

The Merimnao 2010 Year End Report

Merimnao – 2010 Year-end Report of Activities

After several months of planning and preparation the ministry of Merimnao officially kicked off on January 10th, 2010. We had an open invitation lunch meeting in the life center as we outlined the following things:

The Vision for the Ministry

- Create an “umbrella” ministry under which a variety of “soul caring” ministries can operate.

The Biblical Imperative for the Ministry

- *Matt 22:37-39 – ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ NIV*

The Spiritual Roots of the Ministry

- *Matt 28:19-20 - Therefore 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. NIV*

The Basic Mission Statement of the Ministry

- To create, maintain and enhance an environment where lay members of the church can provide “soul care” for others.

The Meaning of the word “Merimnao”

The first question everybody seems to have about the ministry is this, “*What does Merimnao mean?*” Merimnao is a Greek word taken from the following Scripture:

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7 - NIV

The word translated as “anxiety” here is “merimnao” in the original Greek. It can sometimes be found translated as fears, troubles, burdens, cares or worries and carries with it the spiritual concept of “broken-heartedness”.

Merimnao is therefore best thought of as a ministry to the broken-hearted.

This was followed by a call to ministry and a question and answer session.

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From the kick-off meeting we developed a list of individuals who were interested, at least initially, in serving within the ministry. There were about 30 names on this initial list. These individuals were then invited to participate in a second meeting, held on February 28, 2010, where a more in-depth presentation was made. At this meeting we asked for a slightly higher level of commitment to be made in support of what we were about to start. This left us with approximately 20 “interested individuals”.

We then started a process of informal and formal meetings, e-mails and telephone calls to identify those on the “interested individual” list who were serious about joining our fledgling effort to serve the brokenhearted. Part of this effort was to begin to qualify individuals to serve in the ministry in a leadership capacity. Over the year a series of personal interviews were conducted to ascertain whether an individual is called and equipped to minister directly to the brokenhearted.

In May of 2010, we conducted a three-week series of educational or training meetings covering ministry principles and facilitating groups. Participants learned about the basic truths inherent in our work; the principles that governed how we are going to conduct ourselves. For example, one of our primary principles is that we are a ministry of restoration, renewal and reconciliation. The second and third meetings focused on how to deal with brokenhearted people, primarily through how to facilitate groups. We covered a wide range of subjects including dealing with emotions, group rules and body language.

At this point we were ready to start with our initial efforts in ministering to the brokenhearted. The next section of this report deals with each of these ministry areas individually.

Other general ministry endeavors over the last few months included the following:

- Meetings with local area counselors to initiate a dialog with the local Christian counseling community and to start to develop a ministry counselor referral list.
- Various leadership meetings.
- A ministry leadership training program.
- Started working with the church’s prayer ministry to develop a method of bringing the hurting people in our church to Merimnao whenever it is appropriate.

Individual Ministry Efforts

In keeping with our ministry’s Christian philosophical approach, that successful ministry will best be accomplished through the promptings and power of the Holy Spirit, we can see this is evident in what God has accomplished through the individuals who stood up and said “send me”. (Is 6:8)

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Castimonia

Our first effort in meeting the brokenhearted where they actually are is the “Men’s Sexual Purity Group” which we call Castimonia, a Latin word meaning “moral purity”. Castimonia is a Christian 12-step program, focused on the problem of achieving and maintaining sexual purity in the life of men. Members of the group have a range of issues they are dealing with from mild pornography use to multiple sexual affairs to same-sex physical relationships. About half the regular attendees attend our church, and half come from other churches.

Castimonia began operation on June 12th, 2010 under the leadership of **Jorge Sesin** and has grown from a three person meeting to regularly having eight to ten men each Saturday meeting. We have also recently added a second qualified man to co-facilitate and assist **Jorge** in leadership of this ministry, **Woody Farrar**. The group has developed into a small and intimate fellowship of individuals who share their troubles at amazingly deep levels. The 12-step format allows each of the members to provide support and comfort to one another and then growth into healing as members work the steps under the guidance of a sponsor.

Three individuals who began attending this group to deal with their sexual immorality difficulties are now either members or regular attendees of our church, and a fourth also comes to Men’s Fraternity. At a recent Men’s Ministry meeting, a quarter of the men present were regular attendees of Castimonia. These facts indicate that some measure of healing is taking place as these men are moving past their personal shame and into the mainstream. Some of them have moved even further as they now serve within the church somewhere.

Post Abortion Support

Stephanie Rodenberg-Lewis was our first “qualified” leader and she heads up our efforts in the very difficult area of assisting post-abortive women. Stephanie has worked through the material that Merimnao provided her and has been ready to work with this group since mid-year. However the response has been disappointing considering that we know, statistically speaking, there must be a significant number of post-abortive women in our immediate church community.

Toward the end of the year we decided to take a step back to try to figure out what the Lord was telling us about this situation. In the section on plans for 2011 we discuss our conclusion.

Divorce Support Groups

Our efforts in “Divorce Support and Recovery” groups formally began on August 4th, 2010 under the care and guidance of **David Webb**. We have decided on a two-pronged approach to this ministry. First, we have an ongoing, weekly-meeting, support group, which gives those that attend an opportunity to come and discuss their divorce situations. The objective here is to provide a place of emotional safety, which provides support and comfort through sharing in a facilitated group environment. The second prong is our DivorceCare program, which is licensed

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through the national DivorceCare ministry. DivorceCare is a 13-week program designed to help those who are experiencing divorce to move through and beyond the very difficult first stages of coping with the results of divorce. While it does provide a safe place of support and comfort, the primary objective is one of growth and healing. Even after going through DivorceCare, group members are expected to go back to the support group for continued emotional maintenance.

As the year came to a close we were finishing up the first DivorceCare series, and we have a sustained group of six to eight people each week in both programs combined. Three of the eight participants are not regular attendees at our church, although one has recently decided to come each week. During the first few months we have elected to not significantly publicize our groups, as we were focusing more on gaining experience than anything else.

One important note is that we must say a word of thanks to **David**, the ministry leader as he has provided a conference room for these meetings at his office. He has also offered to allow us to use them for other meetings in the future.

Prayer Ministry

Sometime in the third quarter we appointed **Marnie Cordes** as our overall ministry prayer coordinator and introduced her to the rest of our leadership team in that context, although she had been participating in the general growth of Merimnao since the beginning. The role and function of the prayer coordinator is to give prayer support for and to the rest of the Merimnao leaders and to provide a link between Merimnao and the church's prayer ministry. In keeping with the policy of Merimnao to integrate as fully as possible with other church functions and ministries, **Marnie** has joined the church's prayer ministry team as the Merimnao representative and participates in the regular function of that ministry.

Use of the prayer coordination function by leaders at Merimnao has been somewhat limited in its early months. Most groups and leaders are comfortable with whatever level of prayer they chose in the early days of their individual ministries. We recognize that this situation may exist and that people are contented with it; however we also recognize that due to the nature of our ministry we are subject to significant spiritual attack and therefore would be advised to have constantly elevated levels of prayer support. In a later part of this report we will address some changes in our approach to prayer ministry at Merimnao.

Women's Abuse Issues

In August we qualified **Becky Hanshaw** as a leader within Merimnao. **Becky** is a licensed counselor with extensive experience in the area of abuse of women, although she doesn't work as a therapist in that difficult space now. After review of what she believed God was calling her to do, she decided on volunteering to help the brokenhearted in two ways.

First, she will be available for individual one-on-one support/encouragement for any women who have dealt with personal abuse including physical, verbal, emotional and spiritual abuse (in

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connection to domestic violence). She will not provide therapeutic counseling but will serve as a “go-to” person and help to direct abused women in what steps to take next for their situation. Her main desire is to be supportive of a woman who is trying to go forward after leaving an abusive relationship. A woman in crisis should be directed to Katy Christian Ministries, which is set up to deal with immediate crisis. Because of the volatile nature of the world of abuse, we are protecting **Becky** through not providing her contact information to abuse victims. She may only be contacted through the church or the director of Merimnao for the purpose of initiating her help for a victim.

The second part of her work will be as a liaison with Katy Christian Ministries and their domestic violence center. She has met with the staff at KCM. She will be available to take some of the crisis calls which come into that center, as a direct volunteer. The KCM Crisis Director has encouraged Becky to put together continuing education for licensed therapists. Becky plans to organize a one day seminar on the Christian approach to helping victims of domestic violence. The target audience will be Christian counselors, therapists, pastors, and church staff. Possibly medical and law enforcement personnel may be included.

Special Note

We do want to thank some other individuals who are involved at some level in what we do within Merimnao; **Kathy Trout, Monica Hatch and Lisa Caughorn**. While none of these three have been on the front lines, they have all been supportive of our work in various ways. Every ministry needs people like this in the background, and so we want to recognize and thank them through this report.

Outlook for 2011

There are several new opportunities for serving the brokenhearted that have been raised by various individuals within the church. Some are more likely to be put into action than others; we are going to list them below in terms of likelihood of actual activity. There are also some changes or comments we would like to record regarding current ministry efforts.

Section 1 - New Opportunities

Parakaleo

Parakaleo is a women’s group for women who have a significant man in their life who is acting out in sexual immorality. This group could be thought of as a complement to Castimonia.

Parakaleo is a Greek word which carries the meaning of “come alongside and comfort”. The group was formally announced at the recent women’s retreat by the two co-facilitators, **Danita Gross and Betty Farrar**. It is likely to begin meeting in the latter part of January 2011, and will be modeled after a COSA 12-step group. Its main function will be to provide support and

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comfort to women who have experienced the chaos and betrayal of living with a man practicing some form of sexual immorality.

While Merimnao will be administering and operating the group, we expect to work closely with the women's ministry where appropriate. Examples might be providing experienced women to help lead share groups at retreats and having women available when a lady discovers some sexual immorality in her man's life.

Samson Society

The Samson Society is a nationwide loosely affiliated series of men's groups dedicated to providing a place where men can be authentic in fellowship with one another in a recovery group setting. The group format is similar to a 12-step program in that it first provides an emotionally safe place for support and comfort and then also provides a mechanism for personal spiritual growth. The Samson Society is a Christian group system.

We do have a leader in mind for this, but at the time of writing this report we have not finished qualifying him, and he is not in a position to fully commit due to circumstances. That is why we are withholding his name at this time.

Care Teams

We are very early in the process of initiating this project. **Marnie Cordes** has approached us to look at the possibility of setting up "care teams". Care teams would be groups of individuals, with from 6 to 10 people in a group, who would come around a family experiencing a major medical situation. Each team would be prepared to assist the family with care in as many ways as possible. Examples of care might be babysitting services, keeping the house and yard in order, grocery shopping, providing meals and transportation service for doctor or hospital visits.

No family plans to go through major medical problems, but they do occur. However, we can plan as a church family to be prepared to "share the burden" (Gal 6:2) with those in our congregation who are forced by circumstance into this situation.

We are in contact with "Interfaith CarePartners®", a Houston based organization with experience in this area. We plan to meet with them in the New Year.

Section 2 – Changes or comments on current activities

Castimonia

Castimonia has developed into a healthy and growing fellowship of men dealing with similar problems. The group, at the end of 2010, typically runs with 10 or more participants and this stretches the group in the context of allowing every person who wants to share being able to do

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so. A partial solution has been implemented in that we now have extended the formal meeting time from one to one and a half hours.

While we have not formally decided this, it is likely that given the growth in the Castimonia fellowship we will have to initiate a second meeting. It is expected that we would opt for a mid-week evening meeting, thereby giving participants two alternatives. We are currently determining if there is a suitable space for a regular midweek Castimonia meeting at the church.

The group leaders have begun work on a “welcome” package for new members or visitors; this will also be made available for the pastors to hand out to men who struggle with sexual immorality. We expect to have this ready in the New Year.

Prayer Ministry

We will be working on two aspects of this part of Merimnao in the coming year. First we will alter our approach to supporting the various parts of Merimnao with prayer from reactive, waiting to be asked to pray, to proactive, seeking out those who need prayer. Our prayer coordinator will routinely go to our other leaders and seek out what their personal ministry prayer needs are and those of the individuals they come into contact with. Group leaders will also be encouraged to go beyond praying within their groups for needs, in taking some of those needs, with the permission of the individuals involved, to our prayer coordinator.

The second aspect is that of working with the prayer ministry of the church to develop a systemized method of taking the people who express their life’s troubles through prayer requests from only asking for prayer to receiving help from Merimnao. We had an initial exploratory meeting in December 2010 and will be working on a proposal for both ministries and the church beginning in January.

Women’s Abuse Issues

Our servant leader in this part of our work, **Becky Hanshaw**, will be focusing most of her time and effort on developing a seminar or course on the subject of domestic violence. This is expected to be presented in the fall of 2011, and we are working to make this a “continuing education” seminar for those that attend. Our initial target group of potential attendees includes Christian therapists, local pastors/staff, and possibly nurses and police.

This is envisioned to be a joint venture of Merimnao and Katy Christian Ministries (KCM), with Merimnao being the organizer and administrator of the program. We expect to be able to hold what is likely to be a six hour seminar at the church, which is why Merimnao is the program operator. KCM will be able to promote their work with domestic violence victims to the local caretaking community. Although we have not approached the Richmond or Houston domestic violence centers, they will probably be invited to participate at some level.

We expect to bring in an outside expert of some kind as part of the program, and this means that

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there will be some costs involved. At this time we are planning to charge a fee for attending the seminar to cover those costs. Also, it is believed that those who will receive continuing education credits will be more likely to attend if they pay a fee.

Post Abortion Support

With the disappointing response we received from our efforts in this area we have decided on a slightly different approach from our original “group” idea. We will now be producing some tri-fold brochures to place in our lobby and in the offices of local counseling organizations. We will also be approaching this significant issue on a more personal one-to-one basis instead of as a group function. **Stephanie** will be available to women who want to work on the deeper consequences for individualized meetings. We have left the door open to forming a group in the future, dependent upon if we perceive the need or not.

Divorce Support Groups

Divorce Support will make some small changes in the coming year. First we are going to separate the two groups more by having them on different nights. The support group will continue to be on Wednesdays, with DivorceCare to be held on the evening chosen by the group members. We expect to provide at least two 13-week sessions for DivorceCare in 2011.

We also plan to increase the level of promotion of the groups within the counseling and church communities in Katy.

Section 3 – General ministry activities

The main focus of the “umbrella” aspect of Merimnao’s ministry in 2011 will continue to be identifying and developing individuals who have a calling and passion for ministering to the brokenhearted. In this we will have to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who will bring such individuals to us. It will be up to the various group leaders as well as the ministry leadership to be alert, responsive and proactive in encouraging potential new ministry servants.

Other general ministry activities for 2011 are:

1. Freedom Conference – We are going to approach a ministry that has Friday night and Saturday “Freedom from Sexual Bondage” conferences to possibly come here to the Fellowship. Their program includes a mixture of biblical teachings on freedom from sin and worship music designed to engage the heart broken through sexual sin. This is targeted for the fall.
2. Ministry Handbook – We want to be able to provide some form of a resource for ministry leaders, pastors and other church leaders that will help guide them on how to best use Merimnao. We expect it to include the following kinds of information:

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- a. Groups we operate – meeting times, facilitators, locations etc.
 - b. Types of brokenheartedness we are equipped to deal with.
 - c. Ministry contacts, a “who to call” list.
3. Increased Exposure – We want to increase the promotional aspect of what we do in 2011. Each group facilitator will be working in the context of the overall Merimnao ministry to increase awareness of their ministry. Also, as previously discussed, we will be working with the prayer ministry on a project. More items for consideration are to include references to Merimnao in announcements, in prayer stories and in sermons, where appropriate.
 4. Outreach – We would like to begin reaching out more proactively to the local recovery, care, counseling and church community in Katy. We want to be able to share the gifting we have in our servant leaders with some centers of influence so that individuals in our area who we are equipped to help will know we are available to them.
 5. Training – We will be holding a total of 8 training sessions for the Merimnao leaders during the year. These will include some special topic presentations by local counselors, some personal testimonies and some group sharing times.
 6. Adolescent Substance Abuse Issues – Merimnao leadership has made initial contact with a group in the Katy area that specializes in helping families with adolescents who have substance abuse problems. We are planning to develop an ongoing relationship with this group in the first quarter of the year, as they could become a good resource for the ministry in time. They have also inquired about our men’s sexual purity work, as some of their male adolescents often have multiple problems, including pornography and sexual acting out. The principal leader of this group will be our guest speaker at our February training meeting.

That concludes our Merimnao year end 2010 report of activities. Please direct comments or questions to Tim Pepper, Pastor of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation at The Fellowship at Cinco Ranch, or the undersigned.

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