

A THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE FOR FAMILY MINISTRIES

As God's ambassadors in His mission of reconciling all things unto Himself in Christ, we in the Seventh-day Adventist Church face a unique and demanding challenge. In a society characterized by broken and alienated relationships we must become living and trustworthy expressions of God's love. This challenge requires a church strategy in light of the fact that Adventist marriages and parent-child relationships are fracturing at an alarming rate. We need to provide a ministry that enables its membership to become living extensions of God's self-giving love. A ministry which effectively enables people to express genuine love must begin at the most basic levels of relationships—those learned and acquired in the home and family environment.

Historically Adventists have always affirmed that such ministry has a vital role in the final proclamation of the gospel. We have traditionally respected and given full support to the concept of marriage and family life as a sacred gift from God to humanity. As indeed we see that the time has come for God's last call to His grace, a family ministry must by necessity become an urgent, vital, and integral function of church life and outreach. We believe this basic affirmation for a ministry in marriage and family life is deeply grounded in the following Scriptures and Adventist doctrine and experience.

On The Nature Of God

We affirm that the God of Scripture is the eternal "I am" whose essential nature is that of self-giving love. Thus He reveals Himself to man as existing in a perfectly harmonious and loving triune relationship, indicating that love can only find expression through the mutuality of people in relationship. We also affirm that He is the Creator of the universe, creatively bringing into existence all things to express His nature of perfect harmony and love in relationships. Thus all creation reveals His glory.

Exodus 3:14; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Psalms 33:6,9; John 1:1-5, 9, 14; Psalms 19:1-6.

On The Nature Of Persons

Scripture instructs us on our self-understanding. We, as males and females, were created by God to reflect His image. In our creation we were given the capacity to exist in harmonious and loving relationships, with the purpose of reflecting His own relational nature and thus bringing glory to Him. Scripture affirms that men and women were not to exist in isolation but in intimately satisfying interpersonal relationships. These relationships were to be carefully safeguarded as man and woman sustained a loving relationship with their Creator.

Genesis 1:26, 27; Genesis 2:15-25.

On The Fall And Sin

Scripture describes the fall of man and woman primarily as a falling out of relationship. A loving and trusting relationship with their Creator was not sustained; therefore, neither could they sustain their own relationship of trust and love. After the fall, mistrust, hostility and estrangement damaged human relationships. These broken relationships are a tragic expression of our human sinfulness. They are offensive to God because they are contrary to His very nature.

Genesis 3:2-19; 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 3:4-10.

On The Work Of Christ

Christ, coming to earth as God's own Son, emphasized God's relational nature. He came to man and woman as the Healer of their broken relationships and He Himself would be wounded in the

task of healing. Fully incarnating Himself with humanity, He willingly accepted and placed upon Himself all the consequences of a broken relationship with God, providing the opportunity for complete healing. In so doing He enabled man and woman to identify with and accept each other's brokenness, to acknowledge their sinfulness, and to accept Christ's redemptive healing in their lives. Christ is God's way of expressing His relational loving nature to humanity.

Matthew 3:17; Genesis 3:15; John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 2:14-18; 1 John 4:7-11.

On The Mission Of The Church

Christ established His church as an ongoing extension of His work in healing and restoring broken relationships. The church is not just an institution but a community of caring people involved in the creative task of bringing healing and restoration to alienated relationships.

However, in this task the church is not dependent on its own resources. Rather, the resources are divinely provided through the healing power of God's voice in His Word. Sensitive Christians, experiencing God's healing power in the process of sanctification, will be the channels through which God's voice speaks. Thus the church will incorporate into its evangelistic mission the sound of God's healing voice in the midst of human tragedy and brokenness. As the body of Christ the church must demonstrate that Christ is humanity's burden-bearer, thus winning the hearts and souls of men and women unto Himself.

Christ's own definition of the church's mission was "to make disciples." To make disciples is to be involved in the task of all relationships between men and women with God. The family is a major training center for discipling since it is within the family that a developing person first is introduced to living, caring, trusting and nurturing. Thus the church must continually enhance and strengthen the discipling process within families.

Matthew 10:1-8; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 5:21; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 12:27, 28; 2 Corinthians 3:18-20.

On The Kingdom Of God

We affirm Christ's prayer on the establishing of God's kingdom on earth: "Thy kingdom come." The present establishment of God's kingdom of grace through the actual and personal work of the Holy Spirit brings healing and restoration to the hearts and minds of men and women. The work of the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the triune God, is to enable all men and women to experience in the present a foretaste of the joys of restored relationships, to be experienced fully in God's kingdom of glory. The establishment of God's kingdom of glory on earth, will be characterized by all things being made new and all universal relationships perfectly restored.

Revelation 21:1-5; 1 John 3:23, 24; Galatians 5:22-26; Matthew 24:29-31; John 14:26, 27.

On Christian Lifestyle

We affirm that a sensitivity and ability to enrich personal relationships with self-giving love must permeate all of Christian life. Thus, Christian men and women will indeed be co-laborers with the Holy Spirit as He leads them to heal, enrich and nurture lives. Only then will Christian lifestyles be an extension of Christ's ministry of reconciliation. All church teaching and doctrine must enhance the Christian's sensitivity to work together with God in the task of healing and reconciling men and women to each other and to God. For instance, the doctrine of the Sabbath enables the Christian to share the Sabbath gifts of grace, rest, and time with individuals in troubled relationships. The doctrine of Christ's incarnation becomes a living dynamic in Christian lifestyle as the incarnate Christ manifests Himself in His disciples bringing healing and wholeness to each other and to society.

As the church seeks to fulfill its evangelistic mission, seeking to be a 'caring' church, it needs to strengthen its objectives for winning people to the church. At times we have placed too much emphasis on conveying information and communicating facts. However, this emphasis has frequently created only short-term loyalties to Christ and His church. Outreach must be relationship-oriented. Its goal is to bring people into genuine, lasting relationships based on self-giving love. Such a strategy of church outreach will bring to fruition the harvesting of others to the love of Christ and His church. An emphasis on relationships, especially those within the family, will bring maturation in Christ as new members are freed, nurtured, and enabled for service.

1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Acts 2; Matthew 28:18- 20; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3.

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