

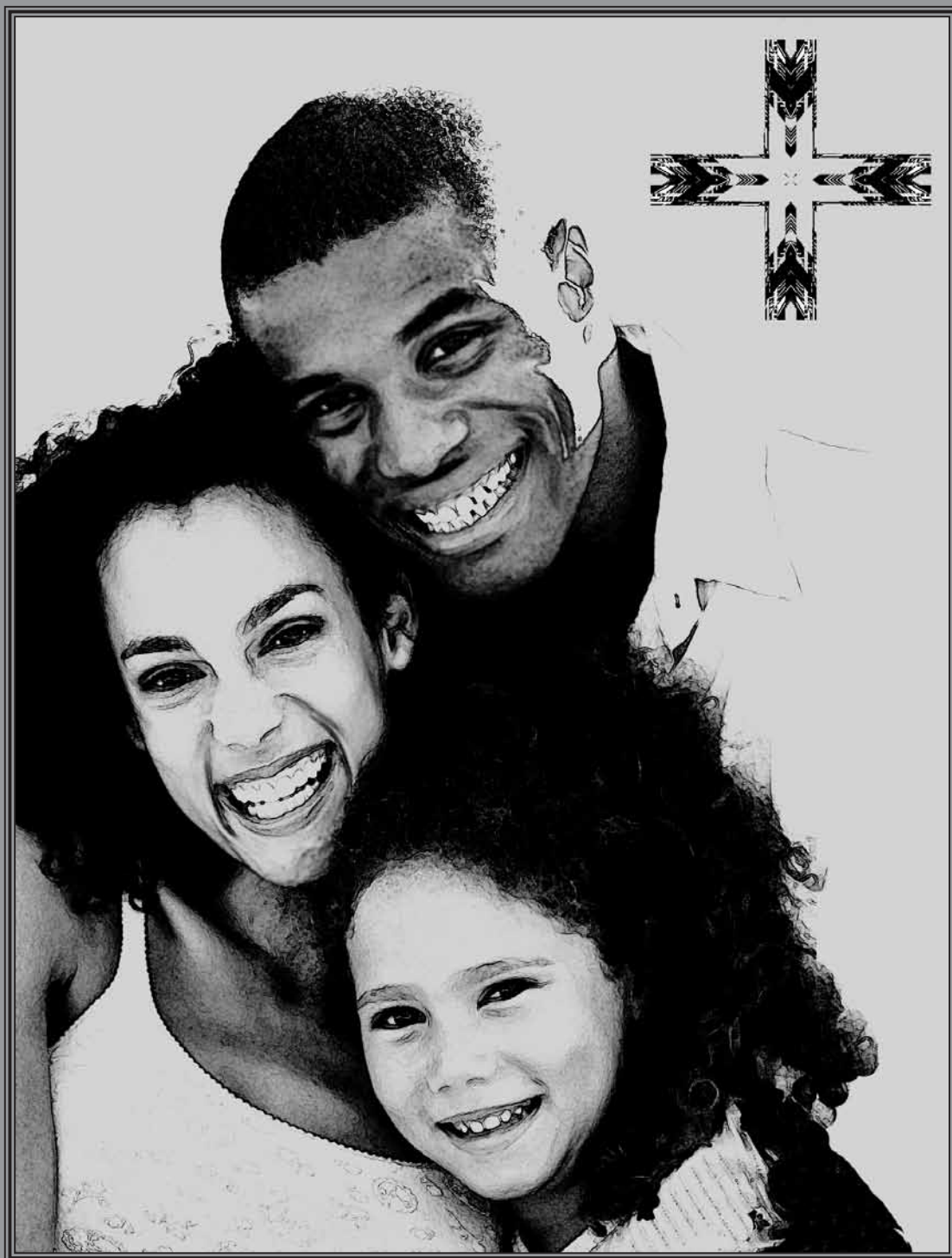
# ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall 2012

Vol. 46, No. 1

## Intentional Family Ministry: A Golden Opportunity



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# ISSUES

## IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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### Intentional Family Ministry: A Golden Opportunity

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## Thanks and Welcome

A special word of thanks is extended to Dr. Paul Holtorf who has served as the Book Review Editor and a member of the Issues Editorial Committee. We welcome Professor Terence Groth as a member of the Editorial Committee and the Book Review Editor.



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“Great nations and proud empires have always collapsed from within before they were conquered from without” (Thomas, *Lincoln Journal Star*, 11/11/12). While statistics don’t tell the entire story, consider these rather alarming family statistics cited by Ludwig (p. 6):

The divorce rate in the United States today is nearly twice that of 1960;

Most younger Americans now spend some time living together outside of marriage;

In 1960 only 9 percent of all children lived in single-parent families; in 2010 the percentage had risen to 25 percent;

More than four in ten births in 2009 were out-of-wedlock.

This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* focuses on the family and ways in which the church should and must use the theology and practice of family ministry to seek and to save what is being lost! There is no question that “home life has changed” and “commitment to an intact family unit has become less important than the ‘ME’ of personal fulfillment and happiness” (Ludwig, p. 6).

Perhaps what Thomas asserts about our society in general is true of the 21<sup>st</sup> century family in the United States in particular: long before the family is conquered from without, it is collapsing from within. However, before we blame only contemporary society for the challenges facing the family and the church’s ministry to the family, we must remember that the decay and breakdown of the family is nothing new! Think of the first chapters of Genesis! Marital strife: Adam blames Eve. Sibling rivalry: Cain kills Abel. Sin always has and will always have disastrous consequences on the family and upon those who make up the family. Kohnke asserts correctly that God established the family first as the “basic unit of society through the ages.” The family is “the place to pass on the faith,” with one being “born into a family to be nurtured, protected and developed into the person one is” (p. 23).

How can a family, beset by sin and its ruthless consequences, do this? Sonnenberg suggests that “intentional family ministry is a congregation’s response to the ‘so what’ question being asked by many” as they wonder if the church is relevant or able to respond to their daily needs (p. 25). He further stresses that intentional family ministry “helps people see their commonality” and “that they are not alone,” “offers wisdom,” and “connects the grace of God and the lives of family members” (pp. 26–27).

God’s grace in Jesus Christ is the ultimate answer to the decay-causing power of sin. However, simply speaking words of comfort when families are falling apart does not go far enough in the local congregation. Thus, Martinson reminds us that the “proclamation of the Gospel to and through families is an important ministry of the church.” For him, faith formation is a responsibility shared by congregation and family. Wisely he reminds us: “Parents cannot not influence the unfolding life and values of their children” (p. 19).

It is my hope and prayer that you find this edition of *Issues* to be a rich resource for the important task of ministering to the families in whose midst God has placed you. At the end of the day, the task is not merely to preserve the family, but through the ministry to and with families, help parents to see that “the finest legacy you can leave your children is a vital, resilient, life-giving faith” (Martinson, p. 19) in Jesus Christ, the Savior of all the families of the world!

**BRIAN L. FRIEDRICH**  
PRESIDENT

# editorials

## Is Family Ministry Different from Ministry?

FAMILIES ARE CENTRAL to meeting the needs of individuals and society, and the church should be at the forefront in helping and supporting families. However, the term family ministry raises the question whether family ministry is or should be substantially different from other ministry. If the goal of ministry is about programs or curriculum, then I think we have missed the point. If it is about doing ministry the same way it has been done for decades, then yes, we are missing large numbers of people. Diana Butler Bass in *Christianity after Religion* and Reggie McNeal in *Missional Renaissance* and *The Present Future* address changes in the church that challenge churches and congregational leaders. These authors study the reasons for the decline in those who affiliate themselves with any church. However, while the numbers of those who describe themselves as Christian are declining, the desire for faith is strong. Diana Butler Bass and Reggie McNeal see the desire for faith as an opportunity for individuals and churches.

The hunger for life-transforming faith has not decreased, but the church has not been viewed as offering transforming love. David Kinnaman's *UnChristian* conveys how this new generation thinks about Christianity. It shows that those outside the church view Christians most by what they are against and are viewed as judgmental and unchristian. However, while the number of people who affiliate with a denomination is decreasing, the number of people who view themselves as spiritual is increasing. (Butler Bass) Spirituality is often dismissed as the easy way out or individualism, but perhaps it is telling that the disillusionment is not with God and faith, but with how Christianity has been represented and perceived. Many disenchanted have been part of the church and tried to be good church members. They are discouraged with the inconsistency between what the church teaches and its actions. Logging time in the church is no guarantee of spiritual growth. (Butler Bass, 25)

So what is the goal of ministry whether family ministry or ministry in general? We want to be focused on connecting people to God and empowering people for service in the world. "Jesus tapped into this widespread sentiment of disillusionment with religion but hunger for God with his teaching about the kingdom of God and how people could be part of it." (McNeal, *The Present Future*, 17) The goal of ministry for us is the same as it

was for Jesus: personal life-transforming experience. This applies to all ages, and it is not about self but about service and sacrifice. This means the goal is not to merely pull people into church, but to help people be the church to others in all areas of their life. This could mean offering a parenting class for young parents, since it is about equipping them for their lives outside of the church walls rather than trying to attract new members by offering a class.

My church went through some rather painful experiences, and we had to heal and learn to trust one another again. We focused on hearing people's stories. Our pastor met with every family and listened to their stories. Then we had designated times during the Sunday school hour for talking with one another with clear expectations. These conversations were well attended and included our confirmation age students. We had to rebuild from the ground up and decide what was important and how it could be accomplished. For the first time we had no lack of volunteers and no problem with participation. People hungered to be heard and understood and stepped forward. We are now two years down the road. Our confirmation class asked the pastor to lengthen their class from 60 minutes to 90 minutes a week so that there was more time to talk about important topics. They needed to be heard as much as adults. Conversations also identified passions of our members and how to help people accomplish them and how the church might partner and support them. Churches should be about helping people identify how God is active in their lives so they can be challenged to live their faith more fully where they are rather than filling their lives with more church activities.

The program-driven church tends to separate generations whether in worship, educational classes or activities. People are more likely to grow and be mentored in intergenerational environments. People want to grow and the need is great, so ministry is about the business of people and relationships no matter the age. While there will still be age-related classes and activities, the goals are the same—people development. People development requires intentional and authentic conversations. We all hunger for this but need guidance in how to connect our stories to God's story. So ministry should be about equipping and supporting families in the broad sense, since we are all a part of God's family.

**Dr. Kathy Miller**

Professor of Sociology  
Concordia University, Nebraska  
Kathy.Miller@cune.edu

## The Redemption of Family

FAMILY IS NOT A FRIENDLY TERM for many these days. Personal histories of abuse and neglect leave some with a bad taste for family. "If that's family, then I don't want any part of it." Family leaves others feeling like outsiders because for them family seems an exclusive club that they are not invited to join. "I've never felt like I belong." We may be tempted as the Church to shy away from using family in our faith language so as to avoid adding hurt upon hurt. In so doing, we risk diluting, or worse, losing sight of the rich invitation to connection and belonging intended by the language of family in deference to the brokenness in our world. In fact, family is biblical. Our beginnings of faith included hearing God define His relationship with those He has created and redeemed in family terms: we are His precious children, and He is our Heavenly Father; we have been adopted by Him as His sons and daughters; as the Church, we are the bride of our bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Because "God would have all [mankind] to be saved" and sent His Son to seal the deal, every person is welcome as family. Our family connection with God necessarily extends to our relationships with each other.

One doesn't have to look long to recognize that we who are the church can fail miserably at being family. This is not missed by those who criticize the church for not living the ideal we are understood to uphold. The observation is a fair one and not generally denied by those of us on the receiving end. The church is, after all, a household of people drawn to the restorative invitation of grace because we understand that we are broken by sin. We really can't pretend to do anything perfectly. Any projected ideal of perfect family will always fall short in practice. Perhaps the point of criticism is based on the wrong context. When culture criticizes the church for not living up to the ideals we preach, they are using the ideal standard as a measure while the church sees it as a vision. We are not perfectly what we are moving toward. In the same way that, for the believer, heaven is "now and not yet," so is family. We are both family now, in our sometimes fabulous and sometimes feeble practice, and not yet what we are growing toward in the future. So while culture dismisses as hypocritical what the church does well to acknowledge as



brokenness, that is, in this case, a flawed practice of family, we dare not sacrifice the identity of family in an attempt to eliminate a focal point of their criticism.

Jesus lived family unconventionally. He hung out with broken people who followed Him everywhere He went. As Gabe Lyons writes in *The Next Christians*, “He saw people differently. He reminded them that He had come ‘to find and restore the lost’.” On one occasion, Jesus is teaching a houseful of people when His biological family shows up, wanting to talk with Him. When Jesus hears this, He responds, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” He then looks at those around Him and declares, “Here are My mother and My brothers! Whoever does God’s will is My brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:31–35). In saying this, Jesus wasn’t denying or demeaning His earthly family. He was enlarging a definition of family characterized by the unconditional love of God in Christ. This is the “family” that is to define the church and who we are called and empowered by the Spirit to be. Gabe Lyons calls a new generation of the church “restorers”—believers passionate about carrying God’s redemptive message of restoration into their day-to-day encounters with people. In ordinary ways made extraordinary by their intentional and disarming love, these followers of Jesus emulate what it means to not only be the family of God, but extend it beyond church-building walls.

Will the church lift up family as a vision to grow into? In the end, we can heave a sigh of resignation and allow culture and our brokenness to steal another descriptor of who God invites us to be with one another in our homes and churches and neighborhoods. Or we can, with love, choose to redeem and restore “family” as that which we not only reference, but live in a manner so winsomely that the wounded and isolated are eager to come in, the critics are silenced, and our Champion-of-family God is glorified through His children in His world.

<sup>1</sup> Lyons, Gabe, *The Next Christians: How a New Generation is Restoring Faith*. New York: Doubleday/Random House Inc., 2010, 78.

**Bob Fossum, M.S.-Family Life and Robin Fossum, M.S.-Family Life**

Family Life Ministers  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
Aloha, Oregon  
bob.fossum@frontier.com

## The Big Hairy Monster Under the Pew

I HEAR A GREAT DEAL about different ministries. Pastor, we really need this ministry at our church. We need children, youth, young adult, singles, marriage, and seniors ministries, and the many requests have given rise to many blessed ministries in congregations all over the globe. Attached to each of these is a family! Family ministry seems to be the big hairy monster that lies under the pew and until recently has been overlooked along with a few dust bunnies.

While many know it is there, few know how to approach this monster and tame her for the growth of the church and blessing for the family of God. Family ministry is something that church leadership must embark on. It is a *biblically* based approach to ministry which meets the *broad needs* of the various families in God’s house by equipping them to pass on the *legacy of faith* in an *intentional* effort to faithfully proclaim the full council of God.

So, just what is family ministry? First and foremost, family ministry is a *biblically based* approach for doing ministry. God established family as the unit to which, and through which, all ministry is done – the smallest “community” where God provides His loving care. Through the marriage union of Adam and Eve, family is established (Genesis 2).

In this family community, faith is to be taught, nurtured, and refined (Deuteronomy 6:1–12; Ephesians 6:1–4). While each individual builds and forms the family as each stone builds the house, so each family builds and forms the church—members of the family of God by Baptism and His Word (Romans 8:13–17; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 3:26). Each of these families is as unique as some of the families found in the Bible! Just a brief stroll through Genesis reveals the effects of sin on the family—and this includes the many different family forms we see in the pews today and beyond the church doors.

Secondly, family ministry is a *broad brush* that meets the needs of everyone in the family of God. This all-encompassing view cares for all those “ministries” which the church is carrying out, but in a more complete way. Families are cared for not as individuals, but as the community that God has designed them to be, people interdependent on one another, upon God, and on the community that God has called them into.

Family ministry is broad enough to address all the needs of the body (1 Corinthians

10:17; 12:27; Ephesians 4:12) across the span of one’s life. It is broad enough to address family needs with the very family of God (or fellowship of believers) to which they belong in a way that goes beyond an earthly, broken family of origin (Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments*, 140). While family ministry is broad enough to meet these varied needs, it is personal enough to know the needs of the individuals, families, and community!

Next, family ministry is *aimed at passing on the legacy of faith*. God established families so that each individual would be cared for physically, emotionally, and spiritually. God commands parents to pass on this faith in God’s Word to the following generations (Deuteronomy 6:1–12). The church must equip, encourage, and enable parents to carry out this ministry in partnership with the church.

There is evidence of sin in the world, and there is evidence of sin in my own family. Family ministry is not directing all families to do as I do, look as I look, or fit my set mold for family. Rather, family ministry is passing on the gift of faith and applying the balm of the Gospel of peace in any and every family situation. This peace can put families back together through forgiveness, mercy, and reconciliation (Romans 5:1–11; 2 Corinthians 5:11–21; Ephesians 2), making them whole quite possibly for the first time!

Finally, family ministry is an *intentional* way of carrying out all ministry done by the church. Family ministry must seek to obey God in assisting families to be transformed by God’s Word as they fight against the pattern of this world (Romans 12:1–8). The church must purposefully support the work of families in the home as we build up the family of God (John 1:12–13).

To build up this family, each and every child must be met in his or her situation and cared for by God’s people through faithful Word and Sacrament ministry within the context of the family of God. Family ministry is the method in which the church, through Word and Sacrament, ministers to the needs of all families—at all stages and in all forms—in relationship to their homes, communities, churches, and world so that faith is formed, lived, and shining as light in the world. Family ministry is a golden opportunity to minister to the families of the world, offering them a new start in God’s family, the church!

**Steve Henderson, M.S.-Family Life**

Pastor of Youth and Family Life, Risen Christ Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa  
pastorhenderson@risenchristdavenport.org

DAVID J. LUDWIG

## Family: The New Mission Field

### Dramatic Changes to Family Life

HOME LIFE has changed. It has always been less than perfect with bad moods swirling and resentment building amidst the constant backdrop of “not fair.” But now the rules seemed to have changed. Concern for individual rights has overtaken concern for the good of the family and community. In the noble attempt to free the individual from societal constrictions and to stop prejudicial, intolerant behavior, the culture has created a powerful, negative impact on the stability of the family unit.

The statistics are somewhat alarming and cannot be ignored. The Institute for American Values in its 2011 study, *The State of Our Unions*, reports the following data. Americans have become less likely to marry. From 1970 to 2010, the annual number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried adult women has declined more than 50 percent. The divorce rate in the United States today is nearly twice that of 1960. Most younger Americans now spend some time living together outside of marriage, with unmarried cohabitation commonly preceding marriage. Among women in the 25 to 44 age range, 75 percent of high school dropouts have cohabited compared to 50 percent of college graduates. More than 60 percent of high school seniors agree with the statement that it is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before marriage in order to find out whether they really get

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REV. DR. DAVID J. LUDWIG, ASSOCIATE PASTOR, CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH, HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA; PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF PSYCHOLOGY, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY, HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA; LICENSED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST; PROGRAM DIRECTOR, GRACE PLACE WELLNESS MINISTRY; FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE POWER OF WE CENTER. DAVID.LUDWIG@LR.EDU

along. The percentage of children who grow up in fragile, typically fatherless, families has grown enormously over the past five decades. While in 1960 only nine percent of all children lived in single-parent families, by 2010 the percentage had risen to 25 percent. Since 1960, the percentage of babies born to unwed mothers has increased more than sevenfold. More than four in ten births in 2009 were out-of-wedlock.

### Shift from “WE” to “ME” in Cultural Logic

WHAT HAS REALLY HAPPENED is the breakdown of the “WE” of the family unit. Commitment to an intact family unit has become less important than the “ME” of personal fulfillment and happiness. Here are just a few examples:

- A. Family organized around the “ME” of the child
  - 1. Parents feel the need to give their child every possible advantage and will take precious family time to drive the child to a staggering number of lessons and events.
  - 2. Every young child gets a ribbon in competition so that the precious self-esteem does not get damaged.
  - 3. If a teacher disciplines the child, the parents tend to defend their child.
- B. Each member of the family has his/her own schedule that is more important than family time, and often family members will be watching their own TV, be on Facebook, or playing a video-game in separate areas of the house when the family is together.
- C. If a person is not happy or fulfilled in the marriage, breaking the marriage and finding happiness elsewhere is becoming a cultural norm. In recognition of the vulnerability of the marriage vows, there has been a substantial rise in living together—keeping the option open to dissolve the union with less drama.

Behind the breakdown of the family is a fairly dramatic shift in cultural logic. The power of scientific advance brought a definite shift

in epistemology that devalued wisdom passed on from the previous generation and placed much more value on scientific research for understanding reality. In this process, revelation has almost completely been devalued as a source of truth. This allowed for an alternative explanation of the origin of life, going from being “God-breathed” to “naturally selected.” The purpose of life then changed from “living a life of service to others” to “survival of the fittest.” Since this places the individual “ME” at the center of concern rather than the community “WE,” morality shifts from absolute to relative. To put it bluntly, “sin” has changed from being self-centered to being “intolerant.”

These shifts in cultural logic drive the common sense of family relationships. Models of interaction patterns are endlessly portrayed in the media of the culture. Humorous sitcoms portray winning as more important than doing something that would help the relationships involved:

“What’s going on?” Jason queries, entering a group of guys who are exchanging humorous chatter. “What do you think?” Karl throws back. “You seem to know everything.” Jason pauses for a moment and then comes up with the perfect put-down, “I may

not know everything, but I do know one thing for sure.” “What’s that?” Karl challenges, with a little disgusted snort. “I know that you are one ugly dude,” Jason responds, walking out with the admiration of the rest for his quick come-back.

In this typical TV interchange, Jason won the interaction, to the cheers of his friends. But he damaged a relationship! Cultural logic says winning and coming out on top is more important than relationships!

### **A Look at How Family Units Are Formed Today**

**A. The beginning of the relationship—“Me-Satisfaction.”** Travis and Julie felt the attraction as soon as they saw each other. They met at a party and quickly were drawn to each other, excited about being together. They stayed up much of the night, sharing their lives. They could not get enough of each other. The relationship continued, developing quickly through texting, meeting together when they could, and spending several evenings a week together. Within several weeks, they were sexually involved and then moved in with each other after several months. This seemed quite normal



to them . . . this was the model of the culture to give sexual freedom to consenting adults. They were getting their needs met and agreed to stay together as long as they enjoyed each other. They agreed that there was no commitment unless the relationship developed into a long-term one.

**B. The Start of the Power Struggles—“Me-Strategies.”** Julie noticed that after they started having sex, the long, soul-searching conversations stopped. Travis seemed more interested in her body than her soul . . . and seemed to have lost some interest in getting to know what she was thinking and feeling. She also realized that she was not as “starry-eyed” over Travis, but had lost some of her respect.

Travis noticed that Julie was not as much fun anymore. They did not laugh or kid around like they first did. She no longer felt soft and exciting, and she more often seemed to be critical of his behaviour. He would find

himself withdrawing after she told him once again how he disappointed her.

Travis gave in for awhile and apologized, but gradually became more resentful of her critical reactions and escalated the arguments. She started getting jealous of one of his former girlfriends, and the arguments became more frequent and heated. Julie really wanted the relationship to work, but was puzzled by his lack of interest in her. She did not trust him completely and started checking up on him.

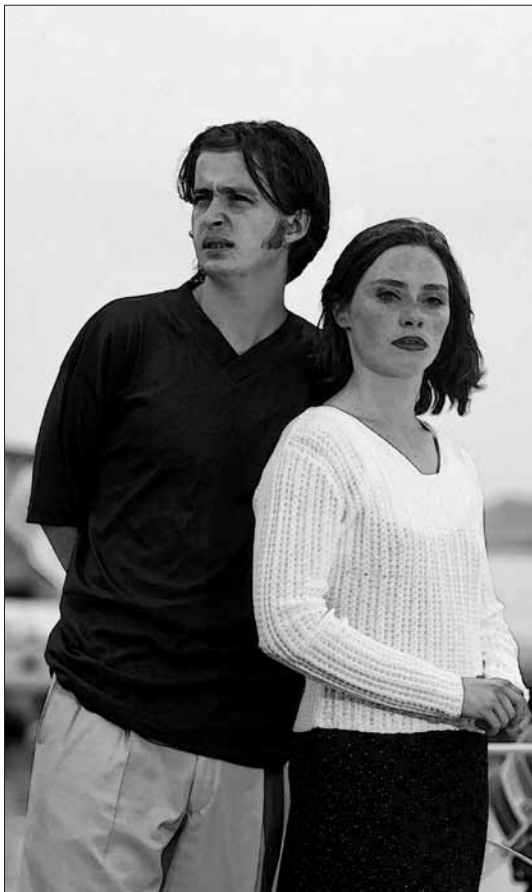
But they found that being intimate would get the mood back. She loved the way he touched her, and he loved the way she responded to him. An evening of love-making would get the mood back for the next few days . . . but at a price. Sex was becoming addictive—they had to jump in bed to fix the mood, and Julie was sacrificing her body for the relationship.

### **C. The Dissolution of the Relationship—“ME-Justification.”**

About ten months into the relationship, Julie started feeling very anxious about the relationship. She was still being intimate and felt that she loved him, but she was becoming so resentful of his lack of interest in her or commitment to the relationship. Without wanting to, she pushed for more commitment so that she would not feel so used.

Travis became more puzzled. He felt that he loved Julie, but she seemed more demanding of his time. She wanted to know where he was at all times. He was feeling smothered and started wanting more space. Finally he suggested that they take a break from the relationship so he could have time to think about it.

Julie reacted to his suggestion with horror. She was convinced that he wanted to see his former girlfriend, and that he was just appeasing her. She blew up at him and demanded that he show her his phone so she could see his text messages. With that, Travis could no longer take her control and packed up to leave. They parted, hurt, angry, and bitter.





## A Look at Parenting as a “WE” as Compared to “ME”

THE YEARLONG “MARRIAGE” of Travis and Julie is the norm of today’s culture. Many individuals go through multiple “marriages” of this uncommitted nature before finally settling into a more permanent one when it is time to have a baby. What is learned through this repeated behaviour is how to be a “ME.” It is like a training ground for survival, learning how to look out after self and not put your trust in another person for the long term.

After the marriage, so many couples remain two “ME’s” and never build a healthy “WE.” Without knowing it, the couple deals with situations to the best of their individual abilities, often struggling when their realities clash. They just do not know how to form a “WE” and deal with the situation together.

The following is an example of how a couple could change the family interaction patterns by forming a “WE.”

Tiffany was upset. Her brother had teased her and she came running to her parents. “Brian laughed at me again,” she began with tears in her eyes. What happened next was disaster. Dad scooped Tiffany up in his arms and yelled at his son, “Brian, get in here!” Mom looked away in disgust, knowing he would blame Brian again. “She’s got him wrapped around her little finger,” she thought in anger. As the four gathered in the den, Mom and Dad did not look at each other. Dad directed his words at his son, “I told you never to tease your sister again,” he threatened with anger barely under control. Brian remained silent during the tongue-lashing, infuriated by the smug smile of his sister who was safe in father’s arms. The scene ended as Brian stomped out of the room and Mom gave Dad an angry look. They were obviously not a team when it came to raising their children!

Such interaction only breeds more anger and upset. Mom may even go behind Dad’s back to comfort Brian, since she feels he was unjustly criticized. Dad would feel his authority undermined. There would be war in the household when Brian became a teenager! This home is not a safe place!

Take another look at the family scene. What would happen in the same situation if there were a united front? What would happen if the parents formed a “WE”?

Tiffany was upset. Her brother had teased her and she came running to her parents. “Brian laughed at me again,” she began with tears in her eyes. What happened next almost seemed like a well-rehearsed sequence of events. Mom and Dad looked at each other with a knowing smile. Dad scooped Tiffany up in his arms and gave her a big hug. Mom called out to Brian, “Would you come here please? WE would like to talk to you.” As the four gathered in the den, Mom and Dad looked at each other again and smiled. Dad began, “WE want the two of you to get along.” Mom picked up the same idea and added, “So let’s talk this over so WE can learn from what just happened.” In the next few minutes, the truth came out and both admitted doing things to the other to escalate the situation. With peace restored, Brian and Tiffany went back to what they were doing. Mom and Dad smiled as their eyes met, obviously a team when it came to raising their children!

## Bringing in Faith Can Help Form the “WE”

VIRTUALLY ALL FAMILY DISTRESS comes from each member of the family feeling compelled to act as a “ME.” The sad fact, given all the cultural modelling, is that families do not know better. It seems normal to act for self and not trust the family unit. The wisdom of the Christian faith is that relationships do not work when everyone is thinking of self (sin) since this causes power

struggles, hurt feelings, and resentment. Relationships work when everyone is more concerned for the good of the whole (WE).

The following is an example from my own counselling of how a counsellor or family minister could teach a family the value of becoming a "WE."

Alan's mother called, "I'm having problems getting my teenage son to obey. His behavior has been getting worse and worse. I think he needs help." I was waiting in my office. Alan sauntered in first, taking the choice seat and spreading his legs out to claim his territory. It was clear that he had quite an attitude and was used to controlling things. Then mother marched in, almost tripping over Alan's feet, selected a chair next to him and glared at Alan for not moving his feet. Alan put a little smirk on his face and looked away. Finally father came in, carefully walking past Alan's sprawled feet, choosing a chair that was furthest away . . . then he began staring at books in my office.

Mother looked at me, expecting me to begin. When I shrugged, she immediately took charge. Looking at Alan with obvious anger, she commanded, "Now you tell Dr. Ludwig what you did last night!" Alan gave his mother a look of disdain and with a defiant shrug, replied, "I don't have to do anything."

With that, mother quickly looked at father, angry that he was letting Alan get by with such disrespect. Father felt the look coming and let out a big sigh, turning his head away to look more closely at the book titles. Mother then looked at me, angry that I was not doing anything!

Fifteen seconds had gone by. It was obvious that the WE had broken down between mother and father. Alan was having a field day with the situation, knowing that he did not have to obey mom if dad did not support her! I sent the son out and tried to help the parents:

I looked at the mother and said, "You are very angry right now. Most of your anger is at your husband's lack of support. You are trying very hard to control your son, but he does not support you!" Her eyes widened as

she listened, then nodded in agreement as she glared at her husband with an "I told you so" look.

Then I addressed the father, "And you are very angry with your wife at this point. It's either her way or no way. She reacts, then expects you to back her up when you do not agree with her aggressive tactics." He looked at me with surprise, then shot a glance at his wife that meant, "You listen to him."

Then I softened and addressed both of them: "The problem that you are having is the breakdown of the united front. Your son is quite brilliant. He probably learned early in life how to split the two of you apart and now is able to do it at will. And it is getting dangerous, because he is stuck in the cracks and is way too immature for his age."

I explained that Christ came so that we could love one another in a way that we cannot do ourselves. I told them that each had worked very hard to try to make the family work, but that the wisdom from above is that they work together!

I then gave them "WE" homework. Addressing the mother, I advised, "Don't you ever react to your son out of your own emotions. That is too dangerous. I saw the way he can make you angry. He knows you all too well. So when you notice something, first turn to your husband and ask to talk it through. Ally first, then correct your son as a WE!"

Addressing the father, I suggested, "Don't you ever put your wife off with something like, 'what's the big deal?' or by turning away from her like I saw a few minutes ago. No, when she shares something she has noticed and is concerned about, treat her insight as a gift and immediately ally with her to form the WE. Add your own input, but make sure you are a united front when addressing Alan."

I practiced with them, role-playing their son, leading them in prayer to help the mood between them until I was confident they knew what they were to do. Then I sent them home, asking them to think WE and say WE anytime their son was involved.

They listened closely and were able to follow through because they did have a good

relationship outside of this breakdown of the WE. They also valued their faith, but did not know how to use their faith in this situation.

They came back the next week and exclaimed that a miracle had happened. Much of the son's disrespect was gone, and he even called the previous night to ask if he could stay out an extra 15 minutes since he was having trouble getting a ride home. Mother answered the phone and did it right. She said, "Just a minute, I will talk it over with your father and WE will get back to you."

I saw Alan for a few minutes that day also. He came in and tried to show his previous attitude when he complained, "Boy, you have ruined my life!" But the way he said it, it seemed more like he was thanking me, for now he could be a kid and grow up with the security that the WE gives! He felt the security of a healthy Christian family!

### **"WE" Strategies Can Work even for the Blended Family**

THE FAMILY is the new mission field! Broken relationships, resentment, escalation of anger, deep hurt—these all are the state of so many homes. Families need help, but the church is too often seen as having no power except to make people feel guilty. To enter this mission field, the church needs to show it has real solutions that will bring health and healing to the family.

The power is always in Christ's presence that helps form the "WE." His deepest prayer to his Father was, "That they may be one as we are one." (John 17:17) Bringing one's faith to a concrete family situation can lead to the breaking of the "ME" patterns. The following is an example of a blended family and the difference it would make to use Christ's help to shift from "ME" to "WE" strategies:

It was 1:30 A.M. Duane was up pacing the floor. His 18-year-old son was supposed to be in at 12:00. "Why don't you come to bed?" his wife called out. "He'll be here soon. Something probably happened to make him late." She got an immediate reaction.

"Why do you always take up for him?" Duane challenged. "He knows you will be understanding ... boy does he manipulate you." "So you think blowing up at him is the right way to handle this?" his wife shot back. "Some loving father you turned out to be!" Duane felt his anger escalate, but before he could say another word, the door opened and there stood a defiant son. "Where have you been?" Duane demanded, dangerously close to the edge, "You are almost two hours late." "Aw, cool down, Pops," came the slurred answer. "Another two months and I'm out of here!" Smelling the liquor and hearing the disrespect, Duane grabbed his son and slammed him up against the wall. "There, that will teach him a lesson," Duane rationalized to himself, "It's about time he knew who was the boss around here."

That was physical abuse—not done out of loving concern for the son, but out of the need of the father to assert his shaky authority. You might even say that "Satan entered" Duane's household that night, invited by all parties involved!

1. The son chose alcohol to give him that "I don't care" attitude that could defy his father. He could have invited God in and have a heart-to-heart talk with his father about how he felt like a ten-year old when his father lectured him.

2. The wife chose a "zinger" to express her frustration, implying that Duane was not a good father, rather than sitting down with a prayer together and sharing her concerns from her heart.

3. Duane chose physical violence to show that he was the head of the household instead of commanding respect by bringing the situation to God in prayer and being open to listen and talk things through in a heart-to-heart fashion.

And they all lied to each other! The son said he only had a "few beers" when he knew that it was more like eight or ten. Duane said that he was doing this out of

concern for his son, but he knew deep down that he was just feeling powerless. His wife said she was only protecting her son, but she knew also deep down that she was just getting even with her over-bearing husband and silently cheered when her son defied him!

Imagine the difference if Duane had confessed, "Look, I have a problem with my anger" or if his wife had confessed, "I do take my son's side against you and that is wrong," or if the son had confessed, "I got drunk tonight and I'm sorry—I made an immature decision." Each of the three, speaking the truth in a spirit of love, could have resisted the devil and invited Christ into their hearts and home. It's as simple, but as profoundly unnatural as that!

It was after midnight. The police had called a few minutes earlier, waking the parents out of a deep sleep. Their son, it seems, had been detained, along

with his teenage friends for damaging mailboxes. As he walked in the door to find Mom and Dad waiting for him in the living room, his first words were, "I'm sorry ... I made some bad choices tonight." Obviously penitent, he went through every detail, not trying to cover or put the blame elsewhere. As he finished, Dad was the first to comment, "You did make bad choices, and I must tell you that when the police called, your Mom and I went through some very bad moments. I am still upset about your lack of respect for other's property and how easy it was for you to go along with the crowd." Then as he looked at his wife, tears came to both of their eyes. "We forgive you," were the most beautiful and comforting words this teenager could hear. The scene ended in a three-way hug and a prayer of thanksgiving for the love and forgiveness they could share.







ROLAND MARTINSON

## The Greatest Family Legacy: Nurturing a Healthy Person of Faith

IT IS CLEAR that in the world of Biblical faith, the family is the primary unit of meaning which shapes and defines reality. Walter Brueggemann<sup>1</sup>

### God, Faith and Family Life

WHAT MANY PARENTS AND TEACHERS know from everyday experience, scholars are discovering scientifically: “children learn what they live.” Because most children are born or “adopted” into families, these basic units of life become the primary context of

young people’s most formative relationships. The Scriptures reflect this understanding of the formative power of families.

Families are God’s primary relational communities for propagating and nurturing life and faith. Within families there are five clusters of formative relationships: 1) among the generations; 2) between husband and wife; 3) between parent and child; 4) among siblings; and 5) between private and public life. As participants with other human beings in propagating and nurturing humanity, Christians are called to live responsibly and joyfully as they participate in families. In these relationships, the Scriptures and the Christian tradition encourage children, men, and women to foster faith and values.

### Mask of God and Vocation

MARTIN LUTHER viewed family relationships as “masks of God”—arenas where God, although hidden, participates with human beings in the propagation and nurture of human and Christian life. As masks of God, families are “orders” of creation, through which God acts to initiate and sustain humanity. The church can well assist families in this task.

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DR. ROLAND MARTINSON IS PROFESSOR OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY AND PASTORAL CARE, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, LUTHER SEMINARY, ST. PAUL, AND AN AUTHOR AND RESEARCHER. RMARTINS@LUTHERSEM.EDU

Thus, Christian leaders might well ask, “How can we find that which is good, right, and healthy in these relationships? How can we teach healthy values and vital faith in families?” The biblical and Christian traditions, as well as the behavioral sciences, have concepts and skills to offer in ministry with families. Leaders in Christian churches have the responsibility to place before families these concepts and skills as they support parents and children in their primary life journeys.

Family relationships are also affected by the Gospel. Jesus Christ came to defeat and destroy evil. He came to confront evil in its social as well as its personal expressions and influences. Redemption, restoration, and a reorientation of life’s purpose influence relationships as family members interact with one another and with society.

Families change throughout the cycles of their lives. Individuals change, spouses and children leave home, relationships and relational networks reorient as family members age and mature. Sometimes expectations are unfulfilled. Often dreams are shattered. Death and loss persist in a variety of forms and intensify throughout the stages of family life (job loss, poverty, separation, divorce, disabilities, death, violence, substance abuse, failure, depression).

The Gospel’s message of death and resurrection is good news to families in the throes of these transitions. In the pain of the cross, in the hope of the resurrection, their lives and relationships can be healed and sustained. Proclamation of the Gospel to and through families is an important ministry of the church. Faith communities created by the Gospel are called to heal and support persons and their relationships.

Thus, Martin Luther and the Lutheran tradition consider family relationships to be “vocations.” These Christian callings are settings where the Gospel is made known and does its healing and sustaining work. In these relational arenas, grandparents, spouses, parents, and children can carry on the “mutual conversation and consolation

of the saints.” Here, forgiveness can bring reconciliation and restore persons and relationships. Here, faith can be passed on to the next generation.

## Passing on the Faith “Generation to Generation”

GOD HAS USED and uses families, imperfect as they are, as vehicles through which children learn faith and values. Through the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their children met God, discovered their identity and discerned God’s will. The children of Israel prayed and worshipped in their families. Great events among God’s people, e.g., the Passover, were celebrated in home-based worship traditions.

Deuteronomy 6:1–9 provides instructions for passing the faith from one generation to the next primarily in the context of families.

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem

on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

These are the types of activities to which Walter Brueggemann refers when he writes of families in the Old Testament:

Although the Bible has other agenda that are more central than that of the family, it does drop hints along the way about family that are worth considering. It is clear that in the world of Biblical faith, the family is the primary unit of meaning which shapes and defines reality. The individual person belongs to and lives out of the family. It is the family that provides deep secure roots into the past, bold visions for the future, as well as a sense of purpose and a set of priorities for the present.<sup>2</sup>

One major function of intergenerational life is to transmit the stories and the promises which identify the family, so that each new generation has an inheritance that gives both identity and roots, and purpose and vocation. “That you may tell in the hearing of your son, of your son’s son how I made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them: that you may show that I am the Lord” (Exodus 10:2; cf. Joel 1:2–3).<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, the major ritual and tradition through which Old Testament families celebrated God’s “story” and Israel’s identity (as well as the family’s) was the Seder meal. At this meal, held in the home, faith and life as well as past, present, and future converged in the space and conversation of everyday life.

While the traditions and rituals of the larger family contributed to these spiritual and moral responsibilities, these tasks were the primary work of the “elders” of the family. The older ones of the grandparent generation were to tell the stories of God’s mighty acts in calling and rescuing Israel. As the elders told stories of God’s presence and activity in Israel, they cited illustrations from the tradition and from their own “days” with God as they spoke in the hearing of “your son’s son.”

The Lord’s Supper, which Jesus initiated with his disciples whom he included among the “chosen family” of his followers, was a Seder or Passover meal, celebrated in Jewish families since the Exodus. The early Christian communities continued to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in their homes, which were the primary loci of the New Testament church. Even as the bonds of marriage and birth were relativized, family households remained primary settings in which the oral tradition, psalms, and profession of Jesus as the Messiah were spoken, sung, and shared. House churches, which included children, servants, and guests as well as men and women, were the primary loci not only of worship but of mission, catechization, and caregiving as well.

In her book, *Family, the Forming Center*, Marjorie Thompson describes a shift in the definition and role of the family that came with the life and ministry of Jesus. In the New Testament, the family is not only the transmitter of life and faith; it also emerges as a prime carrier of the “transforming presence of Christ” in the lives of believers. Many of the foundational images of the early church are drawn from the family: believers are “brothers and sisters in Christ,” and, “adopted into the family of God.” This development carries implications not only for the nature of family life, but also for the essence of the church.<sup>4</sup>

Families matter in ministry with children, not only because of the generative purposes for which God created them, but because God desires to heal and transform them. Scripture reflects the “creative and “re-creative” roles and needs of families. Family systems theory expands on what Scripture asserts. What family systems term “generational transmission of dysfunction,” Scripture expresses as “children will be punished for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but love will be shown to a thousand generations of those who love and keep my commandments.” From their unique vantage points, pastors and therapists can tend

family “cut-offs,” aware that broken familial relationships will hurt people. Those very “cut-offs” hurt Jacob and Esau and continue to hurt families to the present time.

Pastors, teachers, and DCEs can address spiritual growth that results from healthy struggle with these issues. Family theorists can tend these life issues that emerge at specific stages creating crises that faced constructively result in growth toward maturity. The life cycle of individuals and families can be viewed as occasions for faith and life development, some of the many moments God uses to move his people toward maturity of faith.

### **Parents in the Life and Faith Formation of Children**

IN THE BIBLE, parenting is a partnership in people-making. Mothers and fathers become central figures in the family's and the community's socialization of the new generation. Freedom and responsibility under God are the goals of “training up a child.” The child is to know how to love God, neighbor, and self in all that he or she does. Parents are to help the child claim and celebrate the unique person God has called him or her to be. The child is to be prepared for participation in the community, in which the adult can find fullness of life. The child is to be introduced to Jesus Christ and the practices of the Christian faith through the lives and practices of their parents.



Parents do this most effectively when they are believers who practice a vital and informed faith that reflects significant levels of Christian understanding, worship attendance, prayer and service. Parents can engage youth and family in conversation, prayer, Bible reading and service that nurture life and faith.

Parents need not only know and model the Christian faith; they can draw children and teenagers into faith practices. Parents can pray with their children at table, at family celebrations, during times of crises and over individual and family decisions. Family participation in service activities can be a way of life in Christian households. Together parents and young people can “turn their faces outward in mission” and live life for others.

Parents' expressions of respect and love can create an atmosphere promoting faith. While marital difficulties, divorce and parent-youth conflict are no strangers to the households of Christians, their households can, within the promises of the Gospel and the support of the faith community, find ways of navigating the challenges and stresses of daily life with approaches marked by respect, equal regard, open communication, and cooperation. Parents can practice individual accountability, forgiveness and reconciliation, thereby modeling faith in action and generating an atmosphere where faith can be referenced and discussed.

### **Congregations in Family Faith Formation**

FOR DECADES congregations and youth leaders have focused primarily on the church as the agent of spiritual development rather than understanding faith formation as a responsibility shared by congregation and family. This focus on church programming as the primary way to nurture faith in children has had a negative effect not only on the church but also on the lives of families and most especially on the faith maturity of young people.

Families have come to believe that faith is a separate element of life to be tended by



“professionals” at church, rather than viewing faith as the core of life, a responsibility of every Christian including families.

This need not be the case. Many congregations reflect significantly different commitments and patterns emphasizing strong partnerships with families. Their vision understands family to be a primal context for exercising faith in daily life. They understand the mission of the family to include becoming witnesses to Christ and caring for the world.

These congregations reveal expectations and practices that reflect the power and value of ministry with families. Moreover, these congregation’s children, youth and families are enhanced by both young peoples’ and their parents’ participation in the multi-generational ministries of the entire congregation. These congregations integrate parents and young people across the church as well as develop strong ministries with children, youth and their parents. Here are a few “best practices” drawn from these congregations.

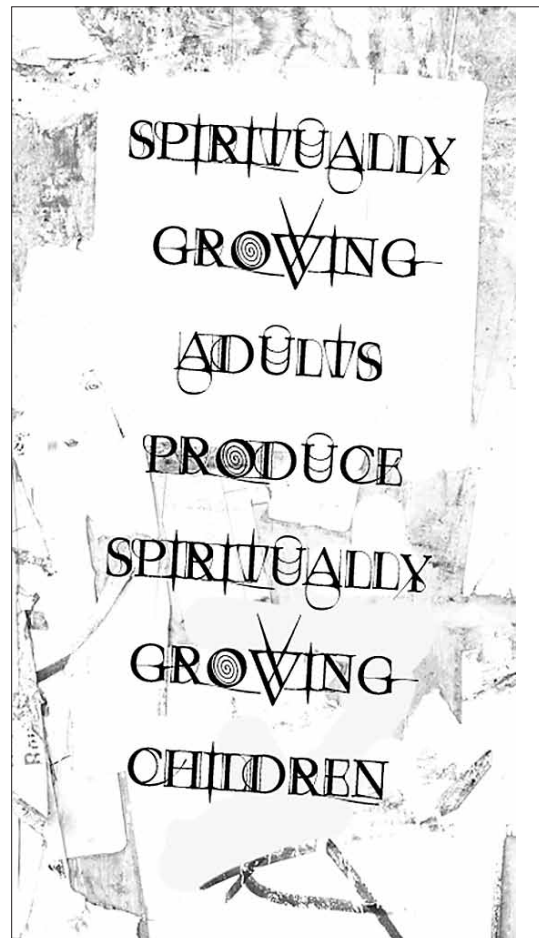
### Strengthen Parental Faith

A MAXIM PAINTED on the wall of the youth ministry wing of a local church reads, “Spiritually growing adults produce spiritually growing children.” While the Holy Spirit ultimately produces faith, the point is clear: Ministries with youth must broaden their vision to include parents of youth as essential participants in passing vital faith on to the next generation. The effectiveness of children’s or youth ministries might well be judged not by how many youth sign up for a particular event, but by the spiritual maturity of the adults who live in the homes with the young people of the congregation. Congregational leaders can broaden their imaginations to developing the faith maturity of the parents of the congregation. This ministry might well include: strong preaching; adult Bible studies; adult faith forums; service-learning mission trips; adult discipleship groups; faith formation retreats, advocacy task forces and prayer ministries.

### Promote Family Faith Practices

CONGREGATIONS can move ministry with young people beyond the walls of the church. This includes encouraging and equipping parents for practicing faith with their children. It means helping parents re-envision the necessary partnership between church and home. It calls for opportunities at church where parents and young people spend time together around Scripture and questions regarding daily life. It is teaching families to set aside time and develop patterns for faith conversations and practices at home.

Children’s and youth ministries can provide opportunities for young people to strengthen parents’ faith by encouraging young people to share with their parents the faith experiences that come from participating in events, such as speaking of their retreat and mission experiences with their parents.



## **Cultivate Family Harmony**

PARENTS NEED RESOURCES that equip them for living married, for parenting and for mentoring their children. Providing enrichment and support for spouses, single parents, extended families, stepfamilies, or over-extended families can be particularly helpful. Congregations can contribute to the health and harmony of households and families as they become caring, constructive communities of quality relationships marked by honesty and forgiveness. Congregational environments in which children, youth and adults feel safe to gather, learn, and bring their friends can have a major impact in the lives of families. Youth leaders and family ministers might well work at developing faith communities that respect and nurture life-giving relationships with young people and their parents during activities at church.

Congregations foster family health by teaching about family relationships. They assist parents in developing more effective family communication and greater capacities to work through conflict, especially with teenagers.

## **Equip Parents**

PARENTS LONG FOR SUPPORT as they raise their children and teenagers. Some churches offer classes and support groups for parents of teenagers. These include parenting classes, parent-youth discussion groups, parent support groups, and seminars for parents of youth entering adolescence. One congregation has appointed a task force to conduct ongoing focus groups with parents to discover their interests and needs. Utilizing this information, they tapped family life experts to provide four family-life seminars in a year for parents of youth. A “family life team” might well be developed to do this in any congregation.

## **Foster Parent-Youth Relationships**

MANY CHURCHES value parents as partners in youth ministry and find ways to include the ideas, dreams, and vision of parents in youth ministry. These youth ministers develop ways

to tap the dreams and hopes that parents have for their teenagers. Congregations might well include parents in planning and involve parents in intergenerational community building, Bible studies, parent-youth communication workshops and mission trips.

Establishing strong “parental-youth relationships” also means providing “extended family of faith parents” for young people who don’t have healthy families or families where faith is practiced. Adult youth workers can play an important role as mentors or even “surrogate faith-parents.”

## **Congregations as Extended Families of Faith**

THROUGH GOD’S WORD and the Sacraments, people are incorporated into the kingdom of God and become recipients of the saving work of Christ. In Baptism each person becomes a member of the Body of Christ, which is often portrayed in the New Testament as an extended family of faith. In the family of faith, there is the opportunity for daily repentance and renewal for singles, grandparents, spouses, parents, and children. Here, they can forgive and be forgiven, care and be cared for, strengthened and supported for their lives in their families. In the family of faith, these persons can be healed and sustained even when their families are destructive or fractured.

Some congregations develop prayer partnerships between older adults and youth by inviting senior adults to pray for individual youth. These “elders” pray for young people especially around major life and faith experiences.

## **Congregations and Families Working Together: Leaving a Living Legacy**

IN THE MID-1980s Search Institute conducted a study of the effectiveness of Christian education among six mainline denominations. Among 28 significant religious influences reported by children, youth, and adults, the most significant were

mother and father. Both of these ranked higher than pastor or church school teacher and the Bible. The seven dynamics most directly related to mature faith in children and youth were:

1. A mother who models the faith;
2. A father who models the faith;
3. A regular dialog with mother on faith/life issues;
4. A regular dialog with father on faith/life issues;
5. A regular dialog with an adult other than a parent on faith/life issues;
6. Experience regular reading of the Bible and devotions in the home;
7. Experience a servanthood event with a parent as an action of faith.<sup>5</sup>

The study indicated that interactive family life and intentional faith instruction in the home combined with excellence in congregational Christian education were of significantly greater impact on the faith maturity of a child, youth, or adult than only participation in church school or congregational worship.

Parents in their ordinary day-to-day interaction with children have the opportunity to profoundly influence the lives of their children and leave their children their greatest legacy. In fact, parents cannot not influence the unfolding life and values of their children. An anonymous popular poem, regularly found on the walls in children's rooms, states:

#### **Children Learn What They Live**

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn

If they live with hostility, they learn to fight

If they live with ridicule, they learn to be shy

If they live with shame, they learn to feel guilty

If they live with tolerance, they learn to be patient

If they live with encouragement, they learn to be confident

If they live with praise, they learn to appreciate

If they live with fairness, they learn a sense of justice

If they live with security, they learn to have faith

If they live with approval, they learn to like themselves

If they live with acceptance and friendship, they learn to find love in the world.

Whether one follows the work of those who study the transmission of faith, or scientists who study families, or listens to the words of poets, the evidence presents a powerful message to parents . . . and to congregations who support Christian parents: through trusting relationships and the days and practices of your lives, the finest legacy you can leave your children is a vital, resilient, life-giving faith!

#### **Endnotes**

1. Walter Brueggemann, "The Covenanted Family: A Zone for Humanness." *Journal of Current Social Issues*, 14/5 (Winter 1977), 18.
2. Brueggemann, "The Covenanted Family," 18.
3. Brueggemann, "The Covenanted Family," 18.
4. Marjorie Thompson, *Family: The Forming Center* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1989), 24-25.
5. Peter Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990).





KEVIN KOHNKE

## How Do the Scriptures View Families?

### What Was the Creator's Intent in the Formation of Families?

GOD'S PLAN RIGHT FROM THE START was for mankind to live in families. God stated, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18). God created woman, and God gave a

command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:27).

As one reads Deuteronomy 6, one can come to the conclusion that families are more than just a place to raise children. The family is the place to pass on the faith.

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life (Deuteronomy 6:1-2).

The importance of sharing God's decrees and law is stated again in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 where we read the "Great Shema":

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THE REV. DR. KEVIN KOHNKE, PH.D., D.MIN., IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS IN FAMILY MINISTRY, GERONTOLOGY, AND HUMAN SERVICES AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE ON AGING AND FAMILY, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, NEBRASKA. KEVIN.KOHNKE@CUNE.EDU



Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

In my mind, the foundation for Family Ministry is passing on the faith, the knowledge and truth of the Word of God in the home, which is to be taught, encouraged, and supported by the congregation.

### **Why is a Family's Worship of the Living God a Critical Factor in Their Lives?**

GOD OFFERS to the family an opportunity to receive His gifts as they partake of the Sacraments and hear His word in the worship service. Worship of the Triune God in a corporate setting also allows for the encouragement of the fellowship of believers. It is true that an individual must feed one's physical body to maintain strength and health. It is also true that one needs to feed on the Word of God to nourish the soul. Worship of the living God draws a family together; as they draw near to God, they draw closer to each other.

### **Why Does the Gospel of Jesus Christ Make a Difference in the Lives of Families?**

AS C.S. LEWIS, (2005) so aptly stated, we are "The sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve." We are the children of sinners and we are sinners. It was a great fall for all of mankind when Adam and Eve sinned. Like Humpty Dumpty, we lack the ability to pick ourselves up and put ourselves together again (Senkbeil, 1994). Original sin covers us.

How often do we add to the words of God as Eve does in Genesis 3:2-3.

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

The italicized words are those that Eve added even though they were not recorded in the Bible as having ever been said by God. "Mom says you have to do my homework!" says one sibling to another, though Mom never said those words. A child may blame his sister for breaking the lamp when it was one's own fault. We blame just as Adam did in Genesis 3.

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman *you* put here with me— she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The doctrine of original sin is vital in understanding how the Gospel of Jesus makes a difference in the lives of families. Original sin touches the very heart of the Christian faith. It gives answers to such important questions as: Can man save himself? Is he able to help along in his conversion? Does he possess the power of free will in spiritual matters? The answer is 'No' to each question. This sin is described as "indwelling sin" (Romans 7:17), a "law in the members" (Romans 7:23). The church has summed the meaning of these passages in the phrase, "original sin." The origin of this sin falls upon Adam and flows to all actual sins; it is a condition into which we have been born since the fall. Our problem then before God is that we are sinners, with sin penetrating our hearts.

By the power of almighty God, the victory over sin has been gained for us. The victory of God over sin comes in a most odd fashion for us humans. God sent His son to take on human flesh, to be spit upon shamefully and spitefully, to be mocked by the mob, crucified with criminals and then to be raised as our Redeemer. If one does not know about original sin and how actual sins flow from our sinfulness, then one never would want to know about Jesus who delivers us from a life of slavery to sin. Freedom is what comes through the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The freedom from slavery to sin brings forth the joy of receiving forgiveness from Christ, empowers us to extend the forgiveness given to us, and offer it to others, including members of our own family.

### **What is the Role of Faith in Family Living?**

FAITH IS ROOTED AND GROUNDED in Christ. Faith is expressed in love toward God and love toward other people. Faith in Christ should infiltrate the entire life of a Christian. This faith is more than facts held in the brain, but involves daily trust in Christ which transforms us. Faith takes hold of what God has to offer, forgiveness and life eternal. Faith in Christ then extends that gift to others. Faith in Christ means a parent is empowered by the Holy Spirit to say to one's son or daughter, "I am sorry, please forgive me." And the child with faith in Christ is able to say to the parent, "I forgive you." Faith in Christ means a child is able to confess wrongs to mom or dad and receive absolution. It's a two-way street.

We learn how the faith of our families in past generations sustained them during times of trouble. As our forefathers trusted in the love of God, so can we. We can reflect on the blessings that our family has received and give thanks to God for these undeserved gifts. Sharing these experiences strengthens the faith of the young family members who learn that God is not a figment in the sky but a loving person who walks with us through life.

### **What Can One Learn about the Unique Purpose or Mission of a Family in the Scriptures?**

"BE FRUITFUL and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28).

This is the first command of God given to the first family which he created. As we search the Scriptures, we learn more about the roles of the individuals who make up a family.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:21-25).

God made Adam and Eve with special care. He made them complementary. God wanted this human pair and every couple after them to bring forth children, to care for one another, so that each generation might grow according to God's plan (Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 127 and 128).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you, and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Children are to obey their parents not because of power but because of love. God provides for children through parents (Ephesians 5:1, 2; 1 Timothy 5:1-8). It is love that makes parents willing to sacrifice

themselves for the spiritual growth of their children (Romans 12:1, 2; Ephesians 6:3, 4).

The passing on of the faith happens most often and perhaps most simply through the family. The family in turn becomes lights of the Gospel shining to the community. In Acts 1:8 we read, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in *Jerusalem*, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The family in essence begins witnessing in Jerusalem, the bedroom down the hall from the parents' bedroom. They start sharing their faith at home, and then they move to Judea, outside the home.

And then on to Samaria and the ends of the earth. The Christian family serves as salt and light in a world characterized by confused, disoriented, and disintegrating families. The words and lives of families say that God's Truth works, that God's Truth makes a difference. Families through words and deeds also say that we care about our community by not hiding our light under a bushel.

### **Which Biblical Perspectives on the Family Are Especially Applicable to the Lives of American Families Today?**

IN OUR FAST-PACED SOCIETY where children have multiple options for extracurricular activities and too many television stations to watch, not to mention the wave of Internet technologies, we can't forget God made the family first. God established the home first, and the family has been the basic unit of society through the ages. The Messianic promise, that a Savior would come and deliver mankind from sin, is to be passed down generation to generation.

The Bible presents the home as a place that is to be permanent. The home is to provide an unwavering setting for the lives of adults and children. Throughout the Bible one can read the account of family life lived with or without God. In the Bible one can see that the family is God's instrument to carry the Gospel of Christ into the life of people. The

Spirit of God is given to transform lives from the darkness of sin to light of the Gospel.

Harmony is to be cultivated in the Christian home rather than quarreling and bitterness (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-21; I Corinthians 13). In this Christian home no one is to lord over the needs and the desires of another. Both respect for others and respect for one's self are godly traits that should be demonstrated in the home. There is to be respect for every individual in the home from the unborn baby in mommy's tummy to the aged grandparents who may reside in the home or just come to visit.

Does the family today recall that it was God who planned the family? The first family consisted of one male and one female. In their everyday activities, do families of this 21<sup>st</sup> century realize the importance God places on family? One is born into a family to be nurtured, protected, and developed into the person one is. Who is doing the nurturing, protecting, and assisting in the development of the whole person if the family is overcommitted? It may be television, or other technological communicative means, classmates, or Satan himself.

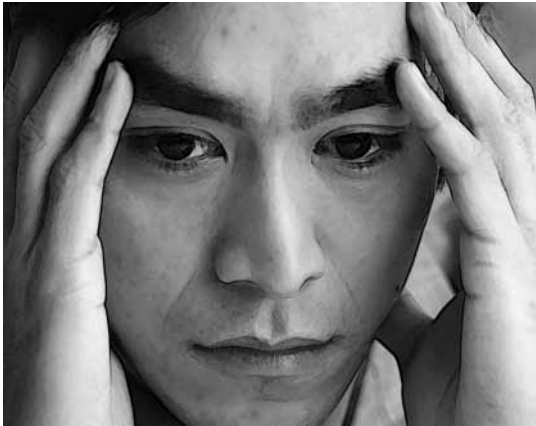
A special focus on family life ministry is commendable so that we do not forget that God had a plan for setting us in families. The family is the most wonderful place for passing on the faith in Christ Jesus. Let's be honest, the blame game which began in the Garden of Eden continues even today. Sin is ever around us. The Scriptures tell us explicitly that sin came into the world through Adam, and that the second Adam (Jesus) brought life. As man is held accountable for sin, so he must be held accountable for nurturing his family to continuously call upon God for physical and spiritual life.

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ROGER SONNENBERG

## An Intentional Ministry—Family Ministry



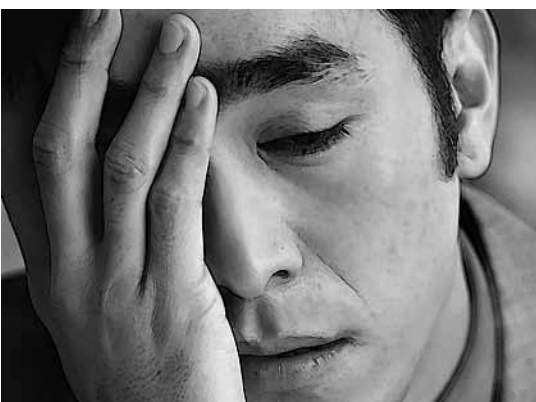
“SO WHAT?” MARTIN LUTHER asked the same question in “What does this mean?” It is the question which is asked by many people sitting in the pew Sunday after Sunday, “So what does this mean for me?” An exit poll of people who have left the church showed that many feel that the church is irrelevant.

Sheila is a single mom raising two children on her own and wonders if the pastor has any clue of the struggles she’s having with her oldest daughter.

Larry was abused as a child. In his thirty years of being in the church, he has never heard a word about abuse. For him, this translates into the church not caring.

Paul and Ruth have been unhappily married for twelve years. Their health providers care deeply, primarily for financial reasons, to be sure, but nevertheless they care about their physical well-being, encouraging them to have annual checkups, eat right, and exercise. But their spiritual caregivers—the church and its leaders—don’t seem to care about the spiritual well-being of their marriage other than periodically offering exhortations about the sin of divorce. They wonder, “Why does the church wait for some crisis to occur before it speaks about marriage? Where is the care that might prevent separation or divorce?”

Yes, the church is good at answering life’s ultimate question, “What happens to me when I die?” but doesn’t seem to care enough to address important questions about day-to-day



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ROGER SONNENBERG IS THE PASTOR OF OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH, ARCADIA, CA.; ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, LUTHERAN INSTITUTE ON AGING AND FAMILY, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, NEBRASKA; 1ST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE PACIFIC SOUTHWEST DISTRICT, THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD; AUTHOR; PSYCHOTHERAPIST. SONNENR@AOL.COM



living. Doesn't God say that He has come to give life "more abundant" (John. 10:10)? Isn't God's resurrection present tense; "I am the resurrection and the life . . ." (John 10:25)?

Intentional Family Ministry is a congregation's response to the "So what?" or the "What does this mean?" question being asked by many. Intentional Family Ministry can provide wisdom through a single-parent support group for the Sheilas of a congregation. Through an Intentional Family Ministry, the Pauls and Ruths have the opportunity to sit with other couples and learn of ways to improve their marriage in an enrichment Bible study.

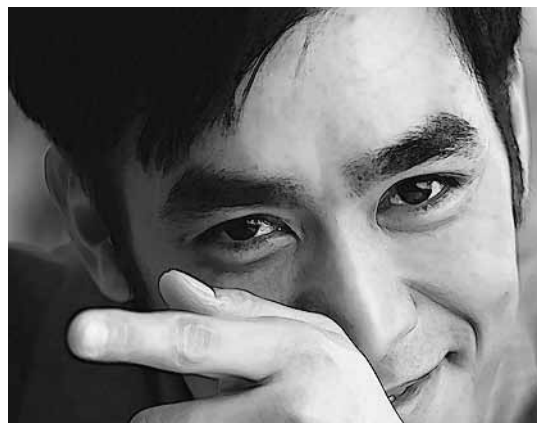
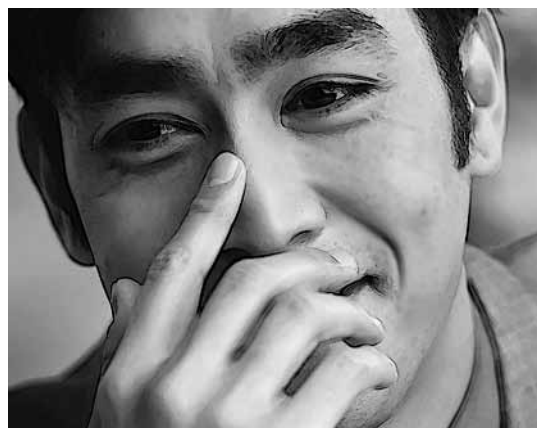
### **Intentional Family Ministry Builds Relationships**

NARCISSISM, according to studies, has increased 700 percent over the last twenty years. "Entitlement" is the present day mantra. Twenty years ago "community" was most important for the average twenty-five-year-old. Today, it is "individualism." And yet, what is the Christian church about? It's not about individualism; it's about relationships. In the early church, "They had all things in common" (Acts 2:44). They joined together in support of one another. Their vertical relationship with God through Jesus Christ brought them into healthy relationships with one another. Romans 1 tells about what happens when there is a skewed relationship with God.

Steve is an executive for a large firm in California. He is also a trained lay deacon in the Southwest Pacific District. When he attended the Continuing Education Seminar for lay leaders of the District last year, participants were invited to engage in a relationship building exercise where participants were asked to think back when they were 12 years of age and draw a quick floor plan of the home they lived in. They then were asked to sketch a few pieces of furniture. Then they were told to recall what was outside the house such as a playhouse, large trees, or a swimming pool. After noting these things, they were asked to imagine

walking into each room of the house and remember some of the smells. After giving them a few seconds, they were then told to draw stick figures of the people and pets that lived in the house at that particular time. Finally, they were asked to draw a cross over the one person, place, or thing where they experienced "grace." They could define "grace" however they wished.

The exercise was so helpful for Steve that while leading an important meeting for his company, he decided to begin with this relationship-building exercise. A young woman on the staff found the task difficult, but upon completing it, she came to him with



tears in her eyes and said, “I’m 33 years old and this is the first time in my life I shared the pain of what happened to me in my home . . . it’s the first time anyone asked . . . and the first time someone seemed to care . . .” It was painful but so therapeutic. According to Steve as well as others who worked with her, the woman literally became a different person in her dealings with the people around her. The exercise had opened up a secret closet, a closet that had been locked for years. This simple exercise gave her permission in a safe environment to open the door and to be set free from years of captivity. As she shared her story, important people in her life—the people she had worked with for years—revealed how much they cared. This new relationship “empowered” her, changed her.

This is only one of many stories heard over the years from those who were blessed through someone who cared enough to care! It began by someone intentionally asking a question and then allowing the process of good communication to do the rest. Such is the essence of Intentional Family Ministry . . . caring enough to care . . . to ask the right questions and to listen. It is intentional in that it is planned and orchestrated, giving people the opportunity to safely share more than surface-stuff, inner-stuff. It is about the telling of stories that build relationships.

One of the things people who lead family ministry programs and facilitate support groups hear time and time again is: “We thought we were the only ones with this problem,” or “We had no idea that other married couples struggled over the same thing in their marriages.” Intentional Family Ministry helps people see their commonality. It helps them connect. It helps them to see that they are not alone.

Intentional Family Ministry is needed more than ever because we live in a world where much communication takes place via technology. Studies indicate that the average person, twenty-five years and younger, spends seven hours and thirty-four minutes each day using technology. This does not include time

spent texting, which, according to the same studies, may be well over an hour and thirty-nine minutes per day. (The average teenage girl sends over 3,952 texts every month.) Though technology connects people, in reality many of these connections lack face-to-face contact and a deep level of interaction.

### **Intentional Family Ministry Answers Questions People are Asking**

IT IS OFTEN SAID, “The church answers questions people aren’t asking.” Certainly, questions which Saint Paul asked are questions worth asking, such as: “What’s the problem? I know what I’m supposed to be doing, but I do the very opposite . . . wretched man that I am, who is going to rescue me?” (Romans 7:15, 24) However, sometimes this question is lost by other more pressing issues in a person’s life. It’s hard to care about spiritual matters when your fourteen-year-old daughter just informs you that she’s pregnant or your husband announces he wants a divorce. A teenager who is worried about being pregnant isn’t listening to the pastor who’s talking about heaven. She wants to know if the pastor cares about her dilemma, and, if he does, will he still want her around the church!.

Special family ministry offerings, such as support groups for single parents or the divorced, will signal to everyone in the congregation and the community that the church and its leadership understand real life and genuinely care what is happening in the lives of people. By offering these special transitional support groups or other family ministry programs, the church is saying we care and understand. So does Jesus!.

### **Intentional Family Ministry Offers Wisdom**

MANY PEOPLE HAVE KNOWLEDGE. The world gives knowledge. Some people have wisdom. God gives wisdom. It was the one thing Solomon sought. Intentional Family Ministry offers wisdom because it offers God’s Word. Churches don’t need to

compete with the local mental health agency which offers parenting courses. Churches offer parenting programs with a different perspective. God's Word offers wisdom. It translates the knowledge, the standards of good parenting suggestions. "It attaches tendons and muscles . . . it puts spirit into the deadness and barrenness" (Ezekiel 37:6). In Ezekiel, we read that He doesn't just dress people up to look good like figures for a wax museum; He puts real life into them. He does it through His "Means of Grace." His very Word "Is spirit and life" (John 6:63).

A woman came to me who was fighting cancer. She asked if she could start a cancer support group. She went on to say that though she was leading one for the local hospital, she had been told that she could not bring religion into it! "I want to talk about Jesus," she said. It became one of the more successful support groups in our church, attracting many people from outside the church. More women wanted to talk about Jesus in their struggle with cancer.

A couple announced that they were going to get married because they love one another. When I asked, "What do you mean that you love her?" he gave the world's answer, "Because I feel so good when I'm around her." I also asked, "What happens when the feeling goes away? Are you still in love then?" The wisdom that God gives related to love is seen throughout the Scripture (e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:4-8). However, the Bible does more than describe love. The Spirit of God Himself uses the words to empower the reader, the listener, the recipient of these words. Through the words, He pours His love into us so that we might love one another in the same way. The very Spirit of God enters us through the Word and makes it possible for us to love with grace and mercy, just as He loves us.

### **Intentional Family Ministry is Gospel-Driven**

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD correctly teaches that it is the Gospel that changes people's lives, not the Law. The Law

teaches us how to live and how not to live. Though it shows us our foibles, our mistakes, our sin, it does not change us! Only the Gospel changes a person. Balswick in his book, *The Family: A Christian Perspective*, reminds us that though commitment (covenant) is one of the elements of God's relationship with us and our relationship with one another, commitment is never possible without "grace." Why? Because of sin! Perfection is found in none other than Jesus Christ.

Much of the world's teaching is law-oriented. For example, most parenting books tell parents what to do and not do. Even many so-called religious books are moralistic, meaning that they give rules and authoritative directions. Though such instructions may be needed and helpful, ultimately, without knowing "grace . . . mercy . . . forgiveness," such teaching can lead to frustration and despair. Even the best parent can scold one's self for not meeting the standards. The Gospel offers "grace," undeserved mercy, forgiveness, love for not meeting those standards. Healthy family ministry is a "Gospel-filled" ministry which frees people to move forward, knowing that despite mistakes, there is forgiveness, there are second chances and new opportunities to improve and become more "Christ-like." Families that are "Gospel-focused" are families that provide "safe places" for their members.

Some have said, "All that the church needs to do is to provide Word and Sacraments." Though the Word and Sacraments are the "Means of Grace," Intentional, Gospel-focused Family Ministry helps to connect the grace of God and the lives of family members. A Gospel focus in Intentional Family Ministry empowers individuals and families for their living and dying. (When you know how to die, you also learn how to live.) Intentional Family Ministry helps to translate the "Means of Grace." This ministry offers a "safe place" to ask questions and to care for one another. It provides opportunities to answer the question, "What does this mean?"

MICHAEL WALCHESKI

## Certification for Intentional Family Ministry

EFFECTIVE PREPARATION for intentional family ministry involves the coalescing of a Lutheran theological perspective of the family and principles of family life education. “Family life education is the educational effort to strengthen and enrich individual and family life through a preventive, family perspective” (National Council on Family Relations, 2012). When family life education is combined with a Lutheran theological understanding and deliberate ministry skills, the result provides the core components of the preparation for family ministers. *To engage intentional family life ministry, certification through NCFR should be an element of preparation.* This essay will discuss the certification process through the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) of the Family Life Educator (FLE) preparing for ministry. Certification as a Family Life Educator is available for all professionals in ministry, ordained or commissioned. The certification discussed here is to be distinguished from certification granted by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to Directors of Christian Education, Directors of Christian Outreach, and Lutheran School Educators. According to the Concordia University System’s standards, the knowledge base for family ministry is connected to the Content Areas established by the NCFR.

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DR. MICHAEL WALCHESKI, LMFT, CFLE; DEAN, GRADUATE SCHOOL; CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY EDUCATION; PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AND FAMILY STUDIES; CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL. WALCHESKI@CSP.EDU

## What is Family Life Ministry and Education?

CERTIFIED FAMILY LIFE EDUCATOR (CFLE) is the professional designation for professionals working with families that is granted through the NCFR. The Council, founded in 1938, is the oldest multidisciplinary, non-partisan professional organization focused solely on family research, practice and education. Family Life Ministry takes things one step further—it is the intentional effort to serve families in the context of faith and learning inside and out of the congregational setting. Family Life Ministry and Education (FLME) brings family research and best practices to individuals, couples, families and parents via *an educational approach in order to build strengths in service to God and one another.*

Family Life Ministry and Education should be thought of not as a program or curriculum, but as a model for planning, implementing, and evaluating ministry with families. Deliberately, FLME employs a lens through which to view families in congregational life. FLME is a target for the whole congregation in the long term rather than a series of programs in the short term. Here are a few questions that can initiate this type of thinking:

- Do major congregational events (e.g., worship), programs (e.g., education), or goals (e.g., outreach) bring families together or separate them?
- Do leaders consider the life stages of the families they are attempting to reach?
- Do ministry programs (e.g., child, youth, and young adults) view participants in light of the family system and structure?
- How are primary family transitions addressed in planning for ministry?

FLME, uniquely, takes a *systemic* view of the family and ministry (Walcheski & Bredehoft, 2009). All members of the family are connected and reciprocally influence one another; this perspective has the potential to change our thinking dramatically. The whole (family) is greater than the sum of its parts (individuals). This is especially



important when addressing, for example, the needs of nuclear, single, or blended families in the congregation. Hence, the family is viewed as a whole, not as parts, within the congregational setting. A linear view sees individuals participating in congregational life; a systemic view sees family units participating in congregational life. A systemic view of families in the congregation has significant suggestions for how ministry is planned, implemented, and evaluated. Furthermore, a systemic view sees the family system as part of the congregational system, and as a part of the greater societal system. Therefore, understanding the reciprocal interaction between the family and other systems is essential.

Along with understanding families systemically, family life ministry engages families across the lifespan. Often, family life ministry is thought of as a program for parents of younger children or adolescents, which is only a part of the whole picture. *Across the lifespan* involves sharing and building faith across the generations. *Beginning at baptism, nurtured in the Word, led by the Holy Spirit, we are guided across our lifespan to life everlasting.*

The NCFR identifies four broad age groups under “lifespan”: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and later adulthood. For FLME, this involves providing support across the stages of life’s journey by providing Christ-centered resources and training across all aspects of family living. In addition, congregational ministry becomes aware of and focuses on family transitions, normative stressors (e.g., transition to adolescence), and non-normative stressors (e.g., death of a child) in the context of the congregational system. *The organization of the congregation and ministry is influenced by the transitions and stressors experienced by families.* Faith-building in family ministry is bi-directional, addressing the unique tasks and challenges in both directions of the family life cycle (young-to-old and old-to-young).

Family Ministry has two components in time. First, it recognizes the impact of the here-and-now in family living. The daily changes and challenges of family life, both within and outside congregational and

social systems, influence family functioning. Knowledge about healthy family functioning can be applied to prevent or minimize many common problems in family living. Second, family ministry acknowledges the future impact of passing on the faith and family functioning to future generations. *The legacy of patterns across generations can thoughtfully be influenced by intentional family ministry.*

Strengthening family life through specific principles and content is captured in the Framework for Family Life Education (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2011). This knowledge base for family ministry is coupled with the Content Areas set forth by the National Council on Family Relations (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2009). The Framework identifies ten content areas addressing major areas of family functioning across four broad age groups. These content areas address and encourage family functioning by providing specific goals, support and resources. Family Life Ministry and Education focuses on healthy family functioning within a family systems perspective and provides a primarily preventive approach (NCFR, 2012). The ten content areas listed below provide the structure for preparing individuals for specific work in Family Life Education (FLE).

- *Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts* — An understanding of families and their relationships to other institutions, such as the educational, governmental, religious, and occupational institutions in society
- *Internal Dynamics of Families* — An understanding of family strengths and weaknesses and how family members relate to each other.
- *Human Growth and Development Over the Life Span* — An understanding of the developmental changes of individuals in families throughout the life span. Based on knowledge of physical, emotional, cognitive, social, moral, and personality aspects.
- *Human Sexuality* — An understanding of the physiological, psychological, and social aspects of sexual development throughout the life span, so as to achieve healthy sexual adjustment.

- *Interpersonal Relationships* — An understanding of the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.
- *Family Resource Management* — An understanding of the decisions individuals and families make about developing and allocating resources, including time, money, material assets, energy, friends, neighbors, and space, to meet their goals.
- *Parent Education and Guidance* — An understanding of how parents teach, guide and influence children and adolescents.
- *Family Law and Public Policy* — An understanding of the legal definition of the family and laws which affect the status of the family.
- *Professional Ethics and Practice* — An understanding of the character and quality of human social conduct, and the ability to critically examine ethical questions and issues.
- *Family Life Education Methodology* — An understanding of the general philosophy and broad principles of family life education in conjunction with the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate such educational programs.

In summary, the goal of family life ministry and education is to teach and foster this knowledge and these skills to enable individuals and families to function optimally. While various professionals assist families, it is the certified family life professional that incorporates faith, family-systems, and a preventative approach to individual and family living.

### **So, Why Seek Certification as a Family Life Educator?**

WHILE MANY PROFESSIONALS have a sincere passion and some interaction with families, FLME certification recognizes a background and understanding in each of the ten family life content areas. Often in ministry, we may work specifically in one area of family life (e.g., parent education, marriage enrichment), or age group (e.g., childhood, adolescence), understanding

the specific dynamics and issues that affect families enabling us to educate and work with individuals and families effectively. The CFLE designation recognizes the educational, preventive, and enriching nature of work in family life education. Additionally, standards identified for certification help ensure skilled ethical practice and promote family life education as a profession (NCFR, 2012). The certification stands as a signal pointing to competencies in ten content areas which further strengthen the ministry professional's potential through preparedness and experiential development.

### **What is Certification as a Family Life Educator?**

NCFR SPONSORS the only international program to certify family life educators. Professionals with knowledge and experience in family life education, such as formal teaching, community education, public information and education, curriculum and resource development, etc. are eligible to apply. Certified Family Life Educators have a minimum of a Bachelor's degree, although many CFLEs have advanced degrees (NCFR 2012). The certification demonstrates mastery of family science content and significant fieldwork experience.

There are two tiers of certification as a family life educator: provisional and full.

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION is available to those with a minimum of a Bachelor's degree and demonstrated knowledge in each of ten family life content areas. Provisional applicants have not yet earned the number of work experience hours needed for full certification. Provisional certification is granted through successful completion of the CFLE Examination or by applying through the Abbreviated Application Process. The Abbreviated Application Process is only available to graduates of NCFR-approved academic programs. Three universities in the Concordia University System (CUS) have NCFR-approved academic programs. Concordia University, St. Paul has three approved programs (Undergraduate—

traditional program; Undergraduate—online program; Graduate—online program) with two program emphases in Parent Coaching and Gerontology. Concordia University, Ann Arbor has one approved program (Undergraduate—traditional program) with three program options: Family Life Ministry, Social Service Community Agencies, Hospital Child Life Specialist. Concordia University, Nebraska has one approved program (Graduate—blended program) with two program options: Family Studies and Gerontology. Individuals seeking certification outside the Concordia University System can find approved programs at the NCFR website.

FULL CERTIFICATION is available to those who meet both the knowledge and work experience requirements. Applicants with a family-related degree at the Bachelor's level need 3,200 hours of work experience in family life education to qualify for full certification. Applicants with a family-related degree at the Master's or Doctoral level need 1,600 hours.

Applicants with a non-family related degree must document 4,800 hours of work experience in family life education.

As noted, there are two ways to become certified: via examination or the abbreviated process. The examination is a national exam offered three times a year which consists of multiple choice questions. Exam questions are based on the FLE Content Areas. Provisional Certification is available through the Abbreviated Application process to students who have graduated with a minimum of a Bachelor's degree from an accredited academic institution that has been approved by the NCFR Academic Program Review Committee. Students enrolled in approved programs demonstrate their knowledge in ten family life content areas by completing comprehensive coursework that covers the CFLE Standards and Criteria.

## Conclusion

THE PRECEDING DISCUSSION has attempted to clarify the value of a certified Family Life Educator in ministry as well as the process

of national certification. In combination with a Lutheran theology of the family and deliberate ministry skills, certification as an FLE equips a ministry leader for an effective and meaningful ministry to and with families. In a broader context, the mission of the congregation is more fully realized in its ministry to families. The family is the primary agent where faith is introduced and nurtured. *Through the Holy Spirit, faith is passed on through family functioning. Hence, to address family functioning in a Christ-centered manner is to intentionally pass on the faith to future generations* (Bowen, 1978; Westerhoff, 2001). Through certification, expertise in how families work empowers ministry and makes for a more effective ministry professional.

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## book reviews

### Vibrant Faith in the Congregation.

David W. Anderson. Minneapolis:  
Vibrant Faith Publishing, 2011.

*Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* is the second book in David Anderson's *Vibrant Faith* series intended as a practical guide to evangelism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. At times it is daring in its simplicity to attack the social media of our day, challenging Facebook with face-time and twitter with time together. This is not the self-described purpose of the book, though. It is eminently practical—the purpose given by the author is “what the church can do to more effectively address peoples’ lives with the living hope in Christ.” Dr. Anderson pushes people to the edge of their comfort zone in understanding that the Gospel of Christ infiltrates every area of the community, particularly the home.

This book is intended for congregational leaders in their various modes of expertise. There are sections specifically designed to advance the missional outbreak of the Gospel from the walls of the sanctuary, while making worship a life-changing experience and not a time out from life. It winds its way from infancy to extreme adulthood, forging a common theme of examples of the way that any church witnesses together. For Dr. Anderson, evangelism is a team effort, not merely the members of a congregation that are the most gregarious.

Faith formation is founded in practical events in which all members can participate. Dr. Anderson places a definite emphasis on the things that happen in the home. Authentic, relational evangelism allows people to see cobwebs in the corners and fingerprints on the windows. By inviting people into the home, in Bible study, meals, and even congregational meetings, there is a sense of openness that may not always occur inside the church walls. This is also the place where learning takes meaning as grace is revealed in the family aspect of the immediate church.

Dr. Anderson focuses the reader on the distinctiveness of the church in the relational aspects of the world today. Faith formation begins in the home, is nurtured in worship, and is fostered by parents and mentors. A great emphasis is placed on merely knowing people's names. If you saw them baptized, the least you could do would be to remember their names.

*Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* is a theory that seems to celebrate everything. This is what the church does. It finds the milestones of people's lives and recognizes and values

the originality that each person offers the body of Christ. A Milestone Ministry event gives tangible gifts, most especially youth, as they grow in the church and become a part of that family.

*Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* particularly points to the teamwork of the church in homes, schools, community and world. In the stewardship section (which admittedly I was hesitant to read), Dr. Anderson hammers home that even in stewardship the church is a team and is in it together. The goal is that the church is a familial place, a true place “where everybody knows your name,” like the 80's television show theme song. Every week is a reunion and a celebratory event.

There were some aspects of the book that I felt were weak. *Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* draws heavily on the previous book and its foundations. There were six locations of ministry, the five principles, the Four Keys for living one's baptism, and AAA Christian Disciples. I found myself continuously having to revert to the front or the back of the book where they were printed and explained. This also led to the feeling I was trapped in a pyramid scheme with the constant use of Anderson's principles.

The section on worship and preaching was weak in its theological foundations. It encouraged preaching sermons on the “four keys” and sermons honoring the service of people in the congregation. For this reader, if the Gospel is doing its work, it must be centered on the key of the cross and the honoring of the service of Christ, not on the practical things the people are doing in the congregation. The sermon should not be the place to focus on self, but on the service of Jesus in the midst of a broken people.

Overall, there are many good things *Vibrant Faith in the Congregation* offers, especially the practical things that encourage engagement of families and community in face-to-face relationships. The book fosters unity in mission, unity in focus, and unity in goal in a world that desperately needs to hear and see the Gospel.

**Ryan Matthias**

Chaplain, Concordia University  
Nebraska

Ryan.Matthias@cune.edu

### God's Design for His Daughters.

Roger Theimer and Mike Heinz. Omaha:  
Kids Kount Publishing,  
King of Kings Lutheran Church, 2012.

*God's Design for His Daughters* is part of the *Faith Legacy Series* created by Dr. Roger Theimer and Mike Heinz to help families grow spiritually in their homes. *The Faith Legacy Series* is geared toward supporting parents

with children from birth through the teen years. *God's Design for His Daughters* is intended as a retreat for mothers and their daughters in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

The purpose of the retreat is to create a fun and relaxed environment for mothers and daughters to learn and to discuss the basics of sex, how the girls' bodies are changing, and what it means to grow into a woman, all within a biblical perspective. At the end of the retreat, mothers will have an opportunity to give their daughters a special blessing.

The authors of this curriculum have set out to make it easy for a church to have a meaningful event for young girls and their mothers. Whether the planner is a professional church worker, a volunteer youth leader, or a parent, the program has the necessary components to support a successful retreat.

The material includes three DVDs:

1. Message to the Retreat Planners and an Orientation for Mothers. The authors share their insights about the retreat and what they hope to accomplish through this resource and the Faith Legacy Series in general. The retreat leaders also learn what should be included in an orientation for mothers to be offered two to three weeks before the retreat.

2. Demonstration of Large Group Activities. The facilitator has the opportunity to watch the large group activities being done during an actual retreat, allowing her to learn how to present them.

3. Retreat Content (divided into three sessions). The retreat speaker is delightful and engaging as she presents the content to the mothers and girls in a retreat type setting, beginning on a Friday and ending on a Saturday evening. Throughout her sessions, she allows the opportunity for “Talk Time,” a time where mothers and daughters are given a question to discuss or an experience to share.

The retreat is divided into three sessions over a two-day span of time:

Be a woman of God – Be cherished.

Be a woman of God – Be pure.

Be a woman of God – Be faithful to the end.

A CD is provided that includes support materials for the retreat. Here one can find the templates for publicizing the event, the handouts for the retreat participants, and the instructions for the facilitator and the other leaders.

The retreat is rich with special opportunities for the mothers and daughters, from having time alone on Saturday for a “girly” activity to decorating a journal that contains a letter from mom. The retreat materials include many ideas for what to include in the retreat to make it a memorable and meaningful experience.



As one who has searched for and used materials to support parents and their daughters in this area, I am pleased to see this comprehensive curriculum. The strengths in this program are numerous:

It provides the facilitator the necessary resources that can be used with the mothers before the retreat to give them a better understanding of the experience and to share ways they can make the retreat more meaningful for them and their daughters.

The content is shared in an engaging and interactive way. Participants receive short segments of the content and then are provided with ways to apply what they have heard through discussion and sharing as mother and daughter.

The large group activities are provided and demonstrated, ensuring that the facilitator will be successful in delivering the key points of the activity as the authors intended.

Helpful inclusion in the curriculum would be for the authors to provide a process for evaluation and templates for obtaining feedback. Two templates could be added to the materials CD, one for the mothers and one for the daughters. Providing templates encourages the process of evaluation and equips the facilitator with a means for learning how to make the program more applicable to their setting and to their population.

For any church that wants to have a ministry to and with parents, this resource has great potential to support parents and young girls in a tangible and meaningful way.

**Christine Blanke**

Parish Nurse  
Seward, Nebraska

### **Laughter in the Walls.**

Bob Benson.

Illustrated by Laura Leigh Benson Greer.  
Nashville: Generoux Nelson, 1990

Such a multifaceted topic as the family is appropriately examined from many perspectives—systemically, demographically, and certainly theologically. But we miss a very crucial aspect of this fundamental gift of God if we do not also appreciate it with the gifts of wonder, joy, thanksgiving, and celebration. Perhaps there is no better language for this than poetry. Many poets have made fine contributions over the years with individual works that touch the heart on this topic. Though somewhat dated (although one might convincingly argue that this is not an issue with affairs of the heart), the

benefit of Bob Benson's *Laughter in the Walls* is that it gathers 28 poems, covering a range of insightful treasures about family, into one volume. An added benefit is that the author celebrates family within a biblical and Christian worldview without being preachy or moralistic. He simply shares episodes from his own rich and God-graced experiences of family that lead us to rejoice in our own families and marvel at the Creator who so imaginatively crowned His creation with family.

As icing on the cake, this revised edition of the 1969 publication includes a half dozen delightful original watercolors created by the author's daughter, Laura Leigh Benson-Greer. More than illustrations, these graceful scenes of house, village and woods provide a visual context that welcomes viewers into the world of the poems and the memories of the homes where they first learned family. The dust jacket of the book summarizes well the intention and, indeed, the accomplishment of the book: "To bring some laughter—and some tears and some joy and some insight into the ways God speaks to us in the daily events of life—into the walls and hearts of any house where the book makes its home. Including yours."

Benson's poetry is written in free verse. It is very readable and inviting. Most of the poems tell stories that highlight the simple pleasures, wonders, and sometimes hurts that characterize family life lived out in our Father's blessed, but fallen world. The strength of the poems lies in their success at capturing universal experiences and feelings about family through the depiction of individual, everyday scenes which poignantly put our own experiences into words that we can keep on hand and revisit like old photographs that bring us back to those treasured moments.

Poems, like family, are best understood and appreciated not when they are analyzed and written about, but when they are entered into. The signature poem, "Laughter in the Walls," brings us into the story not only of Benson's, but our own families. The poem, like family, ushers us with thanksgiving into the hopes, realities and cherished memories that the Father of all families surrounds us with in the midst of our family stories. There God is waiting to bless us.

I pass by a lot of houses  
on my way home.  
Some pretty;  
some expensive,  
some inviting.

But my heart always skips a beat  
when I turn down the road  
and see my house  
nestled against the hill.

I guess I'm especially proud  
of the house  
and the way it looks  
because I drew the plans myself.  
It started out large enough for us—  
I even had a study;  
two teenage boys  
now reside in there.  
And it had a guest room,  
my girl and nine dolls  
are permanent guests.  
It had a small room  
Peg had hoped  
would be her sewing room,  
the two boys swinging  
on the Dutch door  
have claimed this room  
as their own.

So it really doesn't look right now  
as if I'm much of an architect.  
But it will get larger again.  
One by one they will go away—  
to work, to college,  
to service,  
to their own houses.  
And then there will be room—  
a guest room, a study,  
and a sewing room—  
for just the two of us.

But it won't be empty.  
every corner, every room,  
every nick in the coffee table  
will be crowded  
with memories.  
Memories of picnics,  
parties, Christmases,  
bedside vigils, summers,  
fires, winters, going barefoot,  
leaving for vacation, cats,  
conversations, black eyes,  
graduations, first dates,  
ballgames, arguments,  
washing dishes, bicycles,  
dogs, boat rides,  
getting home from vacation,  
meals, rabbits,  
and a thousand other things  
that fill the lives  
of those who would raise five.  
And Peg and I  
will sit quietly by the fire  
and listen to the  
laughter in the walls.

**Terence R. Groth**

Assistant Professor of Theology  
Concordia University, Nebraska  
Terence.Groth@cune.edu