

ARTICLES

FAMILY MINISTRY

FAMILY MINISTRY: A MUST FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Each of the children in your school represents a family. But the types of households represented by those children may surprise you. You might think that, on the average, most come from typical homes, similar, perhaps, to yours or the home you grew up in as a child.

But the last several decades have brought tremendous change in society as a whole, and families in particular. Generalizing about the types of families in your school can no longer be done very accurately. The great diversity of households and their corresponding ministry needs might surprise you.

Researchers across the country, both secular and religious, are in agreement. “Family” is, and will remain, the basic building block of society. But if the family is weak, the country will be weak. As the parent is, so will be the child. If your school families are in trouble, your school will quickly notice the effects too.

As a school administrator, “family ministry,” should not be perceived as some type of extra program or another committee addition. Rather, “family ministry” is an attitude. It is an all pervading philosophy that should be the touchstone of everything that you do. Family Ministry is based on Jesus Christ. It strives to assist families in building their homes on Him. Ministry to families offers forgiveness, healing, and strength for families of all shapes and sizes, by guiding them to the cross and empty tomb of Christ the Crucified.

Churches and schools need to recognize that responsibility for the faith nurturing of children rightly belongs in the children’s homes....carried out by their parents, not substitutes, no matter how well educated or professional those substitutes may be. Unfortunately, over the years, schools have allowed themselves to fall into the trap of being the sole Christian educators of the children. And parents have willingly abdicated their responsibility to the church professionals.

With this in mind, therefore, the wise school administrator, in addition to the important mission of providing a quality Christian education through the school, will take great pains to insure that his or her school is likewise equipping, strengthening, and “partnering” with the unique households which send their children day after day to their classrooms.

The school exists to partner with the family in the mutual mission of the Christian education of children in the Word of God. If either of the partners ignores the other, or fails to carry out their part of this vital covenant, the mission will be much more difficult to accomplish. But together, as partners, the home and the school can see the child grow and succeed by God’s grace in Christ Jesus.

Ministry to the whole family is a must!

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

3,000 kids a day see their parents divorce.

In 1993, two-parent families accounted for only 36% of all family households.

40% of kids will go to bed tonight in a home where their father is not present.

Approximately 4.7 million children lived with a grandparent in 1991.

The average child will see 23,000 hours of TV by the time they leave high school.

There were 3.5 million unmarried couple households in 1993. This is 7 times larger than the number of unmarried couple households in 1970.

60% of US citizens believe that “absolute truth” cannot be known.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

“The American family is the rock on which a solid education can be built... We believe that strengthening the connection between families and schools is so important that we have made it one of America’s National Education Goals. The Goal declares that by the year 2000, ‘Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.’”

Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education

“Parents who know their children’s teachers and help with the homework and teach their kids right from wrong – these parents can make all the difference.”

President Bill Clinton

State of the Union Address

Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the Gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal. Whoever teaches the Gospel is truly a bishop or apostle.

Martin Luther
Estate of Marriage, Luther’s Works, 45:46

These are the commands, laws, and rules the Lord your God commanded me to teach you. Obey them after you enter the land and take possession of it. As long as you live, you, your children, and your grandchildren must fear the Lord your God...Listen, Israel: The Lord is our God. The Lord is the only God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words that I give you today. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you're at home or away, when you lie down or when you get up. Write them down, and tie them around your wrist, and wear them as headbands as a reminder. Write them on the door frames of your house and on your gates.

Moses

Deuteronomy 6: 1-9 (GW)

WHEN THE SCHOOL AND THE FAMILY ARE PARTNERS

The research is in. When families are involved with your school...

....students are more motivated in school and more committed to continuing education beyond high school.

...students are less likely to experience various problems in school.

....students' alcohol use, violence, and anti-social behaviors decrease.

....students will be more involved in extracurricular and non-school activities.

....students get better grades and test scores.

...students graduate from high school at higher rates.

...teacher morale and job satisfaction are increased.

WHAT DOES A FAMILY CENTERED SCHOOL LOOK LIKE?

- ***Family centered schools support the connection between children and their families.*** The school recognizes that children draw their identities from their family. In a family centered school, all family members are included and treated with respect and warmth. A basic belief in the value of families permeates school policies and practices. Such schools are welcoming and non-judgmental, and all staff are available to assist family members.

- ***Family centered schools support and train their teachers.***
It is important to provide training for staff on the basic principles of family ministry. Opportunities such as in-service training, mentoring, and continuing education should be provided on a continuous basis. School administrators set the tone and lead by example in their relationships with families and routinely reassess their communications with them. Joint family training is also provided for staff and families.
- ***Family centered schools forges true partnerships with families.***
Parents are not in a passive role of “being informed” or “educated” in this partnership but instead are in a creative role of establishing goals and making decisions. In family centered schools, families know that their feedback will effect change.

WHAT ARE THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF A FAMILY CENTERED SCHOOL?

- ***Families are the primary influence in the lives of their children.***
Families are the center of children’s lives. Schools should create an environment which reflects the culture, strengths, and desires of families for their children.
- ***It is not possible to accurately generalize about families.***
Teachers need to take the time to get to know family members individually and to support them in their goals for their children.
- ***Families have strengths.***
Families and teachers are partners who have the shared responsibility of doing the best for the children in their care. Teachers need to get to know families and build upon their strengths.
- ***Families have something to offer teachers.***
Traditionally, exchanges between parents and teachers have been viewed as a means of informing families about their child. However, in family centered schools, it is recognized that, while the teachers bring information to parents about child development and about their experiences with many children, families provide information about the individual child, across time and in a variety of settings.
- ***Contemporary families experience multiple demands.***
Employment, housing, health care, and transportation are just some of the issues facing families, whose lack of contact with the school should not always be mistaken for lack of concern for their child.
- ***There are many ways for a family to be “involved.”***
It is important to provide a range of options for families to participate in the education of their child. Families need to be allowed to choose the type and level of participation which suits them.

TIPS TO FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOL FAMILIES

- ❑ Keep the focus on Jesus Christ. Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing!
- ❑ Pray for your families regularly, in school, church, and in your own prayers.
- ❑ Ministry to families means getting involved beyond the security of your facility.
- ❑ Ministry to families requires passion and hard work.
- ❑ Begin with one family first: Yours! You can't give what you don't have.
- ❑ Strive to strengthen your faculty's families as well.
- ❑ Remember that the "typical" family isn't typical anymore.
- ❑ You will not be able to meet every family's needs. Nor should you!
- ❑ The home is the primary agency for faith formation.
- ❑ Keep your eyes and ears open to the cry of families in your school.
- ❑ Cultivate personal relationships with your student's families.
- ❑ Communicate often using a variety of methods. You can never communicate too much.
- ❑ Demonstrate Christ-Care to each student's parent(s).
- ❑ Strive to be intentional, not accidental in ministry to families. Strategically plan your ministry to them. Collect data, assess the needs, and assemble your resources.
- ❑ Use your existing programs as platforms to do family ministry (i.e. PTL meetings; home visits; conferences)
- ❑ Capitalize on "wet cement moments"... "family milestones." (Birth, Baptism, Graduation, Confirmation, etc.)
- ❑ Determine if your school's programming is unintentionally detrimental to family life. If it is, change it.
- ❑ Remember that family ministry is more an attitude than it is a program. "Family Ministry" doesn't meet in Room 201 on Tuesday nights at 7:00pm.
- ❑ Offer the support mechanism of small groups around the Word of God and prayer.
- ❑ Grant teacher in-service opportunities in Family Ministry.
- ❑ "Find a need and fill it."

- ❑ Invite your community to participate in family-friendly events in your school.
- ❑ Establish a diverse network of family ministry people, products, and programs.
- ❑ Customize! No single model will work in every school.
- ❑ Strive to assist homes to become “grace places.”
- ❑ Make parents feel at home in your school. Create a family climate for them.
- ❑ Involve families in decisions and policy. Grant them ownership.
- ❑ Expect disappointment, but don’t give up.
- ❑ Help families reclaim family devotions as an integral part of their lives.
- ❑ Practical ideas for Family Ministry are only limited by your imagination.

FAMILY MINISTRY PRINCIPLES

- 1. Family life education can be built into existing programs and can be an ongoing ministry.*
- 2. Family life should not be hindered by the life of the church since home and church, both of God's design, should not be competitive.*
- 3. Christian education should be carried out in both the home and the church with an integrated program plan.*
- 4. Provision should be made for children who have no Christian parents.*
- 5. Family life emphasis should include singles, with every effort being made to protect them from feeling left out.*
- 6. Intergenerational experiences can be intentionally designed, but the total church program should provide for regular informal interaction between generations.*
- 7. Lay people should be enlisted for various phases of family life ministry. Teaching and training programs should be transferable.*
- 8. New family life programs might be initiated on a voluntary basis.*
- 9. Attempts at influencing the family should give priority to the training of fathers for their role.*
- 10. The church life and program should communicate and be built on the concept that the parents are responsible for the child's nurture. The family rather than the church is the primary agency of Christian nurture. The church supports the role of the parents, not usurps it.*
- 11. The teaching and training ministry of the whole church body should be related to family life.*
- 12. Reverse the practice of splitting the family as soon as they enter the church doors.*

WHAT IS FAMILY MINISTRY ANYWAY?

Family Ministry denotes a program of service to young children, youth, and adults, which helps to better equip them for living in the context of the Christian family. It aims to enrich the spiritual life of the home, to give parents a better understanding of their children and the skills for their Christian nurture, to make personal and family worship increasingly effective, to supply counsel in problems of family relationships, and to help lift the entire spirit and purpose of the home.

The aim of Family Ministry is that every family by the grace of God becomes a spiritually growing, responsible, Christian family unit. It is an intensification of the ministry of pastor to people, and families to each other, to help families fulfill their God-given mission. It embraces: helping parents in the Christian nurture of their children; helping families establish and maintain meaningful family devotions; guiding and inspiring families to be Christian households; living by Christian standards; helping child, youth, and adult develop a Christian view of sex; preparing youth and adults for marriage as a godly vocation. It also includes winning, assimilating, conserving families for Christ; serving the founding, expanding, shrinking, and aging family throughout life; helping incomplete families, single adults, and couples. It is both preventive and remedial, nursing sick marriages back to health and referring problem cases to the best resources in the community. It involves restudy from the Biblical view of such areas as mate selection, engagement and marriage, divorce and remarriage, family structure and authority, sexual ethics, and birth control. More than a "program of services" it is a concern, emphasis, attitude, and family-conscious dimension of the ministry.

God made the home the center of worship and religious training. It not only conveys physical life but is God's primary institution to insert the life in Christ into each generation (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:6-7; Eph. 6:1-4). The home is the cradle of personality, the most potent teaching agency, the chief unit in evangelism, the best barrier against evil, the keeper of culture, the bulwark of the Church, and the cornerstone of the nation. Correlation between consistent Christianity and successful marriage is very high. New strains and stresses have been placed on the family by countless changes in society. Life in the post-modern world has greatly increased the incidence of separation, divorce, broken homes, and delinquency. Home and church need each other more than ever before. Research by psychologists, sociologists, and welfare workers has cast new light on family relations. It is logical that the church should take the lead, because it alone has the regenerating power of the Gospel of Christ, the love and concern of the Good Shepherd, and the teaching facilities and agencies to carry out a balanced program of family ministry.

FAMILY MINISTRY PUT INTO ACTION BY INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES, CONGREGATIONS, AND YOU

**Lee A. Belmas, Assistant to the President - Family Ministry, North Wisconsin
District**

What's the best way to get something done? A) Wait for someone else to do it. B) Form a committee. C) Let the pastor do it. D) None of the above. What did you pick? Come on! Pick an answer. The answer I'd pick is D. If we pick A, we'll wait a long time. If we pick B, we'll wait a longer time. If we pick C, we would burn our pastor's out. Let's face it, church workers can't do everything!

We are missing out on many opportunities to do family ministry if we don't take the lead. If it is to be, it is up to each of us individually (with the help of God, of course!) So let's get going!

Following are some ways that families, congregations and YOU can put 'Family Ministry Into Action' without waiting for someone else, a committee, or a Pastor to do it. Please note that it is always good to check with your church leadership before taking the bull by the horn on some activities. God's blessings as you take 'ACTION' in ministry!

BY INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES

1. Find a family to mentor to and with. Each family can mentor each other, Call another family and begin! Take ACTION!
2. Plan and carry out a quarterly family get-together just for fun. Reserve the church for an outdoor movie night with popcorn, a Sunday sundae evening, a game night, or you name it! Take ACTION!
3. Form a family choir (get a bunch of families together) and sing at a church service and/or take it on the road to a nursing home. Pick some music, check it out with the worship leader, and start practicing. Take ACTION!
4. Host a parenting night forum at the church with babysitting available. Pick a date, a topic, a leader, and recruit parents to come. TAKE ACTION!
5. Conduct 'seasonal celebrations' at the church. Church leaders appreciate your input, help, and leadership. TAKE ACTION!
6. Host a dinner at the church for grandparents. Let the kids serve the food, including dessert, and be the entertainment for the evening. TAKE ACTION!
7. Conduct a family rummage sale at the church. Use the proceeds to bring in some family entertainment. Invite the community. Pick a date and entertainer. Remember to donate some of your proceeds to charity. TAKE ACTION!
8. Form a family prayer chain. Share a family prayer list on a monthly basis. TAKE ACTION!

9. Conduct a family Bible study night that includes simple crafts and refreshments. Keep it simple. Make use of video stories. TAKE ACTION!
10. ENCOURAGE parents with their kids...AFFIRMATIONS go a long way. TAKE ACTION!

BY YOU

1. Accept families for who and whom they are (God's redeemed).
2. Listen to what families have to say and respond to needs they may have.
3. Let families know that you are there and that you care.
4. Pray for all families,
5. Let families tell their stories. LISTEN.
6. Expect the best out of families.
7. Resist showing favoritism to families. Reach out to the quiet ones.
8. Talk to the children of families.
9. Be in touch with families. Be intentional.
10. ENCOURAGE parents with their kids...AFFIRMATIONS go a long way.

BY CONGREGATIONS

1. Support parents in their role as children's first and primary nurturers.
2. Provide refreshments for children, as well as the adults, at all church events.
3. Plan at least two intergenerational events for all ages to participate in.
4. Provide children's messages and children's bulletins at each worship service.
5. Provide opportunities for families to participate in worship services (ushering, greeters, family choirs, instrumental music, etc.).
6. Provide monthly opportunities for parents to talk about parenting issues. Have childcare available.
7. Provide support and outreach opportunities to single parent families.

8. Arrange social opportunities for church age groups to get together (older adults, singles, young adults, couples, etc.).
9. Make your church family friendly by modeling patience, friendliness, care, respecting children's/parental needs, grace, etc.
10. ENCOURAGE parents with their kids...AFFIRMATIONS go a long way.

Beginning Family Ministry in Your Congregation
By Alice Klement, Minister of Family Life
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church San Antonio, Texas

There are three elements that are helpful in the start of Family Ministry in any congregation:

- Prayer
- Family Ministry Task Force
- Outreach

□ **Prayer**

In all stages of Family Ministry - before starting, in its infancy, if it needs a boost, or when it is up and running - gather one or more people to seek God's direction for family ministry in your congregation. Meeting once each week for 1 1/2 - 2 hours has worked well in several congregations.

A format for the prayer group meeting might include a short Bible reading and discussion. A verse that illustrates one of God's attributes is a good way to focus. This can be followed by short spontaneous prayers of praise for the attribute studied. Allow time for silent reflection.

The facilitator lists specific Family Ministry needs or concerns on index cards. Each group member takes a card and begins the prayer with a short intercession followed by a silent time. During the silence others in the group are welcome to interject prayer thoughts. When the leader senses that there are no more prayers for one topic he/she moves on to the next topic.

Always allow time for individuals to add their personal prayer concerns.

The Holy Spirit will respond to prayers by making clear the areas in which to develop Family Life Ministry. As these areas are revealed it is time to get directors and form a Family Ministry Task Force.

□ **The Family Ministry Task Force**

The following is a sample of how a task force might be organized. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE the areas of ministry and directors will be identified gradually. This is good since it takes time to develop a firm foundation for each area.

STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY LIFE TASK FORCE
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
San Antonio, Texas

1. The Task Force shall consist of the Minister of Family Life and sufficient Directors so that one may be responsible for each of the following areas of Family Life Ministry: Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Adult Bible classes, Faith Stepping Stones, Fellowship Groups, Faith and Family Resource Library, Shepherd Groups, Women's Ministries, and Men's Ministries. Positions may be added or deleted as necessary.

2. One of the members mutually agreed on by the Task Force will represent the Task Force at Church Council.
3. The Directors for the various areas of family ministry shall be responsible for recruiting leaders in their areas assisting with recruitment and training of teachers if needed presenting for approval requests for material and supply purchases seeing to it that proper publicity is provided in the area of responsibility reporting on their area of responsibility at all Task Force meetings.
4. The term of office for Task Force members shall be two years with no more than one-half of the Task Force appointed in any year. Any unexpired term shall be filled by appointment.
5. At least once every two years the Task Force shall review its structure and responsibilities.

JOB DESCRIPTION: FAMILY LIFE TASK FORCE

1. Pray regularly for the congregation and the professional and volunteer staff.
2. Be faithful in worship and Bible study for personal growth and as an example to others.
3. Present a comprehensive budget for Christian Education at the time and in the form requested by the Church Council.
4. Recruit Directors for the Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Adult Bible Classes, Faith Stepping Stones, Youth Groups, Fellowship Groups, Faith and Family Resource Library, Shepherd Groups, Women's Ministry, and Men's Ministry. Directors' positions may be added or deleted as necessary.
5. Plan, schedule, and advertise adult and children's education classes for both Sunday mornings and weekdays so that a variety of topics are available.
6. Attend such workshops and other learning opportunities in the area of Family Ministry as are available through District, Synod and other appropriate sources.

The directors are crucial to the development of each ministry. They must have the gift of administration. Administration includes developing a mission and action plan. Recruitment is a large part of the director's work.

Each director needs to be enthusiastic and able to help others catch the vision for ministry.

The Family Ministry Task Force meets to set the yearly calendar and to review and evaluate the congregation's Family Life offerings. Frequent meetings are not necessary or desirable since the directors will be meeting with their individual volunteer staff and developing their own ministry area.

Note: Make certain to include single people in the "family". Be vigilant in using terminology that includes singles. With 51 % of society made up of singles, a Director of Singles Ministry on the Family Life Task Force is a must.

□ Outreach

Family Life programs offer excellent opportunities for outreach. Parenting classes, marriage enrichment, divorce and grief recovery sessions are popular with the community surrounding the church as well as with unchurched friends of congregation members.

Make sure your congregation is prepared to care for the people God will send. Clear, well-placed signs are a must. Greeters willing to offer coffee and begin relationship building are key to outreach. Begin to assimilate these guests by getting them into a small group, using their gifts and talents, and putting their names on the congregation's mailing list.

For Further Reading

Family Friendly Congregation, The Freudenburg (Book, Group Publishing)

The title says it all. The book describes how churches can truly care for families ... including the families of the staff. Its focus is equipping families for home-based, church-supported ministry.

Funtastic Family Nights, Bickel (Reproducible Book, CPH)

Families come in all shapes, sizes and configurations. This book provides resources to help all families reflect, share, and dialog about God's Word as a way to build healthy family relationships.

Good Shepherd, The: A Christian Family Magazine

Viji George, Managing Editor (The Good Shepherd Center for the Christian Family: publisher)

The Good Shepherd Center for the Christian Family is dedicated to providing Lutheran congregations, day schools, Sunday schools and families with effective family ministry resources.

1-800-588-GOOD.

How Prayer Shapes Ministry, Biersdorf (Book, Alban institute)

Recognizing that many volunteer and professional church workers find their greatest struggle is with the spiritual side of their ministry, the author offers the reader guidance in a renewed life of prayer.

New Day for Family Ministry, A

Olson and Leonard (Book, Alban Institute)

"Your need is my opportunity for ministry and vice versa." The authors see the family as agent for social change yet they stress the need to meet families where they are by listening and building ministries with families through focus groups.

Prayer, Hallesby (Book, Augsburg)

This classic is sure to deepen and enrich the reader's prayer life. A study guide is included.

Family Ministry: More Than Filling Space on the Church Calendar

By Dave Wesche

Many congregations are beginning to establish family ministry for several reasons. It might be the recent dealings with school violence. Maybe the significant number of divorced families. Concern for the morals of our children. Whatever has sparked the interest, it is critical to lay a proper foundation in order to ensure that it will be a ministry and not just more events to put on the church calendar.

Just because your congregation is showing parenting videos doesn't mean you are doing family ministry. A youth program with many activities and outings doesn't guarantee it. A monthly singles outing won't mean a thing unless the congregation has established a mindset that the intended outcome of this "calendar fodder" is more than "events = ministry."

If you are contemplating a family ministry program, use the following article as some "food for thought" and a resource to develop a ministry and not a program. A program has activities that will keep people busy and eventually bum out. However, a ministry will help people get excited, grow, and become empowered for further ministry.

A. "Enlightenment"--Prayer and the Study of Scripture

Before your congregation gets down to the task of starting a family ministry, have all members devote time to pray for God's guidance in this endeavor. In Jeremiah 29, the Lord says that His thoughts are for our peace, hope, and future. Then, He states that we will call, seek, and finally find Him when we search with all our heart. We need to go through the same process as we seek how we are to minister to the world.

Lead members through a Scriptural study of "family ministry." As the congregation searches the Word, God has another opportunity to reveal His will for our ministry to families. The following verses may serve as a starting point for you : Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:9-21; Hebrews 10:23-25; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:3-7. Do not become impatient. Remember that as you pray, "Thy Kingdom come," you are saying that God is in control of your life and your ministry. Allow Him time to mold and shape His ministry for your congregation.

B. "Interrogation"--Developing the Team and the Vision

After allowing the time for God to guide you and your congregation to accept the challenge of family ministry, you should enlist a "ministry team" to set a vision and establish some parameters for it. The "ministry team" should consist of members who have a passion for what this ministry will do for the congregation and community. Be certain to group a relatively good mix of people from varying family situations and ages (e.g., senior adult, empty nester, single parent, a youth from a blended family, single adults). Include a few "established" members for an historical viewpoint and a few relatively new members for a fresh perspective. Keep your group size to about eight people in order to accommodate proper discussion.

The first few meetings should allow for time to build relationships among the team members as well as to look at the task at hand. If possible, meet in someone's home to promote an

atmosphere of "family." It is important that your team establishes a comfort level with each other so that discussions will be as open and honest as possible.

Besides working on relationship building, there are two major areas which you need to begin to examine and ask questions. First, how does your team define "family"? This definition will be critical to all future approaches and plans to the ministry. It will be a pivotal point which will invite people into being a part of the events, education, and care of the ministry. Second, the team should develop a ministry/mission statement to define what the goal of this ministry is. It is suggested that you develop a vision that has some or all of the following elements: proactive, holistic, needs-based, growth-oriented, supportive, nurturing, multi- and intergenerational, educational, enriching, empowering, a fit for your congregation. An excellent resource for the team to read as you prepare to vision is Susan Lidum's book, "Church Family Ministry," published by Concordia.

C. "Insight"--Viewpoints from Significant Members

Once your team has grasped a foundational vision for family ministry, it is important to seek out the thoughts of other members. This will be a time for members to voice their input as to what their needs are and also a time for you to generate excitement for the possibilities of this ministry. The format and procedures for these interviews should be established as part of your foundational work. This will ensure that you will be collecting similar data from the variety of people with which the team will be talking. One possible resource to use in the development of this interview survey is "Ministering to Families: A Positive Plan of Action" by Royce Money.

Overall, you should randomly select a number of members from a variety of family situations and ages. However, it is also important to hear the opinion of critical members who, with their support and enthusiasm, will be able to positively amplify the vision and success of family ministry. Some of these key people are: the pastor; the congregational Executive board; chairpersons of the boards for Lay Ministry/Elders, Parish Education, Fellowship, Social Ministry, and Christian Day School (if applicable); members whose passions are effectively listened to; members who are highly involved and connected to the church's overall ministry.

From this solicitation, the team should glean some important information which will begin to specify a certain direction in which to follow for your family ministry. Look especially for the strengths and challenges of the current situation in the congregation, in families/households, and in individuals. These data may be helpful in the assessment and nurturance of particular needs for greater wellness (physical, mental, and spiritual) in the congregation.

D. "Enclosure"--Application of Current Ministries

The next step is to gather together this specific input and highlight significant statements, either due to the passion in which they were given or to the regularity in which they occurred. Then, compare these in light of the original ministry statement. At this point, the family ministry team should revise the initial statement to reflect any new ideas that are a consequence of these opportunities of insight.

Once the vision statement is captured in writing and in the hearts of the team, begin to reflect how current ministries are applicable to your definition of family ministry. First, have the team take some time to observe and record various ministries of the church. Also, please note the "unplanned" family ministry of the church (e.g., gathering of people in the parking lot, children

playing on the playground, conversations by the church copy machine). Evaluate the current programming in reflection of the new "family ministry" vision. Decide what has a "ministry fit," what needs to be "slightly altered," and what needs to be left on the "cutting room floor."

This may be a cause for some struggle, since some "traditions" will no longer fit within the new view of ministry. However, the team must determine the effectiveness of each program as it enables members to increase in their faith and as it equips and empowers them to move into utilizing that faith to serve the Lord.

In the end, ask, "How can we best expend our resources to have the greatest impact on the faith lives of people?"

E. "Implementation"--Start with a Certainty

The previous evaluation should identify a number of programs that have a family ministry direction. There is no need to merely add programs, but observe where people are caring for one another. Take current things that are working and become more intentional with them. Broaden them to reach out effectively and effectively to more members. Why have a birthday celebration for just the older adults of the congregation? Include youth and their families in the celebration of an "adopted" grandparent and factor that relationship into other events to foster its continuance.

Work on the quality of one or two programs instead of splitting your resources too thin by doing eight or nine. Why plan five different retreats for men, women, couples, families, and youth? Be creative and ask if it is possible to combine all or some of those retreats into one big gathering of the church "family"?

F. "Inquiry"--Ongoing Procedures

As you begin to initiate the vision into action, don't leave it to live on its own accord. The team must constantly maintain the focus of the vision, keep it before the congregation, re-evaluate it for clarity, and make any necessary modifications as situations change.

First, the team needs to continue educating themselves and the congregation. Contact other congregations for their models and ideas. Attend workshops offered by the Synod, your District, or by organizations that have strengthening families as their main mission. Contact the Concordia University System for what courses they offer in the area of family ministry, especially the summer courses at Concordia, Seward. Consider the development of a fulltime professional church worker with an emphasis in family ministry. Read, read, read--ask your District office for resources.

Second, have a regular evaluation of your programs to assure that they continue to meet the ministry objectives. Part of this evaluation should include the ministry statement itself to be certain that it is still viable for the congregation's ministry needs.

Third, work on extending the ministry a step at a time. Initially, test to see if you might enlarge the scope of your current activities. Then, as you experience or hear about what other congregations are doing, determine if it fits your needs. Look to begin to reach outside the congregation's walls and into the community.

In conclusion, family ministry takes more than just a few parenting videos and a babysitter during the worship services. Effective family ministry is a mindset that needs to influence

everyone in the congregation to walk alongside one another to encourage, support, uplift, and empower (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Suggested Reading:

Chandler, Russell, "Feeding the Flock: Restaurants and Churches You'd Stand in Line For", The Alban Institute, 1998.

Dawn, Marva J., "Is it a Lost Cause: Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children", Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.

Hebbard, Don W., "The Complete Handbook for Family Life Ministry in the Church", Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995.

Lidums, Susan B., "Church Family Ministry: Changing Loneliness to Fellowship in the Church", Concordia Publishing, 1985.

Money, Royce, "Ministering to Families: A Positive Plan of Action", A.C.U. Press, 1987.

How to begin Family Ministry in the Parish

By Patra S. Pfothenauer

I hung up my phone and sat down as I breathed a deep sigh: another family from my church is breaking up. I cry out to the Lord in my pain. How God's heart must ache as He watches His children destroy their lives. As a family life minister, it is my calling to provide a safe place where families can be strengthened and renewed through God's love and Word. It is my responsibility to share God's design for families and prepare them for the natural stress points that occur throughout the life span of a family.

Every congregation is different. But, all people are in need of the hope that comes from our savior, Jesus Christ. There are specific needs within each congregation, as well as different servants with varied gifts. Therefore, family ministry in every congregation is going to look a little bit different. I have designed and implemented family ministry in two congregations. In both places, I followed some basic steps and the final results were different based on the particular needs and resources within each congregation.

Listed below is a suggested plan for beginning family ministry in the local parish.

1. Pray- create a prayer group that consists of people from every age group in the congregation. Plan a set prayer meeting time each week. Have this group pray for family ministry in your church. This prayer group can also pray for families of the congregation by name.
2. Put together a Task Force- Get a group of people together who are interested in family ministry and implementing it in the congregation. Ask them to make a six-month commitment to meet monthly to evaluate the needs of the congregation, determine a mission statement and begin implementing family ministry.
3. Design a survey- Work with task force members to design a survey to be given to members of the congregation in order to determine the specific needs of the people. The survey can also be used to determine the needs of people at various stages in the life span. It works best to administer the survey on Sunday morning immediately following the worship service in order to get the greatest response.
4. Evaluate the Survey- After compiling the information from the survey, determine the greatest needs for each category in the life span. For instance, single people with no children will have different needs than single people with children or empty nest couples. The results of the survey are a starting place from which a design for family ministry can be determined.
5. Write a mission statement with goals and objectives- As a task force, brainstorm specific goals that you believe God is calling you to accomplish. Then, evaluate the most important goals in family ministry at the time in your congregation. Write out your mission statement and then your objectives to carry out that mission statement. Listed below are sample mission statements from the congregations that I designed family ministries for.

The Mission Statement

The purpose of Christ Church-Lutheran's (CC-L) Family Life Ministry is to meet the needs of God's family at CC-L and beyond, with His love and grace through various opportunities for growth, accountability and support as God's children experience His plan for their lives.

The Objectives

- I. To identify and evaluate the present components of family ministry being implemented at CC-L in order to design an intentional family ministry plan for the future.
- II. To develop a "Family Month" at CC-L where families will be strengthened through intentional planning and programming.
- III. To evaluate various children's grief/divorce recovery programs in order to choose a program to implement at CC-L to meet the needs of the children.
- IV. To evaluate the present parenting programs being offered and the present parenting needs at CC-L in order to determine the most beneficial program to offer in the fall.
- V. To develop and implement intentional family ministry programs through the channel of youth ministry.

The Mission Statement

The purpose of family life ministry at Holy Cross Lutheran Church is to support and equip all types of families in all stages of life with the hope and strength found through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Objectives

- I. To educate families with the Biblical foundation and Christian core values of God's design for the family.
 - II. Arm families with the tools necessary to combat the values in the secular world in order to be His light in the darkness.
 - III. Be a place where families can celebrate and experience the joys and sorrows of life together.
6. Design a Plan- After the mission statement and objectives are written, as a task force design a plan to meet the goals. Determine the specific ways the objectives will be met. Implement programs that meet the specific goals. For instance, at Holy Cross, we had a specific family emphasis where all adult education and sermons were teaching the congregation about God's design for His family.

For Further Reading:

Clark, Chap. The Youth Worker's Handbook to Family Ministry, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997.

Freudenberg, Ben and Lawrence, Rick. The Family Friendly Church. Group Publishing, Loveland, CO, 1998.

Hebbard, Don W. The Complete Handbook for Family Life Ministry in the Church. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1995.

If you would like for information or a copy of a family ministry survey, contact Patra Pfothenauer at PatraSue@aol.com

Family Ministry through Journaling **Pastor Roger Sonnenberg**

“I will utter things hidden from of old--things we have heard and known, things our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children; we will tell the next generation” (Psalm 78:2b-4).

By the time she had finished sharing her story there were few dry eyes in the church, especially as the congregation responded with singing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” It was one of many stories shared that day, the day on which our church celebrated God’s goodness on the 150th Anniversary of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. The woman had been enrolled in the journaling class, and it was one of many rich stories she has written down for her children and children’s children.

“I was only nine years old, but the incident is still real for me, I can still smell the drying grass and taste the dust. The Nebraska summer sun had scorched the crops. Each day my father went out into the fields only to come back and share how bad the harvest would be, if any. Each day we prayed for rain, but it seemed as if the prayers were as dry as the earth itself--they had no promise. Each day the prayers were left unanswered.

Finally, one day, late into the summer, the clouds pushed their cumbersome load of rain across the landscape and onto our farm. I was so excited I ran to my father and shouted, “Papa, Papa, it’s raining. The crops will be saved!” “Honey,” he said, “It’s too late...the crops are gone.”

The next day I went to the open barn. Papa was there, sitting on an old pail, his hands cupping his face. It was the first time I had ever seen him cry. “What can I do to help?” I asked myself. I put my arms around his shoulders, and I, a small child of nine, did the only thing I knew to do, I sang: ‘What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and grief’s to bear....’ On and on I sang.... It was all I knew to do....”

The story was real. It was a story of faith, a story of a lesson from a child, a lesson she had learned from her papa. In telling her story she touched many people, including--someday--the hearts of her children’s children who will read her story.

Though we live in a highly technological society, we also live in a fragmented society where stories are not being preserved. More and more people are writing genealogies (technical in nature), but fewer and fewer people are writing the stories that bring the next generation(s) wisdom and experience. The truth is that we cannot understand ourselves if we do not understand our past. Lewis B. Smedes writes in his book, *Caring and Commitment*, that children cannot write their own stories of life unless they know the chapters that precede their own. In sharing our stories with our children and grandchildren we give them a starting point from which they can write their own stories.

One of the things we have done through family ministry at Our Savior Lutheran has been to help members journal their stories for future generations. Over and over we see blessings, not only in sharing their stories but in hearing the stories of others as well.

- Community is developed as the stories are shared.
- Listening to a friend's story spurs you to share your own story.
- Sharing your story helps you discern where God was present in your life.
- Listening to the stories of others often move and motivate members of the class, much as testimonials do in some churches.
- Healing can take place by journaling one's story (i.e., one woman said, "Pastor Sonnenberg, after 75 years of carrying the burden of what happened in my childhood around with me, I am now able to feel some peace of mind about it.")
- Reviewing, remembering, and journaling one's story can help the story tellers feel more whole, more complete.
- As one hears people share similar stories with similar tragedies and concerns, similar celebrations and joys, a sense of oneness develops.
- Stories have helped people see that their lives mattered.

Graphic Artist: Put the following two journal entries in sidebars.

"The famous appearance of Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan Show was taken as a combination of the ridiculous and the disgusting. I remember thinking, 'What's the matter with this kid? Are his shorts too tight?' I did harbor a sort of guilty liking of his records. Some of them reminded me of the minstrel show tunes my Granddad used to sing for us when I was a kid." -- A Journal Entry

"We did not think of ourselves as segregationists but looking back, I believe we were. It was an unspoken rule that you did not sell your property to Blacks or Hispanics, for that would reduce the property value of your neighborhood. Nothing of the sort was put in writing, but real estate agents made the picture very clear. I believe our prejudice was largely due to ignorance, and if we had been deeply in the Word at that time, we could not have even claimed that excuse. Also, it should be noted that we were never corrected in this matter by the church. We heard a lot about 'love your neighbor,' but I do not recall a single discussion in the church regarding segregation. We were hibernating, and we were wrong." -- A Journal Entry

These are but a few of the comments made by those who have journaled their stories. Best of all, the journalists see how their life stories and faith stories are intricately woven together. As Sue Monk Kid wrote, "It sharpens God's voice in the common places where it often goes unnoticed--between the lines of life...". The writer of Proverbs says, "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children" (Proverbs 13:22). Journaling is one way to leave some of that inheritance.

MORE THAN 50 PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR YOUR SCHOOL'S FAMILY MINISTRY

- ✧ Sponsor parent education and family learning seminars based on family input
- ✧ Provide families with information on child development
- ✧ Lend families books and tapes on parenting
- ✧ Inform families how to develop home conditions that support school learning
- ✧ Survey parents' needs and ask faculty members to work with the categories
- ✧ Link parents with community resources
- ✧ Establish a family resource center in your school
- ✧ Initiate support groups for families around special interests and needs
- ✧ Maximize parent-teacher-student conferences to address family ministry issues
- ✧ Listen to parents closely as they tell you their child's strengths and how they learn
- ✧ Insure teachers have ready access to telephones to communicate with parents quickly
- ✧ Strive to send home many positive messages about the student
- ✧ Communicate especially with the fathers!
- ✧ Involve the total family in student award and recognition events
- ✧ Consider establishing a "homework hotline"
- ✧ Make the "home visit" a family building experience
- ✧ Start a program to help parents assist their children with homework
- ✧ Create learning events and activities that can involve the whole family
- ✧ Involve parents in career days; tutoring; chaperones; class assistants; reading to kids; etc.
- ✧ Develop a booklet of organizations and agencies that can help families in distress
- ✧ Videotape helpful parenting training for families who are absent from the meeting
- ✧ Begin a "Family Ministry Task Force" in your school to plan and implement ideas
- ✧ Start "classroom family suppers"
- ✧ Put together a "devotion suitcase" full of resources and have each child take home for a week or so. Include order blanks for purchase of the materials.
- ✧ Assign homework that can involve the entire family interactively
- ✧ Model family skills and behaviors in the classroom
- ✧ Provide opportunities for families to be involved with the corporate worship experience on Sunday
- ✧ Teach parents how to conduct family devotions and prayer time with their kids
- ✧ Begin a Parish Nurse program in your school for families
- ✧ Create and mail an attractive "Family Newsletter" for all homes
- ✧ Have a "Family Shelf" or two in your school or church library
- ✧ Put together and publish a "How Families Can Help" Handbook
- ✧ Have each class make "Video Devotions" and duplicate for their families
- ✧ Encourage all professional church workers to experience a marriage retreat
- ✧ Use the PTL to do family building training and skill development
- ✧ Resurrect the school operetta and build it around family life
- ✧ Start a school web page devoted to family helps
- ✧ Use older adults as school volunteers for reading assistance, etc.
- ✧ Co-op with other schools in providing a trained MSW or counselor for families
- ✧ Offer Servant Events or Faith In Action Groups for the whole family

- ✧ Get kits for your children to build a small family altar for their homes
- ✧ Put together a class devotional booklet with devotions written by each child
- ✧ Provide parental training in financial management; conflict resolution; etc.
- ✧ Offer regular video series on topics of interest to families
- ✧ Sponsor family meals regularly with an entertaining and helpful program
- ✧ Start a "Dad's Club" (Men's Ministry)
- ✧ Initiate a Grandparent's Day...maybe near Thanksgiving with a noon meal
- ✧ Celebrate faith milestones of your students (i.e. Baptismal birthdays, Confirmation, etc.)
- ✧ Encourage the parents of all students to audit Pastor's Adult Information Class
- ✧ Plan Father-Son; Mother-Daughter; Father-Daughter; Mother-Son events
- ✧ Invite parents to visit classrooms when convenient
- ✧ Hold a school "open house" regularly
- ✧ Create a place for families to be comfortable while in your school building
- ✧ Sponsor community events that can touch the families of your community

Small Group Family Ministry

By Susan Shelton

"But what about my kids?" Have you heard that question a time or two when inviting newcomers to your small group Bible study? Like many contemporary churches, ours has been working to establish small groups. Our goal is to engage 80- 100% of our membership in a small, caring community of believers. Since the median age of our congregation is 34 years, we have a lot of children. Thrilling as this is, appropriate child-care is an ever-present issue for us. Over the years, several of our small groups have tried unsuccessfully to incorporate children into their meetings. Despite their creativity and desire, none found a suitable way to prevent the noise and activity levels from distracting the adults. Eventually all resorted to requiring each family to secure their own child-care at home.

When our own small group began discussing the possibility of including the children, many individuals shuddered at the thought. Some of us had been through past disasters and didn't relish "round two." Yet, through open discussion we all agreed it was a goal we were willing to struggle to accomplish. After several brainstorming sessions, we formulated a plan we were ready to test. After several months, we met again to reevaluate. Several issues were resolved, and once again we worked until we could all agree on solutions. As a group, we were committed to making a Family TLC group (small group) work. To do so, the group must be willing to test different options, evaluate and reevaluate often, and be strong enough to participate in open and honest discussions. The following is a summary of what we've tried and learned along the way.

A. Location

1. Meeting in a home

The main advantage to hosting a small group in individual homes is atmosphere. The setting is more relaxed and intimate, thus encouraging the closeness and personal sharing people crave. A group can choose to have one primary home to meet at with an alternative in case of illness. Another option is to rotate the host home among the group members. Basic "requirements" should be determined ahead of time, making sure there is adequate space for the children to meet away from the adults (i.e., a basement or recreation room).

2. Meeting at the church

Although meeting in a home provides a more intimate atmosphere, the strain of hosting our 8-12 children proved to be too much for our families. The kids had caused some distractions in the home, not only in the noise level, but also when a potty break was necessary. Since the children were able to use any classrooms at the church, the leader chose rooms well away from the adults as well as mapped out a route to the restrooms that did not pass by the adults.

B. Child Care

1. Teenage Care Givers

One possibility in providing childcare for your small group is to enlist the help of several responsible teenagers from your church or neighborhood. These teens can either be encouraged to offer this care as their service to God, or the group can opt to share the cost of paying them. This is an easy solution, as long as there are sufficient toys for all to play with, and if your teens are dependable. One disadvantage to providing care in this way is that the group's children will primarily be playing with "babysitters".

2. Adult Co-op System

Another option for childcare during your small group time is for the group members to share the responsibility among themselves. Members could alternate as couples or pair up with others. Children often respond better to adults, and in this way, the noise distractions will be lessened.

3. One Committed Adult

This is probably the best option for the children, but the most difficult to provide. We found that having one adult as the children's leader created more continuity and cohesiveness for the kids. The kids in our group are beginning to develop more of a "community" with the other kids in this group because of the consistent leadership.

4. Combined Family Study

An innovative study published by Group Publishing is entitled, Family Sunday School Fun. There are 13 lessons for parents and elementary-school kids to study together. It contains lessons and family activities in a 60-75 minute format. After the lesson, the children could play with adult or teen leaders while the rest of the adults share daily concerns and pray for each other.

C. Miscellaneous

1. Ratio of leaders to children

One mistake we made initially was not providing enough leaders for the group of children. Take in to account the ages of the children in the group. If possible, divide the children into preschool and early elementary groups. One adult (or teen) for every three preschoolers and one adult (or teen) for every four elementary children is a good rule of thumb.

2. Lesson Materials or Schedule

While babysitting IS an option, our group decided to provide more for the children. An hour and a half to two hours is a long time for a group of children of varying age groups to quietly play together in a confined area. Having a schedule to follow provides structure for the children so they know what to expect each time. It also gives the leaders a guide to follow to keep the kids together. By breaking the time into 10-15 minute blocks, kids are kept moving and their interest is stimulated. The group leaders can, develop their own schedule, incorporating the following topics or activities. It is recommended that you follow the same basic routine each time so that the children know what to expect. After a few sessions, the kids will easily transition from one activity to another because they know what is expected of them.

a. Free play

Provide plenty of toys, games, and books that the children can choose from when they enter the room. This free time allows each child the opportunity to choose his own toy and helps all of them to settle in before the lesson starts. Depending on the ages of the children in the group, this time can last from fifteen to twenty-five minutes.

b. Lesson

A lesson can be as simple as reading a story out of a children's Bible or as involved as a lesson from a published curriculum. Concordia Publishing House (CPH) Sunday school curriculum, Life Light midweek series, and other devotionals and supplies. With a little adjusting, most materials can be adapted to fit your group's needs. Group Publishing offers a wide variety of curriculums and books. Our group opted to design their own materials. Although it is more work for the leaders, it allows them to tailor-make the lessons to fit the individual group and its needs. Sermonette books can be helpful, as can devotional books or Arch books (published by CPH). Even good quality children's picture books can be used as a springboard for Bible lessons. Reading a book, discussing the moral or lesson learned, and then tying it in with a Bible passage makes a memorable lesson.

c. Music

Good quality Christian music for children is readily available from your local Christian bookstore. Choose one with snappy rhythms, catchy tunes, and a good message. Most Christian bookstores allow you to listen to tapes before you invest in them. Singing along with a tape or CD takes the pressure off both the leader and the children; having something secure to follow encourages all to sing with gusto.

- d. **Art Activity**
Supplying children with a variety of craft materials has many benefits. Artistic expression is an important part of childhood development; it is also an excellent way to tie a lesson to a visual reminder. Children love to show items they have made themselves, and whenever they see the masterpiece at home they are reminded of the lesson. If the leaders are unable to think of a specific item to make that illustrates the day's lesson, providing crayons, markers, or colored pencils with white paper is an easy option. Gluing cotton balls, colored or plain pasta shapes, colored paper shapes tissue paper squares and the like make terrific mosaics. Art is a fun and easy way to allow kids to express what they have learned in the day's lesson.

- e. **Snack**
Food is always a welcome sight for kids of all ages! Providing animal cracker pretzels or cookies mid-session is a great way to refocus the kids and get to know them better.

- f. **Closing and Opening**
Begin and end each session with one or two songs and a prayer.

Having one committed adult leader with the children each night was a blessing for our group. Former groups had tried teenagers alone or in pairs, paid babysitters, and had even tried rotating the adults each night to take "a turn" with the kids. Our group felt it would be better for the kids to have one adult with which to bond. This may not be the solution that is best for your group. Trial and error and trying again is the best way to insure that your children and your adults have a positive experience in your Small Group Family Ministry.

Reaching Generation X Through Infant and Toddler Family Ministries

Kelly Haack

A move to a different community, a new job, later marriage and then a house. Before Kristi knew it, years went by and she did not have a church home, even though she had grown up going to a church school and had attended church regularly as a child. Then Kristi got pregnant with her first child. As the baby inside her grew so did her desire to be a good mother. Soon Kristi's thoughts turned to the spiritual nurturing of her baby and she decided it was time to return to her roots. So, after ten years of absence from consistent church attendance, Kristi joined a church and became a regular worshipper.

According to Herb Miller in his article "Demythologizing the Baby Buster Challenge" (Church Resources.org) Kristi's story is typical of the buster experience. "Baby busters who reconnect with congregation life currently do so at the median age of twenty-seven. Why? By this time they are married and their first child is one year old. Parenthood jolts many people into adulthood. They recognize their influential role in determining this child's life values."

The beginning of parenthood is a prime touchpoint at which churches can reach out and draw the unchurched into their midst. But to do so, churches must be poised to meet the needs of new parents. But what are the needs? According to Miller, "Busters like a religion that speaks to the practicalities of life... In focusing on practicality, busters are especially prone to feel that religious beliefs should address family issues."

By building strong ministries to families with infants and toddlers, churches are equipping themselves to:

1. reach out to the unchurched, who are in a transitional stage of life and looking for spiritual grounding and
2. build strong foundations of faith in families that can be carried on to future generations.

Signs of Vital Ministries to Families with Infants and Toddlers.

Ministries that are alive, speak to the needs of young families, and draw them deeper into faith and a disciplined Christian life are key to reaching and strengthening the family and the church.

Following are some signs that a church has a healthy growing ministry to these families:

- Parents with young children feel welcomed in the church.
- Babies and toddlers are visible in church.
- Babies and toddlers feel loved at church and, in return, they love their church.
- Babies and toddlers learn that Jesus loves them and, in return, they love Jesus.
- Parents are growing in their faith and becoming increasingly disciplined.
- Families are making relationships within the church.
- Parents are given help and resources in their parenting role, especially their role as the spiritual mentor of their children.

A Comprehensive Model for Reaching Young Families.

According to the article “Evangelizing Through Childrens Ministries” (Department of Childrens Ministries, ELCA) specialized children’s ministries are the front porch to the church. “They offer people outside the congregation a place of observation, invitation, and meaningful connection with the body of Christ.” These ministries include ministries specially tailored to parents with infants and toddlers. Following are a dozen ideas for making your infant/toddler family ministries an inviting front porch, drawing those outside the church into the heart of the Christian family.

1. *Family Friendly Facilities.* Look around your church. What do the facilities say to a mother walking through the door with a baby in her arms and a toddler clinging to her skirt? Is the building bright and clean? Does it appeal to the eye of a toddler? Are the bathrooms (including a men’s restroom) nearby, easy to locate, and equipped with a child-sized stool and changing table? Are the stairways enclosed to protect a toddler while her parents talk to others? What things could you add to your church to send the message “Babies Welcomed Here”? One or two rocking chairs in the narthex or in the back of the sanctuary; a baby-safe play area which allows parents to fellowship, and tot sized-drinking fountains all say “We love little ones.”
2. *Including Babies in Church Services.* Parents who have not been to church in years, possibly never, can be overwhelmed by the job of keeping their toddlers quiet and entertained in church while trying to worship. If they feel that the church is a place where children are to be seen and not heard, they may decide not to come back the next week. Even if they do, toddlers, who are driven to move and make noise while being required to “sit still and be quiet”, can easily learn to dislike church and God.

In planning church services, there are things that can be done intentionally to make them friendlier for families with young children. Plan a simple litany, to be used for a month, with repetitive words such as “Alleluia”. Have a song where little ones can clap their hands or shake a rhythm instrument. Invite even the youngest toddlers to be up front with their parents for the children’s message. Incorporate a variety of sensing experiences into the service; aromatic candles, a variety of musical instruments, and a procession are a few examples. Once a year invite all the families with nursery aged children forward to the altar to receive a blessing for their babies. Finally, communicate to the congregation that active and noisy toddlers are a beloved part of congregational life.

3. *High Quality Nursery.* According to Miller, “A top quality nursery...is the front line ministry tool for reaching busters...If the nursery fails to meet their expectations, they shop elsewhere next Sunday.” Even with family friendly church services many young parents are unwilling to struggle with their children through a service. Other families need childcare during Bible class or to be given the opportunity to serve as ushers, Sunday school teachers or in other Sunday morning ministries. For these reasons, a church nursery serves a vital role in enabling parents to be active in the church community. The nursery also serves to connect parents to one another, to provide parents with Christian role models and resources, to give parents the opportunity to serve, and to be a vehicle for teaching the church’s little one’s about Jesus’ love.

The current generation of parents, which includes single working mothers or two career families, has been well educated on the differences between high quality and low quality childcare. When they walk into a nursery they immediately evaluate it. It is imperative that churches offer these families the highest quality of care, including a spiritually nurturing environment.

What do parents look for in a nursery? They look for a safe, inviting environment with loving and nurturing caregivers. They also look for developmentally appropriate practices, a small child/caregiver ratio, and spiritual nurturing. Parents like to have their toddlers bring home a picture they colored, a song they learned, or a letter explaining what has transpired in the nursery that day. Because many generation x parents are disconnected from their families by distance, divorce or other situations, they are also looking for relationships and surrogate family. As the church becomes their family, their faith in Christ Jesus becomes real and more deeply integrated into their lives.

4. *Small Group Ministries.* One way to encourage generation x families to develop relationships within the church and to grow in their faith and in their roles as parents is through small group ministries focusing on Christian parenting. According to Miller, “More than any recent generation, Busters want to connect with the love of God through the sense of community and intimacy that grows in a spiritually focused group.”
5. *Parent Education.* Another way to connect baby buster families to each other and to Christ, while strengthening their role as Christian parents, is through Bible studies, classes, and retreats focusing on Christian parenting and couple relationships. Parent education should begin in pregnancy with classes or retreats for parents-to-be, and extend to baptism classes and programs for parents of children of all ages. For families who are not ready or unable to make the commitment to a small group ministry, a short retreat or class can wet their appetite for deeper fellowship and growth and lay a spiritual foundation. For parents who are involved in small groups, these ministries serve to further support and strengthen their family lives and connect them to one another
6. *Parents and Tots Classes.* Long hours at work can cause parents to grieve the time that they miss with their babies. This makes it harder to part with them for church activities. One way to overcome this obstacle is by offering classes for parents and their little ones to take together. Concordia Publishing House offers one such class- “Parents and Twos”. Parents and tots classes offer toddlers an opportunity to play, interact with other children their age, and learn about Jesus and his love. Parents can spend time with their young children, while getting to know other parents and learning about and discussing Christian parenting. Classes of this nature can be extended downward to include parents with babies. Together the parents and their children grow in their faith.
7. *Ministries for New Fathers.* It can be overwhelming to be a new father-work pressures, a changed relationship with one’s wife, and making a smooth transition into the role of Dad can cause men to struggle with their identity and their esteem as a man. Add to this the vital importance of strongly connected fathers to the healthy development of children and the necessity for fathers to take leadership in the spiritual development of their children. The pressures, if recognized, can place a great strain on the beginnings of a new chapter in family life. Unrecognized, they can lead to devastating effects.

According to statistics compiled by the National Center for Fathering, fatherlessness (including emotional fatherlessness) is a large contributor to poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, dropping out of school, health and emotional problems, crime, and teenage pregnancy. On the other hand “fatherfulness” –strong fathering- resulted in more securely attached infants; diminished separation anxiety in one-year olds; greater physical well being, perceptual abilities, and relational skills among young children; increased academic and extracurricular achievements; and greater empathy.

With the statistics pointing to the necessity of strong fathering and the breakdown of marriages resulting in diminished fathering, an essential ministry that the church must take up is the creation of ministries for fathers starting with pregnancy and birth. These ministries may take the form of small groups, Bibles studies, fathering classes, retreats, or pairs of men committing to support one another in their fathering roles.

8. *Home Visitors.* A baby is born and within hours the pastor is at the hospital visiting the mother. He oohs and ahhs over the baby, asks the mother about the delivery, prays with her and the father, talks about baptism, and maybe leaves some resources for the parents to read. This connects the family to the church and helps them begin thinking about their child’s spiritual development. But must it end there?

Another way to immediately deepen the connection between the family and the church is through the use of volunteer visitors- lay people who visit with the family in the home, after the family has had a chance to get settled. These visitors can be ears to listen to parents who are eager to share the experience of their new baby with others. They also find ways the church can support the family. Finally, they bring with them a packet of resources that links the family to the programs in the church. This packet may include a list of programs the church offers for young families, some scriptures that speak to parents, a general brochure about the church, and a gift for the baby such as a tape of Christian lullabies or a religious board book.

Through a program of referrals and advertising a home-visiting ministry becomes not only a ministry of inreach but also an outreach to families in the community, connecting unchurched families to the family of Christ.

9. *Parent Mentors.* The new job of parenting can be overwhelming, especially to parents who for various reasons are missing the support of an extended family. When I did daycare, I would find such parents, usually the mother, agonizing over the smallest details of baby care. One way a church can support these parents and strengthen their family faith life, is by offering new parents the opportunity to develop a relationship with a trained mentor, similar to a Stephan minister, but someone who is an experienced parent. The parent could call the mentor if they were concerned about child development, health, or any other parenting issues. The mentor would be responsible also for keeping the family in her prayers and encouraging them in their faith life.
10. *Cradle Roll.* Concordia Publishing House offers a cradle roll program “Beginnings”. This program, or other cradle roll programs, in which parents periodically receive in the mail

materials encouraging them in their Christian parenting role is a nonthreatening way to reach out to all families, even inactive families.

11. *Media Ministry.* Another nonthreatening means for ministering to families is through a strong media ministry. By making current parenting videos, books, tapes, and pamphlets available and highly visible (perhaps in front of the nursery) to parents, a church enables them to strengthen their parenting skills at a time that is convenient for them and without the pressure some parents may feel in a group setting.

12. *Childcare*. According to research compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 60 percent of mothers of children under age six are in the labor force. Almost 4.5 million, 43 percent, of American preschoolers receive some form of childcare and one out of three children go to daycare in organized childcare facilities. These numbers are expected to rise as more mothers with young children become a part of the work force.

Because of the low caregiver to child ratio required by programs that serve infants and toddlers, there are fewer daycare openings for these age groups than among programs that serve older children. The report *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children* by the Carnegie Corporation states: “Many parents of infants and toddlers have few childcare choices....When they do go back to work, too many parents are forced to “make do”--to accept care that is safe and affordable but that falls short of the quality that they would like for their young child. Many find themselves searching again and again for new arrangements as their initial “choices” prove unreliable and unsatisfactory.”

The great need for high quality childcare for infants and toddlers offers the church a wonderful opportunity to reach out to families with Christian daycare facilities. When children and parents interact on an almost daily basis with spiritually grounded childcare providers, God’s Spirit is given many openings for working in the hearts and lives of His children. The little ones are able to hear about God’s love on a regular basis and their parents can be connected to the church through the formation of relationships. For churches with the facilities and resources for providing childcare, this can be an excellent option for reaching out and strengthening families in the Christian faith.

Churches with limited space or resources may want to consider other childcare options such as a mother’s day out program, or free childcare on the Saturday before Christmas. One church in Minnesota offers free childcare to parents in the community one Friday evening a month. What a beautiful way to tell the parents in the community that your church cares about them and their families and to reflect Christ’s love!

In the Bible we see Jesus reaching out to others and drawing them to himself by ministering to their needs. He held and blessed the little children, fed the hungry, opened up God’s wisdom to Mary, and healed both the spiritual and physical hurts of those around him. Today God calls and equips us to do the same. One way we can do this is through intentional ministries to families with infants and toddlers. May the Lord bless your ministry in this important area!

For Further Reading

Beginnings: Nursery Role Packet (Concordia Publishing House, 1996). Newsletters, an audiocassette, birthday cards, books, and other resources make up this comprehensive cradle roll program for parents of children ages birth to three. As the different items are sent to a family through their child’s first three years of life, they are repeatedly reconnected to the church and gently guided on their faith journey.

Faith-Building with Preschoolers and **More Faith-Building with Preschoolers** by Linda Prenzlów and Ilene Allinger Candreva (Concordia Publishing House, 1998 and 1999). These two

resource books for teachers of 1-4 year olds each have six thematic units based around Bible stories. The creative activities incorporating various areas of development and the Parent's Letters and Family Activities make this a valuable resource for toddler classes, nurseries, and childcare settings.

Little Blessings Nursery Smart Pages (Gospel Light, 1997). An excellent resource for churches that are beginning or even in the middle of their journey into the nursery ministry. It provides information on recruiting and training volunteers, classroom activities, policies and procedures, and reproducible parent pages all aimed at providing a high quality, spiritually nurturing nursery.

The Safe and Caring Church Nursery by Jennifer Root Wilger (Group, 1998) This comprehensive guide to developing a church nursery includes information on creating a space, health and safety, recruiting and training workers, and baby care and nurturing. Also included is information on using nursery ministries for inreach and outreach. It includes baby dedication ideas that can be adapted for use with baptisms.

Toddlin' to Jesus by Susie Schmieding (Department of Child Ministry, LCMS, 1998). This small book provides a wealth of information, ideas, and resources to help congregations develop family-centered classes for nurturing the growing faith of infants and toddlers and encouraging parents in their role as faith mentors to their little ones.

Yours to Love: Words of Wisdom From Your New Baby by Maria Shropshire (CSS Publishing Company, Inc., 1996). These letters from infants and toddlers are a gentle and inspiring way to help parents understand their roles in nurturing their children in all areas of development, including spiritual development. Accompanying each letter is a Bible verse.

Review of:

“THE YOUTH WORKER’S HANDBOOK TO FAMILY MINISTRY,”

Chap Clark

Youth Specialties, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. 1997

This newer release (1997) contains 127 pages of practical ideas for partnering with parents in youth ministry. In the rear of the book, the reader will find some reproducible handouts for both parents and teenagers. The author offers three general working definitions of family ministry which are insightful as well as sharing some good discussion starters useful for any committees charged with the oversight of family ministry in the parish.

The book can easily be read in one sitting. It is non-theological in nature. For the veteran family minister, it doesn't contain much new or creative material. More a handbook in nature, it is not meant to be read cover to cover. Pricy at \$ 15.99, it may be a good buy at half the price.

The majority of the ideas are networked from church brochures, newsletters, and suggestions made to the author. Actual strategies to employ in approaching family ministry are missing. The clip art throughout the book leaves a bit to be desired, resembling youth newsletter art.

On a positive note, there are some great margin quotes by a variety of family ministry authors which are worth pondering. The book is definitely successful in raising the awareness of the importance of a holistic approach to youth ministry, as well as keeping the home a partner throughout the process. Lots of idea lists are provided, and many of the ideas can serve as starting points for those youth ministers who are interested in broadening their approach to include teenagers' parents. Although the title says it is the “youth worker's handbook,” this book is for anyone who wants to make a move toward a meaningful family ministry regardless of theological, philosophical, or historical perspectives.

The work is fairly simplistic for seasoned clergy or DCEs, but a good basic book for the uninitiated lay person involved in youth ministry with a family focus.

On a Scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best: 6.

Author: Dr. Chap Clark, associate professor of youth and family ministries at Fuller Theological Seminary. Coordinator of youth and family ministry for Glendale Presbyterian Church in California.

The Biblical Basis For Family Ministry
POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/Content/ppt_articles/717.ppt

Family Ministry Powerpoint Presentation
Powerpoint presentation

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/Content/ppt_articles/718.ppt

Family Ministry Team of the Nebraska Synod

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/content/pdf_articles/631.pdf

Family Ministry Through Schools
POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/Content/ppt_articles/239.ppt

Family Ministry Events

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/content/pdf_articles/664.pdf

The Five Levels of Family Ministry

http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/content/pdf_articles/711.pdf

Frequently Asked Questions

Family Ministry

<http://familyissues.lcms.org/lcms-fm/index.html>

What Is Family Ministry?

By Diana R. Garland

The Louisville Institute

<http://www.louisville-institute.org/rptgarland.html>

The Youth Worker's Handbook to Family Ministry

Chap Clark

<http://www.gospelcom.net/ys/mall/browse/training/famsmpl.html>

Family Ministry: What Are the Issues...and Is Anybody Really Doing It?

Chap Clark

Family Youthworker, July/August 1999

http://www.youthspecialties.com/ywj/articles/family/family_ministry.html

Family Needs Survey

Directional Plans for your church and its families

Family Life Web Site

<http://www.familylife.com/about/familyneeds.asp>

Q. I'm looking for Family Ministry Resources. What's available?

ELCA Web Site

<http://www.elca.org/etteam/assessment/telling224.htm>

A Better Way to Define Family

by *Kenneth Kremer*

Editor

Lutheran Parent Magazine

<http://www.wels.net/sab/cad/fam-define.html>