

LEADERSHIP IN FAMILY MINISTRIES

The home and family emphasis within the Department of Church Ministries endeavors to make the home a discipling center where family members by their relationships with each other are encouraged in their relationship with Jesus Christ and His church. The focus is on premarital guidance, strengthening marriage, and parent education with attention given also to extended family relationships, single parenting, step-family needs, and single living.

Family Ministries also provides an avenue for evangelistic outreach. Ellen White frequently addressed her strong convictions regarding the importance of family to the church and to society. "The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. . .," she writes. "The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 352).

The form that Family Ministries takes will be determined by the overall goals of the church, the felt needs of the congregation and the community, and the resources available. Specific approaches to family ministry may be sorted into three broad types or categories: education, enrichment and counseling.

Education. Substantial revelation concerning the divine purpose for families has been given. Practical principles for family living regarding the relationships of husbands, wives and children are found in Scripture. Churches can do much to integrate family life education into their regular calendar of prayer and other weekly meetings, Sabbath Schools, divine worship services, in the preaching program, and as members come together for fellowship. Study groups, seminars, workshops, lending libraries, and classes all may be used to educate members in every conceivable area of family life.

Enrichment. This process of enhancing family relationships through better communication, deeper understanding, and an improved ability to resolve anger and conflict focuses on the family as a system. Married couples, parents and children or the entire family group make gains together through sharing and interacting in various events and activities. Enrichment programs and activities help singles also, as they have family and relationship needs as well. All are part of a family system somewhere, even if that system is the larger church family. In a day and age when many people do not have extended families nearby, an enrichment group can become a surrogate extended family. When enrichment activity is carried on among individuals who are all part of the same church family, a spirit of community and cooperation is fostered.

Counseling. Some individuals and families are in such need as to require counseling, specialized work that is particularly tailored to assist them in resolving short-term or long-term personal or relational crises and difficulties. More trained counselors are needed, and more must be done to inform church members about the availability and appropriateness of individual, marital and family counseling. Where professional counseling is not available, a pastor with some training in this area may be able to provide basic help.

Ultimately Family Ministries is more than completing a checklist of programs, services or special events. The spirit of Family Ministries is seeking through each relationship to open the way for God to reach down and work His miracle of grace in every home and church community. Such a ministry is not only programmed but spontaneous; it manifests itself in loving families and warm, vibrant communities of believers.

Family Ministries Leader(s)

At the local church level Family Ministries is the responsibility of church leadership, working in conjunction with the Family Ministries Leader(s)—an individual or husband/wife team—whom the church has elected. Family Ministries leaders should be chosen not because they or their families

appear to be "perfect," but because they have a deep commitment to family relationships and desire to learn more about how God's grace can be demonstrated in everyday living in their homes.

Family Ministries Committee

To more effectively meet the needs, the church board may designate a Family Ministries Committee, chaired by the Family Ministries Leader. Although this committee should not be too large in order to remain effective, appropriate church leaders should be included as well as persons who have awareness and feeling for the varied needs of families within the church.

Those members who have faced traumatic life and family experiences and have grown spiritually through them may be valuable members of such a group or serve as a resource for it. The Family Ministries Committee serves as an advisory to and performs tasks as directed by the church board or the Church Ministries Coordinating Committee where the latter has been designated.

Responsibilities of Family Ministries Leader(s) and Committee

The leader(s) needs to work closely with Family Ministries Committee members who will assist, offer counsel, and share in the responsibilities for developing and implementing the goals of Family Ministries within the local church. The leader(s) and committee members will share the following responsibilities.

1. Assist church leadership in compiling family demographic data both within the church and in the surrounding community to clarify target groups for family ministry.
2. Assist church leadership in assessing the needs of the church members for family life information, education and training, counseling, and enrichment programs.
3. Encourage sensitivity to the needs of families and the impact of church programs upon them in terms of expenditure of time, energy, money, and other family resources.
4. Provide for the availability of premarital guidance to couples preparing for marriage.
5. Cooperate with the conference/mission Department of Church Ministries to implement the Family Ministries emphasis programs promoted by the department, and the annual Christian Home and Marriage Week and Family Togetherness Week voted as part of the World Church Calendar. Resources are distributed from the General Conference Department of Church Ministries and should be available through the local conference or mission office.
6. Cooperate with church leadership in designing, planning, and implementing additional family life features and programs as needed for both membership nurture and evangelistic outreach. The General Conference Department of Church Ministries suggests the following additional emphasis as a minimum:
 - a. Premarital guidance—available to all couples before their wedding.
 - b. Strengthening marriage—one program per year.
 - c. Parent education—one program every two years, or preferably, programs for parenting young children and parenting teens offered on alternating years.
 - d. Family worship—one program every five years.
 - e. Family finance—one program every five years.

Resources are available from the General Conference Department of Church Ministries for each of these areas of emphasis and may be ordered through the local conference or mission office.

7. Foster a climate of warmth and closeness, engendering a sense of "familiness" in the congregation and a redemptive spirit toward families in need of support and encouragement.