

# ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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**NEEDED IN EVERY CONGREGATION: FAMILY MINISTRY**



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# ISSUES

## IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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## editorials

### Consider Outer Form and Inner Reality

EVERYONE I KNEW WITHIN THE 15 SQUARE BLOCKS that made up my Hyattsville, Maryland, paper route was Caucasian. Most every one of my friends had a mother and father, and if they did not it was considered an unusual tragedy, brought on only in the most strange of circumstances by divorce. Everyone seemed to have children.

We believed that our experience was normative, and anything else was an aberration. So, my thoughts about what constituted the "family" of family ministry were influenced by this normative expectation borne in my culture.

What we see in our couples, families and neighborhoods now, though, is certainly different than what I saw in Hyattsville. For instance, Peck and

## reflections

ONCE UPON A TIME there was an era in which the definition of family was characterized by the phrase, "Father Knows Best," as depicted by a television program of the same name. The United Nations named 1994 as "The International Year of the Family." This sounds positive and uplifting, but is it reality?

Families are in trouble, more trouble than ever before. Indeed, there is a crisis in families. Consider, for example, that in the United States today 50 percent of marriages end in divorce. Sixty percent of those divorces involve children. When divorced individuals remarry, 60 percent of those marriages end in divorce. Twenty percent of the children in the United States will be reared in families that experience two divorces. A recent report stated that the average United States female born in the last decade will have more husbands than children in her lifetime. It is a cliché to say our families are in crisis.

The purpose of this edition of *Issues in Christian Education* is to inquire why the tragedies in American families are occurring. Since they are happening, what opportunities are there in our congregations and Christian schools to help families? Furthermore, how can we equip most effectively family life educators in every congregation in our church?

Today there is a debate whether the single parent family or the stepfamily will be the dominant family type in the United States by the year 2000. In that debate it seems an assumption that the nuclear family, with one husband and one wife, will rank a distant third. The challenge before us is great. To be sure, every family is somewhat dysfunctional, just as every family has some strengths. This edition of *Issues* attempts to point out the significant impact family life educators can have in ministry to families. May God bless your learning and follow-through in this all-important area of living as His disciples.

Orville C. Walz, President



Manocheian (*The Changing Family Life Cycle*, p. 335) suggest that close to 50 percent of couples are expected to choose divorce as the conclusion of dealing with marital dissatisfaction. George Barna (*The Future of the American Family*) suggests only 25 percent. Either way, divorce is much more prevalent than it was 40 years ago. As a result, there are loads more children being raised in one parent or "blended" families. My "normal" is no longer normative. The outer form has changed.

Have things underneath the outer form changed as much? In my two parent family, one parent was an alcoholic, a fact we attempted to hide from the outer world to maintain the appearance of propriety and normalcy. One aunt and uncle of mine were separated, divorced and remarried, a reality that I discovered only much later in my adult life. There were major intra-familial struggles, at best only whispered about. Looking from the outside we were all members of two parent, Caucasian, religious, "normal," and "adjusted" families. But underneath there was much, much more.

The difference between outer and inner reality was significant and sometimes disease producing. The internal dynamic, tension, and struggle may have more commonality between then and now than the external form.

I have come to respect inner reality for people, couples, families and even organizations. Where inner reality and outer form are connected, there is more health; where there is a relatively large gap, there is likely more disease.

As you read this edition of *Issues*, consider inner reality as well as outer form. Spiritual support, social support, adaptability, and willingness to seek help are among the major resources of highly satisfied families regardless of the outer form and organization which those families present (Elizabeth Morgan, *Pioneer Research on Strong, Healthy Families*). A positive sexual relationship, a religious orientation, clear communication, and creative leisure time—all inner dynamics—are among the major marital resources of highly satisfied couples.

Let us not be so stuck on a normative outer view of "family" or even of individuals that we

neglect the inner reality of what is so in people's lives. After all, in whatever outer form our relationships take, our intent is to provide safe and hospitable environments for people in the name of the Christ who healed us and gives us a safe, secure, and loving relationship with the heavenly Father.

Bruce M. Hartung, Ph.D.  
Director, Ministerial Health/Health and  
Healing Ministries  
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

## Congregations as Intervention Agents: Shifting to a New Paradigm

Writers such as Fritjof Capra (*The Turning Point*) and Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) have noted for some 20 years that our culture is experiencing a shift in its basic assumptions of reality. These assumptions make up our world view, or paradigm. They are the cornerstone of our beliefs, values, and cultural norms of behavior. By definition, we are transitioning from a mechanistic society, with an emphasis on linear thinking, to a holistic, organismic society, which is characterized as being global, multi-influential in causality, dynamic and everchanging, and flexible.

While this transition certainly affords us the benefits of vast improvements in communications and global networking, it also appears true that we are experiencing painful consequences of such change. Workers are displaced both at the blue collar and administrative levels. Uncertainty reigns in the era of "restructuring" within corporate America. The United States has also been wrestling with the roles of men and women and grappling with issues affecting the family such as finding quality time, divorce, abortions, blended families, violence, health care, and raising children in a world where the norm is constant change. Families are searching for a place to be grounded and safe in the maelstrom of social chaos and transition.

Churches historically have influenced our cultural values, and they have served as a stabilizing force when change becomes too swift and unmanageable by the culture. Given this role, churches must also adjust to such change and help steady the culture as it transitions to a new stage of development.

Ironically, the field of psychology, once a strong critic of churches, spirituality and formal religion, is now embracing spiritual beliefs in the comprehension of human behavior. The American Psychological Association (APA) and American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT) have recently published articles on the value of spirituality in therapy and how clergy contribute to the field of counseling. In essence, the timing is fortuitous to help families. Sociologists and psychologists can now cooperate with mainstream religion to assist people instead of flogging churches and theology as being too constrictive.

While the Lutheran church, especially the Missouri Synod, historically has assumed great leadership in ministry to families, it is now time to rethink its role. Having been forerunners in day school education and administering Christian education within a congregation, does Synod need to change this model?

Speaking as a psychologist and researcher, the data suggest that we need to change and expand our roles. Our response must be quick and assertive, reacting as if a natural disaster had just occurred. Three to four million cases of spousal abuse, one million cases of elderly abuse, and about two million cases of child abuse are reported each year. Researchers all agree that these figures are grossly underestimated. In addition, depression and suicide rates are rising rapidly, divorces now top 50 percent, and addictive disorders in such areas as chemical dependency, gambling, eating, and sex continue to be manifest. These are symptoms of a society struggling to find meaning in an entertainment, media-driven, compulsively active culture.

As a therapist who sees many Lutheran families and a former counselor in a Lutheran high school,

it is clear that these problems trouble many of the parishioners who seek spiritual solace each Sunday. In addition, many members within our local communities suffer physically and emotionally, and they long to be attached to a group who will provide them with a spiritual connection. They also require peers who uncritically help them to understand their behavior, utilize better parenting techniques, talk openly in a support group, learn to communicate better as partners, and examine life for its spiritual meaning. As Thomas Moore, author of the book, *Care of the Soul*, notes, "A spiritual life of some kind is absolutely necessary for psychological health."

Who is better to nurture our psychological health than the Christian communities which emphasize forgiveness, healing, and a loving God who sent His Son to atone for any human indiscretions? However, to respond to these cultural changes, we must be willing to change. We must train our workers in the mental health fields, embrace a solid working relationship with the psychology community, and commit to a "care" orientation for all people.

Paradigm shifts are inevitable and cannot be stopped. The Lutheran church is, as is all of our culture, at a crossroads. Our choices lie either in moving into the twenty-first century as leaders in our changing culture, or in fearing, criticizing, and ignoring change, thus risking the future of our children, our church, and our culture.

Dudley Wiest, Ph.D.  
Cerrantes Institute  
Orange, California

## The Best Hope

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* Ephesians 3:14-15.

Historically, congregations have had a tremendous influence upon families by helping with the faith-nurturing functions of religious education and the socialization of children. Today, congregations

are seeking to meet this challenge with greater intensity by sponsoring schools and nurturing families. At the same time, church professionals notice that fewer families are reinforcing faith values taught by congregations because of general disinterest, multiple family problems, or "lack of time."

Is the culture muting the religious beliefs and practices of the family? Rodney Clapp in *Families at the Crossroads* points out that in previous years lifelong monogamy was the norm, pre-marital sex was discouraged, heterosexuality was the unquestioned standard, moms stayed at home, and children were protected by the popular culture. Today, not one of these expectations is uncontroversial in the popular culture.

If today's culture is muting the religious beliefs and practices of families, then, Clapp suggests, Christians must "go public" and use the home as a mission base while living their faith in society, just as Old Order Mennonites, Mormons, and other groups boldly express their faith.

If many more families visualized themselves as Christian communities in society, our society would be impacted if not transformed by recognizing that: 1) all families are rooted in God (Ephesians 3:14-15); 2) the marital relationship is a sacred bond reflecting the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32); 3) parents are called to nurture their children as precious gifts from God to be valued far more than economic well-being (Ephesians 6:1-4); 4) singleness also is to be cherished as a lifestyle. (I Corinthians 7).

Christian institutions can provide valuable support for families by:

- helping all family members to visualize and experience their God-given calling, which is to be reflected in the bond which expresses Christ's relationship to the church.
- expanding family ministry programming in multiple areas of the home, the congregation, and the community.
- broadening the "Caucasians middle-class lens" to include people of color by challenging biases and stereotypes so prevalent in our communities, and providing hands-on experiences in service, nurture, and education.

- offering guided curricula of family life education in continuing education programs for church professionals and lay leaders.
- packaging family curricula through delivery methods and settings such as distance learning and other high-low technology for all ages and stages, especially for Boomer and Generation X families.
- offering inter-generational family life education from the cradle to the later years as family members spend additional years after children leave home in the roles of older siblings, spouses, widow(ers), great-grandparents, surrogate parents for grandchildren, and as members of church and community.
- directing research to survey and evaluate family life education processes and structures. Surely, the LCMS with nearly three million members and qualified researchers on college/university and seminary faculties as well as highly qualified lay researchers have something to say beyond the valued findings of the Search Institute, James Dobson's *Focus on the Family*, and others.

The twenty-first century looms with more multiple challenges and commensurate opportunities. Congregations which equip and nurture family members, young and old, single and married, to see their homes as nurturing mission stations which reflect Christ's love for the world certainly will make a powerful statement to members of our society of all ages and stages. As a sociologist at a state university recently pointed out, for families today, religious institutions are the best hope.

Shirley Bergman, Director  
Lutheran Institute on Aging and Family  
Concordia College-Seward



Joseph Barbour

## Families in Crises: Why So Many?



### Today's Family Crises

ARE FAMILIES IN AS MUCH TROUBLE as it appears? The media, self-help books, and magazine articles all allude to the fact that the family is in more trouble than ever before. As we read about children being in gangs, metal detectors at school doors, parents leaving their pre-school children at home while they vacation, one cannot but begin to wonder if it is true.

Further evidence that the family is in trouble are the articles debating whether the single parent family or the step-family will be the predominant family type by the year 2000. Without debate is the accepted ranking of the nuclear family as a distant third. Presently, 50 percent of marriages end in divorce. About 60 percent of those divorces will involve children (Hetherington, Law, and O'Connor, 1993).

This increases the number of children impacted by divorce considerably since 1980. It is estimated that 38 percent of white children and 75 percent of African-American children will experience their parents' divorce before their 16th birthday (Hetherington, *et al.*). Most of these men and women will remarry. Sixty percent of those marriages will end in divorce. On top of all of that, 20 percent of the children in the United States will experience two divorces (Visher & Visher, 1993).

As divorce is no longer an unusual event for families, it is also true that living in a step-family situation is becoming com-

mon. Glick (1991) determined that in 1987, 33 percent of all the people in the United States were in a step situation of one kind or another. These people were either stepparents, parents who had remarried, or adult stepchildren. He discovered that 20 percent of all children in the United States under 19 years of age were stepchildren or half-siblings.

What this means is that divorce and remarriage is no longer considered an unusual event in a person's life. It is deemed to be a normal part of a family's life cycle. It then follows that the problems associated with divorce and remarriage are becoming an integral part of who we are, how we deal with relationships, and what we do as a society.

Is the family something in the past? In spite of the data, those who work with families do not think so. Historically, the family has always been undergoing transitions and changing forms. For instance, prior to the industrial revolution of the late 1800's, family life centered on the home. Both parents were present because the work was done in the home. Outsiders, such as apprentices, were an ongoing part of most families.

After the father started going to a different place to work, the home became the "castle" and family relationships changed to a more private setting. No more outsiders. Children had to move away from their families in order to find work. At that time, there was much concern that the family was doomed.

The family is no longer a word with a single meaning. Some will continue to define family by type, such as a single parent family, stepfamily or nuclear family. Others will say the word

with a single idea of what shape a family is supposed to take. However, when all is said and done, the family is taking on many new and varied forms.

### The Dysfunctional Family

The word "dysfunctional" scares most people. The word is used often and never in a positive context. It has become a catchword including any activity associated with a family that does not appear normal. In the worst sense, dysfunctional is used to diagnose a family. Dysfunctional is not a condition, it is a description.

The word dysfunctional is used more accurately when it describes a particular set of interactions within a family rather than the family as a whole. The same is true when someone describes their car as being broken. Typically, only a part of the car is broken, and when that part is fixed, the car then runs as smoothly as it did before.

Almost everyone has owned a car that they liked. When the car became "dysfunctional," it is unlikely that the car was thrown away. It was sent to be fixed, and you continued to enjoy the car. It never crossed one's mind to leave the car parked in the driveway and wish that the car would run better.

Every family has experienced moments, days, even years of feeling dysfunctional. For some reason, families believe themselves to be stuck and "unfixable," and therefore must somehow bear up under the terrible burden. Instead of fixing what is wrong, the family ends up wishing that they were different. Paradoxically, the more they wish they were different, the more stuck they become, and the more hopeless they feel.

A family therapist will tell you that it is not the dysfunction that cripples family functioning; it is the "stuckness" of the dysfunction that turns families toward crisis. For instance, in a healthy family, the family members will take turns blaming others. In an unhealthy family, one family member will become the one who must do all of the blaming all of the time. Soon, the blamer will begin to feel distant from the rest of the family. Blame then becomes louder or more intense in an effort to gain some control over the family so that they can be included. Yet, the more they blame, the more distance they feel.

To add to the confusion of defining dysfunction, different family scientists have different definitions of what makes a family act dysfunctional. Virginia Satir (1976), the "grandmother" of family therapy, declared that how family members communicated among themselves determined the health of a family. She believed that the more closely one's verbal and nonverbal communication matched, the healthier the family. She termed this "congruency." It was Satir who stated that 95 percent of all families were dys-

functional on an ongoing basis because their ongoing communication was "incongruent."

Salvador Minuchin (1981) believes that families experience dysfunctional behavior when the boundaries around family roles become confused. For Minuchin, when parents are running the family, and that fact is clear, then the family will be healthy. For example, when a father acts like a brother to a son, the family becomes confused. When parents insist that the children take care of them, the family enters into a crisis. When a wife acts like a mother to her husband, anger is created.

Murray Bowen (1976) taught that dysfunction was passed from one generation to the next in their family rules. For him, any dysfunction could be traced back to one's parents and then to grandparents and on back through the generations. Once it was understood that what was happening in a family was not a psychological defect, but a time honored tradition, then it was easier to change.

It is interesting to note that while the church has no definition of dysfunction, it also has no role model for a healthy family. It is not hard to understand why when families of the Bible are studied.

An interesting exercise is to start at Genesis and look at each family as it appears, searching for a model for what might be described as a "perfect" family. As each family is described in its activities, it quickly becomes apparent that the families that God selected to lead his church had lots of problems. Adam and Eve's family experienced homicidal death of a child. Noah, on at least one occasion, drank too much. Jacob and Esau had a mother who favored one child over another, while David committed adultery. Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, went to get him, for she thought that "He had lost His mind" (Mark 3:21). At some point, Jesus was the oldest son in a single parent family.

Since the Fall, it is a fact of life that there are no perfect families. Since Biblical times, families have changed form and experienced crisis and dysfunction. From the beginning, God has been with these families because He loves them as they are, no matter what their condition.

### Getting the Balance

For a family to survive, it must be balanced. Families have a wonderful, God-given way of balancing themselves by having just enough of everything necessary. Well-balanced families have lots of flexibility, yet lots of stability. Families that are lacking that balance have lots of rigidity and little stability.

Balance is a fascinating process to watch when one knows what to look for. For instance, every family, regardless of what form the family takes, must have a certain amount of



words being spoken. If one family member is quiet, then another will be talkative. If you can convince the talkative one to be quiet for one week, or get the quiet one to talk for one week, the other will compensate by changing. The quiet one will talk, and the talkative one will be quiet. If both talked all of the time, there would be no one to hear. If they were both silent, there would be nothing to hear.

Every family must have a certain level of affection to survive. If that is not available from one family member, another will become even more affectionate. This is especially true with our faith. If one family member refuses to attend church, another will attend faithfully.

Therapists use this knowledge to create change for families. Therapists know that an individual cannot be the way he or she is unless their "others" are the way they are. Change one family member, and the whole family will change. This keeps the family balanced.

When a family cannot change fast enough to stay balanced, the family moves into a crisis. Regardless of how balanced a family appears to be, no family can change fast enough to stay balanced during a divorce or a remarriage.

When the family cannot make adjustments quickly enough to rebalance itself, it will create new behaviors to keep the family from falling apart. Typically, these are dysfunctional behaviors. Dysfunction helps keep a family from falling apart, even when it feels as though the behavior is tearing them apart.

For instance, a newly divorced mother has a fear of being alone in later life. She becomes too attached to her teen-age daughter when she realizes that her marriage is deteriorating. She is in a crisis. She may have difficulty letting go of her teenager.

As the teen wants to become more independent, the crisis for the mother will increase and spread to the other family members. If she gives her daughter the freedom to grow up, then she may go away, the mother's worst fear. Instead, she will continue to treat the teen as a ten year old.

While the mother's interaction with the teen is dysfunctional, it is logical also. Mother is not doing this to be mean, but to stay safe.

### To Be Safe

Without question, the most negative aspect of all of these issues, dysfunction, crises, and unbalance is that it robs the family of emotional safety. Without the feeling of emotional safety, relationships become distant and scary.

The family is where one obtains a sense of safety. When the family is a safe place to be, then the world is a safe place. Relationships are deepened through sharing as safety

prevails. These families intentionally work to become close and connected to each other. These family relationships become the model for all of our relationships in the future.

Unfortunately, a family that becomes emotionally unsafe also becomes a role model for future relationships. Connectedness cannot exist when one is in danger.

When family members experience a crisis over a long period of time, such as a divorce, the parent's remarriage, or violence, family members are forced to reconsider how safe they are. They lose that sense of balance that lets them know that they are safe. From that point on, until that sense of safety is restored, the family will move into the mode of merely surviving.

While in the survivor mode, it is impossible to see the good around you, the joy of your relationships, or even, at times, the cross of Christ. When family members move into the survival mode, all sense of growth stops. One's sense of self must change because what one knew to be true earlier is no longer true.

Every family member must now consider what his or her new position is going to be. All future relationships will be built around the fact that safety is an impossible quality in the family. Being on guard and not getting too close are the only defenses.

The following is an all too common example of how a family loses its sense of safety. A husband who dreamed of being a part of the children's daily lives must now change his dreams. He remembers all of the conversations with his wife in which he promised he would always be there for support through thick and thin. He remembers the note he sent his wife telling her that nothing, absolutely nothing, would ever change his heart toward her.

Now he is having meetings with his attorney trying to get all that he can of their material goods and as much visitation with his children as the law will allow. What had seemed so solid and so full of promise in the beginning is now turned into a nightmare that moves with the mush of molasses. His truth is different. His view of himself is different. He has failed. He is afraid, and he feels that he has no safe place to go.

The wife who dreamed of dropping off her children at college with her husband now is struggling to find time to go to the grocery store. Among the demands of work, getting the children to school, going to teacher meetings, dropping the children off for various activities, and keeping the house in some semblance of order, she is tired and angry, and she feels abandoned.

She remembers the conversations and the promises made to each other that were to last a lifetime. Nothing would interrupt their perfect love for each other. Now she is

meeting with her attorney, holding on to what she can, worrying about how they are going to make it even if she gets what her lawyer says she will get. She is not growing any more; she is surviving. Her world is no longer safe. She does not know where to be safe as she fights to keep herself and her children sane.

The children have no say in the matter. What they know is that Mom and Dad, of whom they are half of each, rocked them and told them that they would always keep them safe. When the children sensed that something was wrong, they tried to be good. Then they tried to be bad. Nothing worked. All of the old tricks that previously had kept them talking together suddenly no longer worked. They wondered about what was wrong with them and what caused their parents to separate. For them, there is no escape from this nightmare. The source of their safety has become the source of their pain. They feel as though there is no safe place to go.

Families can endure a lot. Danger from a source outside the family will bring its members to a new level of closeness. Sickness can bring a renewed empathy among family members. However, once the safety factor has been removed and the family members perceive each other as their source of danger, especially a parent, then the family may never recover. Once the boundary has been crossed, especially for children, they will always assume that there is no place of safety, especially in their own home.

The rule of thumb for therapists is that whatever "baggage" or unresolved issues a person has in a relationship, he or she will take that baggage into the next relationship. This is true for adults who remarry. It is also true for children who leave parents to enter into a marriage.

The difficulty is apparent. With so many families leaving issues unresolved, the next relationship starts already loaded down. When the next relationship starts with someone who has learned that families are places of danger, then family members begin to protect themselves from each other. Succeeding generations continue to pass on that message.

### The Church as Prevention and Intervention

Are there solutions to these problems? I believe there are. Guiding families to a place where they can experience safety creates an intervention that will change all of the generations to come. The only place that this can happen is in the church.

The church is the only institution granted the right to be in touch with every generation of a family simultaneously. It is the only place of safety for every family member. Regardless of what type of danger was created within the family, the message to them is that there is forgiveness. The church

becomes an advocate for the whole family and not one part of the family against the other.

While the church is not equipped to counsel so many families, it is in the position to provide pastoral care to those families in counseling. It is also in a position to provide a safe community where they may come to be renewed.

The church is in the envious position of being able to help families who have experienced dysfunction, crisis, unbalance, and danger without having to change any of its teachings or direction. Christ is clear in His teaching that family members are to support each other (Ephesians 5:21ff.). Teaching family members to see one another as Christ sees them will end much of the danger that family members pose to each other.

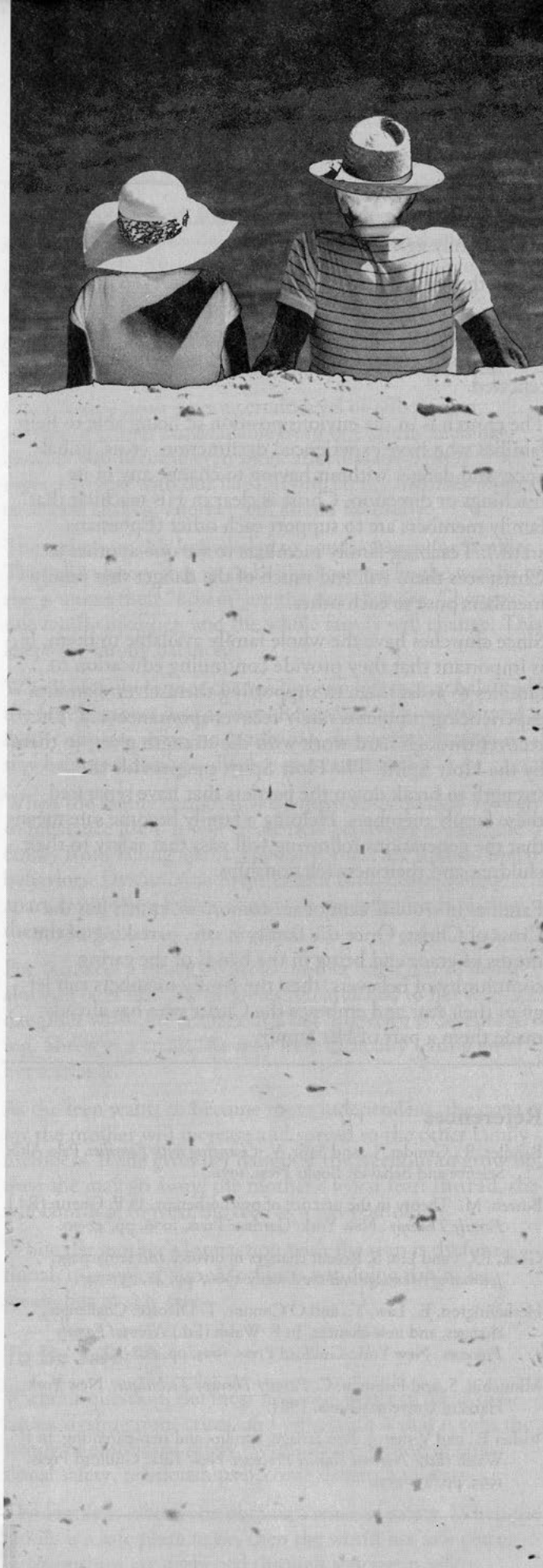
Since churches have the whole family available to them, it is important that they provide continuing education to families to assist them in supporting themselves. Families experiencing problems rarely recover spontaneously. They recover through hard work with the strength given to them by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can provide the strength to break down the barriers that have separated these family members. Helping a family become safe means that the generations following will pass that safety to their children and their new relationships.

Families in trouble cannot see tomorrow, much less the Cross of Christ. Once the family is safe, partaking of the means of grace and being in the hands of the caring community of believers, then the family members can let go of their fear and embrace the Christ who has already made them a part of His family.

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Jennifer Baker

## Family/Adult Ministry Opportunities in Congregations and Schools

IT IS NO SECRET that today's families are busier than ever. Ask any young woman as she picks up her toddler from child care after a long day at work. Ask any "Thirty-Something" mom as she shuttles her grade schooler from one after-school activity to another. Ask any middle-aged dad as he surveys the weekend "to do" list. Life for families in the 90's often is overwhelming.

In *The Future of the American Family*, George Barna tells us that "time has become the currency of the nineties." He repeatedly cites studies which indicate that parents want to spend more time with their children. More than half of all parents preferred to have one parent stay home with the children if money were not an issue. He continues, "Our research indicates that millions of American adults feel trapped by demands that do not reflect their personal priorities and preferences in life. Although they might like to allocate a greater portion of their waking hours to family or other leisure activities, their financial obligations or other needs preclude it" (Barna, 1993).

With so many adults, particularly parents, feeling stressed by their lifestyle, one may wonder why the church would be in a unique position to help families and adults. Why would busy families take more hours out of their already over-crowded week to attend worship services or other activities sponsored by a local congregation? Perhaps one reason relates to the crisis of values being experienced by many American families.

Jennifer Baker is the Director of Family Ministries at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Belvidere, Illinois.

### Crisis of Values

Two out of three children born in 1993 will live in single-parent households before their eighteenth birthday. In fact, almost half of all women having their first child in 1993 were not married to the child's father. The increase of single-parent households results in an increase in financial stress, with many women and children being on the verge of poverty. This, undoubtedly, is one of the factors in the emerging trend of single adults in their twenties and thirties returning home to live with their parents (Barna, 1993). In some cases, grandparents have become the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, with an unprecedented 3.2 million children now living with their grandparents or other relatives (*A Better Tomorrow*, September/October, 1994).

Changes in household composition have brought considerable disagreement about what composes a family. Most agree that a married couple living with children constitutes a family, but after that, definitions grow increasingly fuzzy. One study indicated that more than one out of four respondents considered two lesbian women who were rearing children to be a family. One-fifth of those polled felt that two gay men who were committed to each other and living together constituted a family (Barna, 1993).

In the midst of this muddle of definitions and values stands the church. Because the church traditionally has been associated with morality and standards, many people continue to look to religion for answers to questions concerning their families. Unfortunately, they may not be finding the help they desire in local churches. Barna (1993) reported that while more and more adults are embracing the belief that the Bible contains the answers to their most perplexing questions about life, some are turning their backs on local churches.

### Missed Opportunity

Consider the experience of the Baby Boomers. In the late 1980's, they returned to church in record numbers, with many identifying their reason as "a desire to teach proper values and beliefs to their children." Unfortunately, the traditional church expected the same program and style of instruction it had used for years to appeal to this new crop of adults. Sadly, this expectation proved to be faulty as Boomers began departing churches in record numbers starting in the early 1990's. The needs of these adults deserve to be addressed by congregations who are in a unique position to help families and adults (Barna, 1993).

The very fact that Baby Boomers look to the church for answers to help with their families indicates that the church at least has been viewed as a symbol of help for families. After all, what single institution has traditionally had more

lifelong contact with the family and its extended generations than the church? Perhaps the spiritual dimension of life's significant milestones gives the church its special link with families.

### Making the Most of Family Milestones

Consider births, weddings and funerals. Even those with only a nominal religious affiliation probably have experienced a "church connection" for one, two, or all three of these major life events. In our culture, the blessing of God and the church are seen as significant to those involved in these life events, even among adults who are not otherwise spiritually inclined. Churches need to take advantage of these and other "wet cement" moments, as they were called by David Mace. He astutely perceived these significant events for families as opportunities for the church to minister while the "cement" was still wet and workable, observing that work done later on, once the "concrete" had set, would be much more difficult, often requiring a "jack hammer approach" to change patterns in relationships.

### Weddings

Weddings commonly bring the first contact that an emerging family unit has with a church. Marriage offers a prime ministry moment as many couples want a "church wedding," even though they may rarely attend worship services. Clergy can attest to the large number of inquiries they get to perform a wedding ceremony because they have an attractive sanctuary. This request in itself can be viewed as an opportunity for ministry rather than a nuisance.

Faith Lutheran Church in Troy, Michigan, welcomes unchurched couples to be married in their sanctuary if they will allow the church to minister to them by participating in premarital counseling, attending a 13-week premarital enrichment experience, and going to adult inquiry classes. In this way they develop an acquaintance with a couple that often continues after the ink on the certificate dries and the bridal gown is stored. Couples experience this church's actions as caring for them and supporting their marriage.

### Childbirth

When babies come, parents continue to look to the church for help and support in training their children. When a congregation takes time to reach out to parents and children through a "baptismal ministry," families feel significant and cared for at a key moment in their lives. This ministry also may help to reduce the one-half of all children baptized in our congregations who are lost to our church before they reach school age (*Alive*, May 4, 1987).

In seeking to do this, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Belvidere, Illinois, has implemented a "Ministry to Moms"



in which one of our trained Stephen Ministers visits each new mother in the congregation in her own home a week or two after the baby is born. A follow-up call is made a few weeks later to determine any needs or problems. Two or three meals are also offered to the new parents through the Helping Hands Ministry. As a result of this outreach one young mom was overheard to say, "No church has ever cared for me like this church—and we weren't yet full-fledged members!"

### Babies, Toddlers, Pre-school and School-age Children

Attending to families with young children is key to helping them feel cared for by the church. This support can take the form of a weekly "Mom's Day Out," as well as programs that enhance and encourage parenting skills for young children. "Mom's Time Out," a class offered by Cross View Lutheran Church in Edina, Minnesota, meets weekly, giving community mothers an opportunity for study, discussion and support. Child care is also provided, featuring a structured learning program for older preschoolers.

Churches need to be careful not to underestimate the importance of their ministry to children. In one survey of 288 parents, mothers and fathers listed the children's ministry as the number two reason for joining their church. (Preaching was number one by a slim margin.) Staff members perceived preaching as much more important than did families, with 90 percent of the staff members and 78 percent of parents saying that preaching is the most important reason for joining a church (*Children's Ministry*, July/August, 1994).

Faith Lutheran Church in North Palm Beach, Florida, is another church that has given special attention to the problems of children and their families. According to Pastor John Frerking, this congregation began to think about children not as a problem but as a potential. Noting the large number of latchkey kids in their community, they began an after school program where children were not only kept safe, but were taught Bible stories helping them understand the Christian way of life (Heinecke, Hunter & Luecke, 1991).

### Christian Day Schools

Congregations offering Christian education for children in a day school may have even greater opportunities to minister to families. At a time when parents are becoming increasingly disenchanted with education proffered in public schools, as well as being concerned for their child's moral and physical safety in this environment, Christian schools offer an attractive alternative. Because parents make

a conscious choice to send their child to a Christian school, it is natural to assume that many are also interested in help with their home life. Christian schools who recognize this factor further enhance their ministry by intentionally pursuing activities to strengthen family relationships.

Schools can offer parenting programs through regular PTL meetings, as well as encourage togetherness through family fellowship activities. Ministry to the whole parish is further enhanced if school and nonschool families are invited to participate in these events. When Immanuel, Belvidere, noted that only one-half of the eligible children were enrolled in the day school, the congregation opened PTL programs to school and nonschool families alike with encouraging results. Events have included a yearly Back-to-School Picnic, an All Saints' Party, rollerskating for the family, and parent education programs.

### Confirmation

Church bodies with the tradition of confirmation have an additional ministry milestone from which to reach young adolescents and their families. This key moment in a young person's life frequently gets parents refocused on their child's religious education. This occurs at the same time they are generally experiencing anxiety about the looming teen years. Ministry opportunities abound during this time frame if only a church knows how to take advantage of them.

Some of the most successful ministries to parents of young teens combine parent participation in confirmation classes along with parenting classes or retreats. Chapel of the Cross Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri, involves a high level of parent participation with students in its weekday confirmation program. A similar approach is used at Immanuel, Belvidere, in what is called "Confirmation Sunday School." The individualized, interactive nature of these programs gets parents and kids talking together as they study God's Word.

An additional element of the confirmation process at Immanuel, Belvidere, is a yearly retreat for parents of eighth graders held concurrently with the last retreat confirmands have with the pastor before confirmation. At this time parenting concerns are addressed in a timely fashion—and often with nostalgic emotion—as mothers and fathers prepare to launch their young teen into other social contexts.

### Crisis Concerns

Finally, the day-to-day, week-to-week, year-to-year connections that a church can have with families make any crisis situation more significant. Even individuals without this

connection frequently turn to the church when they are in trouble. Pastors see members whom they have not seen in months when there is a diagnosis of cancer. Pastors are often the first to be called when a death occurs. Even times of financial crisis can motivate a family to contact a church for assistance. Unfortunately, people have not always found the help they are seeking for themselves and their families when they have contacted a congregation.

Churches who offer basic support groups for those experiencing divorce, death or alcohol dependency are in a good position to meet the needs of many hurting people. Immanuel, Belvidere, offers Rainbows for children experiencing loss through death or divorce; Helpmates for those who have lost a spouse through death or divorce; and Stephen Ministry to meet various individual concerns. From time to time, as need and leadership have allowed, we also have had support groups for parents of children with learning disabilities and for those struggling with chemical dependency issues.

### A Consistent Approach

Family milestones offer significant occasions for getting people's attention, but a consistent framework of educational events and support structures is needed to sustain effective ministry. Adult education in the church offers a primary opportunity for helping people grow in their understanding of God's design for the family, but it needs to be more than a video on parenting or annual marriage retreat. Along with classes on the Bible, doctrines of the church and topics such as prayer and evangelism, classes are needed to flesh out, in practical ways, what Christian family life looks like in the last part of the twentieth century. Options for learning include, but are not limited to, the following topics: Christian Marriage, Parenting Young Children, Parenting Teens, Finances for the Christian Family, Christian Family Communication, and Grandparenting. At Immanuel, Belvidere, classes exploring these topics and other family concerns are offered periodically during a three-year cycle.

### Encouraging Supportive Relationships

In classes designed to help people with their family life, intentional effort also needs to be made to assist participants in making connections with other class members, for example, parents of toddlers meeting other parents of toddlers, and newlyweds meeting others newly married. As connections made through classes are encouraged and nurtured, participants help each other live a Christ-like lifestyle in an unChristian world. They can understand that they are not alone in their struggles by identifying with others who can empathize with their life situations.

### Timing

Special attention needs to be given to offering family-centered learning options at times when today's busy families are most likely to attend. For many, this is Sunday morning because this day of the week is already associated with worship. Meaningful, need-centered educational opportunities offered at this time, along with attractive nursery care and Sunday school for children, often meet with success. For those churches featuring midweek education for children, evening opportunities for adults offered at the same time can be quite effective.

These time slots also offer possibilities for periodic intergenerational activities, with adults and children meeting together to study the Bible. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, Minnesota, invites parents and children on one Wednesday night each month to hear a special presentation, often by a guest speaker, on a topic that parents and children have been studying individually. On evenings when parents and children do meet separately, parents study the same lesson as their children in order to facilitate sharing "faith stories" at home. Intentional efforts are devoted to making spiritual growth a family event.

### Planning for Ministry

While a board or committee can plan family-centered learning, churches effective in family ministry often agree that it is easier and less confusing to have one person in charge of overseeing and administering an intentional ministry to families. A committee may assist this "Director of Family Ministries" by carrying out or supervising various components of the program, but the final responsibility for leadership usually rests best with one person who has the time, energy and passion to devote to such ministry.

In small churches a lay person or a pastor may oversee a family ministry initiative, but in larger congregations this responsibility may better be delegated to a staff person who has the clear mandate, as well as the time, to pursue the development of this ministry.

It is important to remember that family ministry is not just an add-on to a busy church calendar, but rather an emphasis in congregational life. For instance, the Director of Family Ministries may take the lead in advocating, pursuing and organizing child care during adult education opportunities to allow young parents to attend. Along with seeing that classes related to family life are offered, the Director of Family Ministry may also encourage and participate in planning worship experiences celebrating God's grace in family life. He or she also may develop opportunities for families to witness their love for Jesus to other families in the neighborhood as well as help less



fortunate families in times of trouble. What is important is that at least one designated person be responsible for seeing that the congregation is intentional in its ministry to families in its various activities and interactions with the community.

### Resources for Family Ministry

A plethora of resources exist for planning family educational events. To meet the demands of various budgets, there are books, study guides, audio tapes, and video tapes from which to choose. I prefer a mixed approach, with resources which can be used by individuals, by small groups, by large groups, or by teachers/leaders for enrichment.

### Church Library

The church library is a good place to have books, periodicals, audio tapes and video tapes as resources for family concerns and crises. A congregation's library can be staffed by volunteers. At Immanuel, Belvidere, a table display of library resources, often organized around a particular theme, is featured in the foyer every Sunday. For instance, a September display typically is devoted to books about school concerns. In October, the display may focus on grandparenting; in November, on family devotions; and in December on Christmas activities and literature.

It is helpful to reserve a portion of the library for resources to be used by leaders or teachers. Sample books, study guides and small group resources are examples. These may be previewed by people interested in leading a small group studying a special interest, such as single parents, college-age adults, or parents of teenagers. Video-assisted curricula are also available. Audio-visual materials can serve as a boost for the lay teacher who feels comfortable in leading a discussion, but who is not completely knowledgeable about a particular subject area.

### People Resources

People continue to be the greatest tool for helping families. Printed, audio and visual materials may come and go, but the "print" of Jesus on one's life continues to be the most compelling "resource" for ministry. People make other people feel welcome on Sunday morning and during the week. It is people who answer questions and express concern for family problems. It is people who show God's love to the hurting in our midst. Real, live people who share from their own experience and evidence a transparency about the ways they have seen God work in their lives are a continuing testimony to what God is doing—and wants to do—in families. As the Director of Family Ministries, I am continually on the outlook for people who

have been touched by God in their family life and who want to share His love with others.

### Conclusion

The church can foster strengths in families that are unattainable by any other institution. We can begin by proclaiming God's view of the family, not just as some man-made invention, but as the design which originated with Him. We can help husbands and wives, mothers, fathers and children grow in understanding how God wants them to live with each other. The church can shine brightly in an increasingly dark world as we proclaim the transforming love of Christ accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit which enables us to live as God has called us to live. Faith, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control make harmonious marriages and families. God specializes in giving these gifts to His people. Intentional family ministry is an important way to help people in families to know and live God's plan.

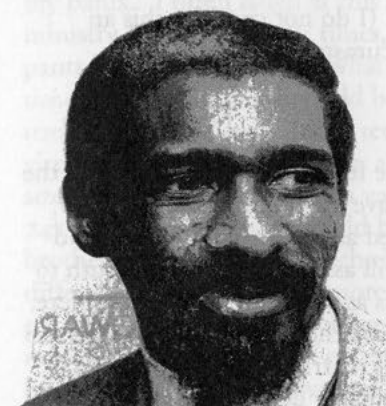
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## Paul Vasconcellos Equipping the Family Minister for Ministry



ONE OF MY GRADUATE STUDENTS, a Lutheran elementary school teacher, said to me recently that some of her parent-teacher conferences are somewhat different for her today in that she sometimes spends five minutes talking to the parents about their child's performance and 20 minutes listening to the parents talk about their family problems. Some weeks later I met a former student at a campground. He is serving as a Director of Christian Education and Minister to Youth in a large congregation. He emphasized repeatedly how his ministry to youth is also a ministry to families, and he offered a host of vivid examples of how the two are really inseparable. Last week, a parish pastor, in talking about the challenges of the pastoral ministry today, exclaimed that he has always seen his ministry as a family life ministry, and then he complained that he simply felt overwhelmed by the opportunities for family ministry, being perplexed by the complexity of some of the problems, and searching for a more meaningful and intentional ministry to the families of his parish.

Each of these recent conversations reminded me that almost all, if not all, professional ministers of the Church, be he or she a school teacher, DCE, youth worker, pastor, or

deaconess, are involved in one way or another in family life ministry and family education. I am also reminded of the tremendous challenges and opportunities all professional ministers in the Church have in touching the lives of families and family members with a relevant, meaningful, and intentional ministry. The problem is that most of us are not very well prepared to do this kind of ministry, and it does not take much for any of us to experience feelings of guilt, inadequacy, or perplexity. Such occasions certainly do not call for hand-wringing, retreat, feeling sorry for ourselves, or apologizing for incompetency. The question is how we can help and support each other in view of the family realities we are faced with in the Church today, fully recognizing that we cannot do everything or be everything to all people, but that we can do something and be a significant other to and for others in the Church.

### Preparation of Church Professionals

Let us look for a moment at the preparation of our professional church workers at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. As one who has been involved in Lutheran higher education for over 25 years on the undergraduate and graduate level, I am well aware of the dedication and commitment our Church has to provide the best possible education for church-work professionals. As times, circumstances, and culture have changed, I am also well aware of the many changes we have made in our curricula to meet the demands of the ministry today.

Dr. Paul Vasconcellos is a Professor of Family Ministry and a member of the Theology Department of Concordia College-Seward.



To prepare our professionals well we must change in order to meet relevantly the challenges of the day. I am reminded of this rather regularly at Concordia College-Seward as our Department of Education, for example, responds to the changes and requirements of state and national teacher accrediting organizations. The needs and opportunities for family ministry today call for additional training experiences for ALL our church professionals in training or in this field. I believe that every church professional today needs to have some formal training in family science and family ministry. This can happen either by formal coursework, workshops, or a combination of both. The elementary school teacher I referred to earlier had no coursework in the area of family until she entered our graduate program in family life ministry. I may add that she simply became tired of listening to all the problems while not knowing either what to say or what to do (although she did recognize the importance of the ministry of listening). The DCE identified earlier who had taken some of our courses in family ministry was sharing his enthusiastic support for both what he received from his training as well as the direction we have moved at the college. The parish pastor is my classmate, with both of us serving more than 30 years in the Church's ministry. We thankfully reminisced that at least we had some fine exposure to family ministry in our training through the leadership, devotion, and writings of the sainted Oscar Feucht and, outside of our synodical circles, David and Vera Mace. Times have changed for all of us, even as families have changed. In the world of academia and social research, a whole new field has emerged, the field of family science, a discipline which has much relevance for us in the Church's ministry.

There is more to this than just the call to add one or more courses or workshops to already overloaded curricula. Involved is a vision for the professional ministry of the Church. This vision is that there will be trained family life ministers and educators available throughout the geographical regions of the Church. Even as ALL professional church workers need some formal training in family science and family ministry, yet all professional church workers ought not, should not, and cannot focus their talents, efforts, and energy on intentional family life ministry. The Church needs, however, those professionally trained resource people available in parishes and/or circuits and/or regions and/or districts of the Church. What is important is that we have equipped ministers present where the grass roots ministry is taking place.

Consider this. Given the complexities and challenges of family life today, it seems appropriate that every large congregation with a multiple staff will have at least one of its ministers specifically trained in family life ministry and education. This person, of course, may be one of the

pastors, the DCE, the school principal, one of the faculty members—whoever is perceived to have special gifts and interests in this ministry. In smaller parishes the pastor may choose to be certified for his kind of intentional ministry. Or, there may be a consortium of congregations that would support a family life minister who would give leadership to developing an intentional family life ministry for congregations of a circuit or a region by being a resource person and family life educator for that region and/or community. Certainly district officials responsible for leadership in congregational education will want to be trained in family life ministry and education. (I do not consider this an option given our family circumstances today.)

### Impact

What difference will it make for the Church family and the families of the Church to have a significant group of professional ministers trained as family life ministers and educators? First of all, we will assume that there is truth to the cliché that the Church is as strong as its families. Here, it is also good to remind each other that not all families are in a state of crisis and not all marriages are falling apart. There are many, many reasonably healthy marriages and families in our society and Church. Certainly, these families need continued nurture and support so that they can remain relatively healthy and strong. Of course, we hear most about families in trouble, unhealthy, often alcohol-drug-ridden, severely dysfunctional families that take up so much of our attention and resources, often with little change. Wherever that family may be on the continuum of relatively healthy (every family is somewhat dysfunctional) to relatively unhealthy (every family has some strength), we argue that family ministry and family education will involve both prevention and remedial ministries. We argue fervently, however, that the ministry of prevention must be given priority because, in essence, this is the ministry to families which will have the best long-term results for families, for the Church, and for society as a whole.

We recognize, of course, that a massive, concerted, and consistent effort must be made to "sell" the families of our Church on the prevention approach. This indeed is a special challenge for us today. Moreover, it is a special challenge to convince even some of the professional ministers of the Church of a prevention rather than a remedial emphasis in ministry. The point is that the Church and its families do not need a flood of Church professionals who are also psychotherapists. It is true that we need a good resource of qualified Christian therapists for our people. The greater need, however, is for qualified family life ministers and educators who will develop and support a strong prevention ministry in our churches and communities. This certainly goes against the tide of our

"quick-this and quick-that" mentality. But it is that patient, consistent, long-term investment that eventually will pay off the best.

### Competencies

What competencies are needed for a person to equip herself or himself as a family life minister and family life educator? Such a question reminds me of my father who trained as a pilot in the 1920's. As he spoke of those early days of flying airplanes, he often used the expression "flying by the seat of my pants." I often laugh at this because in my 30 years of ministry I have had to, at times, "fly by the seat of my pants." If, however, this is what I did or do most of the time, I am afraid that I would be both incompetent and irrelevant. When my brother retired after 35 years as an airplane pilot, he was flying as a captain of a 747. Both in size and technology there is a vast difference between those 747s and my father's Fairchild built in the 1920's. My brother's training, highly technical and extensive, was vastly different from my father's more than 70 years ago. The parallel, of course, is that our ministry today is so much more complicated and, of necessity, our training needs to be so much more intensive and continuous.

The ministry of Word and Sacraments, the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, certainly is at the heart of the Church and its ministry, and certainly its ministry to families. This central focus must never be minimized. There certainly is no substitute for this prime mission and ministry of the Church to its families and the families outside the Church. By the same token, however, we cannot afford to ignore the sciences of the day, especially, for us, the family sciences. We need to understand family science in order to understand families better and work more effectively with them. Family science, for example, helps us to understand family systems and the other systems (including the church) to which the families relate and which impact on families. Such thinking changes both the way we view and do things.

There is also a relatively new professional called "the family life educator." In support of this profession and of family life education, there are excellent programs and instructional materials that are being made available. The Church needs to have its own family life educators, and the Church should utilize some of these good and available materials, as well as produce more of its own. The family minister and educator needs not only to understand the family and the individual life cycles, but how to minister to and meet some of those poignant needs of individuals and families as they pass through the cycles of change. They need to know how to educate in terms of lifespan education. This would also include understanding some of the basics of adult education, as well as educating the adolescent and the child. Like

any other professional minister in the Church, the family life minister and educator needs a combination of native ability and professional training and experience to meet the challenges of the ministry today.

Who may seek that specific training as a family life minister and educator? Anyone already trained, and in good standing, as a professional minister in the Church who believes he or she has the interest and abilities to function in this particular intentional ministry can take this initiative. There may be laymen or laywomen who would like to pursue this training so they may assist in ministry to families in the parish, circuit, or district.

### Concordia's Family Ministry Studies

How may one receive training as a family life minister and family educator? Concordia College-Seward has a program available for those who wish this kind of training. Concordia offers two training modes. A person may choose to enroll in Concordia's Graduate School and pursue the Master of Science degree in Family Life Ministry. Or, one who is not interested in pursuing a graduate degree but is interested in a guided curriculum in continuing education may enroll in the certification program offered through the Lutheran Institute on Aging and the Family associated with Concordia College-Seward.

What are the goals of Concordia's family life ministry training program? The goals, in general, are to enable one to gain a contemporary knowledge of family science; to explore models for Christian family ministries; to gain insights about the challenges and opportunities of ministering in a society which is experiencing rapidly changing family structures; to have a knowledge of family resources and approaches for use in congregational and school ministries; to increase competence in providing ministry to families in congregations and schools; and to be academically prepared as a family life educator.

What will one study by enrolling in one of Concordia's family ministry tracks? Generally, the student will study a theology of the family, family science, and family education. The Masters Degree program is a 36 semester hour program, of which 27 hours are required courses. Required courses include Life Span Development; Family Life Ministry; Educational Research; Theology, Theory and Dynamics of Family Relations; Foundations of Christian Marriage and Family Counseling; Ministry to Dysfunctional Families: Assessment and Intervention; Ministry to the Chemically Dependent: Intervention and Treatments; Life Span Education; and Family Resource Management. The remaining nine hours may be taken as either three elective supporting courses, an independent study and two supporting courses, or a thesis and one supporting course.



These courses are also structured as workshops so that both the graduate student and students taking the workshop(s) for Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credits may participate simultaneously. Graduate students will not only participate in the workshops but also do readings, papers, and projects via a rigorous pre-and-post workshop schedule. CEU students who wish to be certified as a family life minister will do all the workshops and some of the readings and assignments associated with the various courses. The required courses and workshops are offered during a three-week period during the month of June. One course (five workshops) is offered in one week. The student may elect to take one, two, or three courses during a summer. (The one exception is the course on Educational Research. If this course is taken on the Concordia campus, it will have to be taken during a regular second or third summer session.) As indicated previously, graduate students complete a total of 36 hours of course work, or 33 hours plus an independent study, or 30 hours plus a thesis. CEU students who wish certification as a family life minister-educator will complete a total of 45 workshops with some course work.

A special feature of Concordia's program is that students who complete either the Masters Degree or the Certification for Family Life Ministry will meet the academic and content requirements for certification as a Family Life Educator by the National Council on Family Relations. The NCFR is the only organization in the United States which certifies Family Life Educators. Concordia's program is recognized by this well-respected national organization.

Concordia's family life ministry program was designed with the busy church professional in mind. We recognize that most people are not able to leave their place of ministry over an extended period of time. Therefore, each course is offered in a one-week block (Monday-Friday), and three courses are offered each June. Therefore, it is possible to earn a total of 27 graduate hours over a three-year period. For example, during June of 1995, the following three courses will be offered: Chemical Dependency: Intervention and Treatment; Life Span Family Education; and Family Resource Management. Again, students interested in CEUs should remember that each course is made up of five workshops. A student may attend as many workshops as he or she wishes, up to 15 workshops over a three-week period. CEU credit will be assigned in accord with the number of workshops attended. Furthermore, for the graduate student, additional hours may be earned at Concordia through elective courses offered during the second and third summer sessions, through taking courses by independent study, or by taking courses at a nearby college or university and transferring credit (up to 12 hours of equivalent course work may be transferred).

Students have six years to complete the Masters Degree program, and some may take the same amount of time, or less, to complete the CEU certification program. Ministers who wish to give consideration to being certified in family life ministry may wish also to consider the following factors. Most of the professional ministers currently enrolled in Concordia's program have the enthusiastic support of their congregations and/or schools. Currently, there is a fine cross-section of professional ministers enrolled in both the Masters and CEU Certification programs—pastors, teachers, DCES, youth workers, a director of church music, and a lay pastoral assistant in charge of caring ministries. Two public school nurses entered the program this summer because of the relevancy of the workshops to their particular ministry. Feedback we are receiving from students is positive, encouraging and most supportive. In essence we are told that the program is focused appropriately; it is relevant; it has immediate application to where these folks are doing their ministry. One reason for positive feedback is that Concordia draws not only from the expertise of its own faculty, but also from the expertise of others beyond the Concordia campus.

Concordia began planning this program in 1987. Noted experts in the field of family science and family therapy were consulted. In the summers of 1991 and 1992, a few experimental workshops pertaining to family ministry were offered. The response of the participants was most positive and encouraging. In 1993 Concordia initiated its Master of Science degree program in Family Life Ministry. We are witnessing God's blessings on this field-driven and field-intensive program. We believe that if you decide that the focus of this training fits your interests, talents, abilities, and your present and/or future ministry, you will not be disappointed.

Students who wish to have more detailed information about the Master's Degree program in Family Life Ministry may write or call Concordia's Admissions Office and request a current Graduate Catalog. Students who have questions about graduate study in Family Life Ministry or other concerns about this area of ministry may contact Dr. Shirley Bergman, Director of the Lutheran Institute on Aging and the Family, Concordia, Seward, or the author of this article at Concordia College, Seward. Students who are interested in earning CEUs and/or who are interested in being certified as a Family Life Minister through the Institute on Aging and the Family, and/or who are interested in being certified as a Family Life Educator through the National Council on Family Relations may call or write Dr. Shirley Bergman.

## book reviews

THE FAMILY, A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home by Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991.

The authors of this book invite their readers to join them "in the demanding task of integrating biblical and social-science knowledge about the family." It is an invitation that, in this reviewer's judgment, merits acceptance.

The authors use social science theory and data about family issues whenever they contribute meaningfully to our understanding of how things are. Then, in each area of analysis, they turn to Christian/biblical models and norms to discuss how things ought to be. For example, regardless of the evidence that different societies grant social acceptability to different standards of behavior, the authors challenge the William Graham Sumner dictum that "the mores make anything right." Cultural "normality," they explain, is not to be confused with God-pleasing morality and Christ-like standards of behavior.

The authors hold that neither the traditional patriarchal family model nor the modern open family model reflect the biblical ideal of marriage and family. Instead, the criteria for building the Christian/biblical type family should include: a) unqualified commitment both to the institution of marriage and to constructive relationships within the family, b) caring and concerned communication, c) believed and practiced forgiving grace, d) mutual submissiveness and altruistic empowerment (instead of the widely promoted self-idolatry which denies wholesome integration to so many of our families), and e) role adaptability to cope with the complexities of contemporary society.

Christians should not assume that the self-serving, secularistic romantic model of mate selection has automatic merit by virtue of its popularity and prevalence. This model, so taken for granted throughout the western world, makes little if any allowance for family involvement or ecclesiastical guidance in the important matter of choosing one's life-long partner. God provides resources which help to prevent Christians from making unwise choices which virtually doom a marriage

before it has a change to grow into the wholesome union which God intends for it. These resources include prayer, Bible study, mutual commitment to basic Christian values, and caring in-put from loving family members and the Christian community acting as an extended family. The secular-minded reader will consider this approach naive and impractical, even old-fashioned (the ultimate put-down). But Christians who sincerely seek God's blessing will be well advised to accept it as the one model which brings divine resources to build and strengthen the bonds between the believing, yet frail and sinful, persons that make up any human, Christian family.

The authors present a persuasive biblical case for seeing both parents and children as being in a mutually empowering "growth toward maturity" mode. This is in contrast to other models which emphasize power and control. Thus maturity is defined, not as being, but as a life-long becoming in which all members of the family are in a continuing process of growing up into Christ who is the Head. Not to be misunderstood, this mode does not require the relinquishing of parental authority.

If a person is looking for a definitive or polemical analysis of current controversial family issues like non-marital cohabitation, abortion, or homosexuality, this book does not provide it. It does, however, include a thoughtful discussion of the debate concerning gender roles, emphasizing that this debate is a modern and western phenomenon, since "in most societies throughout history males and females developed their respective roles quite naturally."

Since the theological treatment of each issue in this volume is framed in terms of the biblical formulas of sin/grace and Law/Gospel, most readers will find this well-written analysis of the family, viewed from the Christian perspective, to be "echt Lutherisch."

W. Theophil Janzow  
Professor Emeritus  
Concordia College-Seward

FAMILIES AT THE CROSSROADS: BEYOND TRADITIONAL AND MODERN OPTIONS by Rodney Clapp. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Two things may be said for author Rodney Clapp: he is fair, and he challenges everyone. At some time in this thought-provoking book, Clapp challenges the church, government, liberals, conservatives, traditionalists, modernists, feminists, and virtually everyone else who has some preconceived notions about family structure, relationships, and function.

His most basic challenge is to the idea that the "traditional," nuclear American family is first of all the biblical family model, and second, that this family unit is the primary structure of the church

and society. Tracing the history of the "traditional" family to the beginnings of the Industrial Age, Clapp asserts that this is only one of a number of family forms that are recorded in Scripture and have existed at various times in history.

In reading and understanding Clapp, the reader must above all wrestle and come to terms with Clapp's central principle, that the Church (the spiritual family), not the biological (physical) family, is the basic family form. The core of this thesis is stated in two "declarations." Clapp presents "the negative declaration: The family is not God's most important institution on earth . . . (and the) positive declaration: the church is God's most important institution on earth." He underlines these declarations thus: "The family is not the primary vehicle of God's grace and salvation for a waiting, desperate world . . . the church is the social agent that most significantly shapes and forms the character of Christians . . . and the church is the primary vehicle of God's grace and salvation for a waiting, desperate world . . . we cannot put Jesus first and still put family first." It is from the Christian's primary membership in the Family of God that life and activity (including the biological family) flows. The first empowers the second.

The second major premise presented in Clapp's book is this: the greatest problem with the American family today is that it has been overrun with a market, consumer mentality in which each member operates from a basis of self-interest rather than a concern for the health of the whole. The American family has lost a sense of purpose, and the sheer pursuit of intimacy is not enough to cause families to prosper.

Theologically, Clapp exhibits an understanding of Law and Gospel that should sound positive to most Lutherans. His views on the purpose and structure of the Christian family come from a very tough-minded biblical and Christian point of view.

Some of Clapp's views in the closing chapters on how the mission role of the family may be realized were, in this writer's view, somewhat limited and perhaps not as well developed as some of his earlier, theological perspectives.

*Families at the Crossroads* is the optimistic vision of a man who believes that ". . . within the church, Christian nuclear families can resist the social forces that would remake the family in the image of the economic exchange model," and that "we cannot be Christians individually without being Christians together, we cannot be Christian family without being linked to other Christian families."

Jay Musfeldt  
Director of Christian Education  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Salem, Oregon

continued on next page



PARENTING WITH PURPOSE by Roger Sonnenberg. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992.

Parenting is one of the toughest yet most rewarding jobs life offers. Every parent wants to be a good parent, but how? How does Christian faith play a role?

*Parenting with Purpose* is a video-based Bible study that helps parents review fundamental characteristics of healthy Christian families, based on the research by Nick Stinnett and associates. The course explores from a Gospel perspective these characteristics: commitment (includes discipline issues), time spent together, communication, appreciation, conflict resolution and shared Christian faith. From each of the six sessions parents will walk away with specific, tangible ideas for strengthening their family life.

The course is called "video based" because there is more to it than watching a video for an hour. A given class time includes about 20 minutes of video, shown in segments from two to eight minutes. The video segments introduce Bible study

and discussion. The materials suggest breaking the class into small groups of three to five so that individuals will have more of an opportunity for participation. The leader's guide is user friendly. It provides a clear path for what to do, how to do it, and how much time to allow. Minimal preparation is required of the leader.

Preview the video used in each session because it serves as a catalyst for discussion. Real life vignettes from four "video families" spark discussion by providing a look at common occurrences in family life. Participants feel free to critique the video families in a way that they would not if they were dealing with personal situations. In a few cases the video provides an open ended conflict situation for the class to resolve.

Discussion is an essential part of every session. The questions are very purposeful and will lead the class to desired conclusions. This sharing between class members is an important element to the success of the course and helps make it enjoyable. To help build relationships between parents, *Parenting with Purpose* provides parents an op-

portunity to commiserate, celebrate, and encourage each other in their Christian faith as well as in their parenting. If anything, the course provides too much material. Let the discussion flow rather than trying to cover everything.

The \$189.95 price tag is a good value when you consider the number of families that will participate over the six sessions and the potential for multiple uses in the local church, including an evangelism tool to parents in the community. *Parenting with Purpose* is a ministry resource to use with all family structures: two-parent, single-parent, and grandparent-led households.

*Parenting with Purpose* includes a 90-minute video, a leader's guide, reproducible class materials, and take-home leaflets.

**Stephen J. Carter**  
Vice-Chairman, LCMS Family Initiative and  
Executive Vice-President of Editorial  
Concordia Publishing House



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