "shalom community." What does this mean? Shalom is a peace that comes from just relationships, and shalom communities reflect this.

One thinker who has tackled the concept of shalom is Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff who says that while justice is the ground floor of shalom, shalom goes beyond justice. It's about finding peace through right relationships to God, others, nature and self. Pursuing shalom means seeking joy and satisfaction in the lives God has given us. It means demonstrating kindness and respect in all our relationships, and it results in peace.

As Burnard emphasized, the School of Education seeks to serve its students spiritually as well as intellectually, and pursuing shalom can help achieve that goal. He also stresses the importance of relationships with others in developing shalom.

"In Bakersfield, we have established formal partnerships with all but one of the 43 school districts in Kern County. Our efforts to collaborate with others, disseminating our values and beliefs through these relationships, furthers our efforts to create a shalom learning community," Burnard explains.

Shalom is basic to the Christian walk, whether in the halls of academe, City Hall, the church fellowship hall or around the kitchen table. And it is foundational, the PLNU School of Education believes, to good teaching and learning, to the development of highly qualified, high performing educators of noble character.

So what does it take to foster an intentional, Christ-centered community in the School of Education or elsewhere? It takes servant leadership, concern for others, and the willingness to pursue shalom. While building this kind of community takes time and effort, the comforting images of garden, harbor and family should remind us that it is all worthwhile. ■

Anita Palmer is a freelance writer and editor in San Diego County.

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SETTING THE COURSE

Q & A WITH DR. DARREL R. FALK, DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND VICE PROVOST FOR GRADUATE PROGRAM SUPPORT

FOR DECADES, POINT LOMA HAS BEEN KNOWN FOR ITS EXCELLENT EDUCATION PROGRAM. WHERE DO YOU SEE THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION RIGHT NOW?

The School of Education's programs are grounded upon the university's Christian calling, and we want to build on that. We're entering a year of transformation. We're working through new vision and mission statements, and we're building our conceptual framework with the outcome in mind: developing highly qualified, high performing educators of noble character in an intentionally Christ-centered learning community.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS FOR THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION? WHERE DO YOU SEE IT GOING?

We're working right now to strengthen the connection between the PLNU undergraduate program and our credentials and master's degrees. Part of our Wesleyan heritage is to be a support network, a scaffolding for our young educators as they transition through different stages of their life journey. We want to provide a safety net, not just for undergraduate and graduate students,



Darrel Falk

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