

MORE IDEAS FOR FAMILY MINISTRIES

GIVE A FAMILY STRENGTHENING EMPHASIS TO EXISTING CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Without adding new programs to an often already overcrowded church calendar, a family strengthening emphasis can be given to existing church services, programs and activities.

Sabbath School

- Include occasional features in adult, children and youth divisions which deal with specific family themes.
- Invite fathers or mothers as guest speakers with features for junior, earliteen, youth Sabbath Schools on family life themes.
- Have a panel of parents and a panel of youth discuss family issues.
- When teaching the Sabbath School lesson, use family illustrations and make applications to fit family settings.
- Give opportunity for young mothers/parents to study their Sabbath School lesson together in a corner of the room where their children are being taught theirs.
- Give children opportunities to present special music, features or other presentations to the adult Sabbath School.
- Have whole families meet together for song service and a short multigenerational feature before dividing by age group.
- Organize parent support groups arising out of the Sabbath School context, such as a cradle mothers' group.

Worship Service

- Preach sermons on specific family topics.
- Use examples from different family living situations as sermon illustrations. Listeners identify with the human interest aspect and receive encouragement to grow even if not all such illustrations have successful endings.
- Provide a "Children's Corner" during the worship service with children's stories or other features tailored especially for the young. Include points which can be discussed at home.
- Prepare a children's activity sheet or a special children's church bulletin which draws young people into the various aspects of the worship service.
- Take into account the needs of children, adults, singles and marrieds when planning the worship service and selecting music.
- Have couples or families lead various aspects of the worship—providing special music, reading scripture, announcing hymns or praying.
- Involve youth in leading congregational worship or serving as ushers or greeters.
- Insert a time of fellowship at the beginning of the worship service when worshippers may greet one another.
- Provide opportunity for members to give ideas and suggestions of sermon topics and other aspects of the service which could have a more positive effect on marriage and family living.
- Include a bulletin insert with special thoughts from Bible and Spirit of Prophecy on family living.
- Distribute a handout at the close of the sermon with practical ways the message of the morning can be put into practice at home.
- Throughout the church year acknowledge and affirm the various kinds of families—newlyweds, couples with small children, families with teenagers, couples in mid-life, single parents, divorced persons, step families, multigenerational families, widows and widowers, and singles who have never been married.
- Provide child-care from time to time for single parents so that they can enjoy the full blessing of the worship service.
- Build into the yearly worship program appropriate emphasis on the secular and church calendars of special days such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christian Home and Family Altar Day.
- Use responsive readings on the family from the hymnal or use other appropriate scripture

passages.

- Have a special time of commitment for couples/families at the close of the worship service.

Prayer Meeting or Mid-week Service

- Study biblical marriage and family themes, i.e., marriage covenant, love, forgiveness, mutual submission, fruits of the Spirit in the home, using spiritual gifts in the family, family worship.
- Study accounts of Bible fathers, mothers, children or whole families.
- Select for study "family" portions of Spirit of Prophecy books such as The Ministry of Healing, Education or entire books such as The Adventist Home.
- Pray for specific church families by rotation.
- Invite testimonies of God's blessing in family living.
- If families with children do not regularly attend, plan a monthly mid-week family night with spiritual activities and features of interest to children and youth, perhaps beginning with supper together.
- Have a family worship demonstration as part of the mid-week service, with selected families demonstrating interesting and effective family worship ideas.
- Sing the special hymns for families from our hymn books.
- Feature a series on one of the family topics that is of high interest to the congregation and show how the Bible is practical to every day family living.

Adventist Youth Meetings

- Plan programs around topics of interest to youth regarding family living, building relationships/friendships, communication with parents, handling and resolving conflict, dating, preparing for marriage, etc.
- Have Pathfinders or other AJY groups earn the honor in Family Life.
- Plan some family-oriented events periodically at Pathfinder and other AY meetings such as socials or outings—camping, hiking.
- Have a panel discussion with two panels—one of teens and one of parents. Let them ask each other "What I've wanted to know but never dared to ask. . ." questions.
- Have a Pathfinder open house when parents are invited to see what the young people are doing.
- Invite parents to help on a short term basis, to teach a craft, a progressive classwork component, or an honor.

Meetings With Church Board and Councils

- At one of the regular meetings, plan a brain-storming session for the Church Board and/or Church Ministries Coordinating Committee (or the Sabbath School Council, the Youth Ministries Council, the Personal Ministries Council, the Board of Elders, etc.). Assign the topic "How Our Church (Sabbath School, Youth Group, Board of Elders, etc.) Can Strengthen Families." Make specific plans to implement ideas and suggestions that arise.
- Plan a few minutes periodically for in-service education of council members. Study topics such as communication, temperaments, self-worth, conflict resolution which will improve the quality of church family life and spill over to individual families.
- Provide opportunities for families of board/council members to fellowship together to build better bonds and feelings of "family" among leaders.

Church Social Meetings

- Focus different programs throughout the year on various aspects of family living—marriage, mothering, fathering, grandparenting, and include programs that focus on family clustering groups (which might include all church members divided into "super families").
- Build church social programs around family holidays in the calendar such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day.
- Plan a round-robin social that moves among several homes with each family responsible for one game or activity and end up at the church for refreshments.
- Select films, videos and other programs carefully so as to convey and deepen Adventist family

values.

- Sponsor a "Family Talent Night" with various families in the churches presenting the combined or separate talents of parents and children.
- Create a place mat for Sabbath potluck with activities and puzzles that will get the church family communicating multigenerationally.

Evangelistic Meetings

- Present doctrinal messages around family themes such as the fatherhood of God, making our earthly homes a foretaste of our heavenly home, being faithful to our family promises and covenants as God has been faithful to His eternal covenant with us, presenting the Sabbath as a time for rest and renewal of relationships between God and ourselves and between family members, and family finance and Christian stewardship.
- Include talks on family life as a part of evangelistic meetings.
- Feature families during meetings (see above on the Worship service). Let families or couples present special music or give personal testimonies.
- Give special Bible studies on family living to candidates.
- Distribute handouts and literature on family life to evangelistic congregations.
- Plan some visitation time for families as wholes as well as visiting individuals within families. Endeavor to work for the family as a unit.
- Organize visitation using several from a family as a visitation team.

Communion Services

- Designate a special place for couples and/or families who wish to share the ordinance of footwashing together.
- Explain to families with unbaptized children how to teach their children the meaning of the communion service.
- Plan a special time when children with their parents may sit together with unconsecrated emblems and sample them for the purpose of instructing their curious and inquiring minds.
- As children grow older, let fathers wash the feet of their sons and mothers the feet of their daughters to teach them and to give them a sense of specialness and inclusion in the service.
- Have a simulated passover meal as families before the communion, explaining the symbols and the meaning to the Hebrew family and the new understanding brought by Christ to the Communion.

Baptismal Services

- Celebrate the candidate's membership in his/her own family as well as membership in the church family.
- Include the entire family in the preparation of a child for baptism, providing opportunity for parents to recommit themselves, siblings to look back or forward to their own decision as well as making sure the child to be baptized understands the step he is about to take.
- Give family members opportunities to share feelings about their loved one's baptism by song or personal testimony.
- When young people are baptized, meet with the family to pray and share ways in which all can be supportive of the newly baptized young person.
- Include a "welcome to the family" by giving each member some special paper as stationery on which to write words of encouragement and welcome to be part of a scrapbook keepsake for the new member.
- Where possible, baptize members of the same family together. Some find a special sense of unity in being baptized simultaneously.
- Encourage baptismal candidates to invite their extended family members to be present. Recognize the potential of this event to give renewal and stimulation to family relationships.
- Encourage families to remember and commemorate baptismal dates of family members at home.
- Remember in a special way at church the anniversaries of current members' baptisms.

Child Dedication Services

- This is an occasion which naturally generates warm feelings of familiness throughout the congregation. It affords an excellent opportunity for a special message about the importance of a family, child-rearing, parenting, etc., in the sermon or in a special feature.
- Make the dedication service special with an appropriate charge and words of encouragement to the parents.
- Offer family members (siblings, parents, grandparents) the opportunity to share with the church family their joyful feelings over the presence of this little one among them.
- Record the dedication services and give the tape to the family. They will be able to remember and celebrate this event annually.
- Give the parents and child a special gift book (Child Guidance, The Adventist Home, or some other appropriate title).
- Prepare a special message for this dedicated child which he will later read (at age 11 or 12) which will encourage him to prepare for baptism.
- Give the family a folder which shows all the church has to offer in assistance to the parents and to their child as he/she grows.
- Make it a whole family event by including extended family as available in the dedication event.
- Make a scrapbook of photographs, the church bulletin of the day, dedication certificate, etc, that can be added to on the occasion of other significant events in the child's life.

Wedding Services

- Encourage the bride and groom to think of their family when planning their wedding. Perhaps they can include special words or thoughts of tribute to parents or other family members during the ceremony or at their reception.
- Provide engaged couples with premarital guidance, helping them to identify issues which they need to discuss and to develop the skills with which to manage their relationship successfully.
- Select and train one or two couples who enjoy being married to meet with the engaged pair to talk about what marriage means to them.
- Build wedding sermonettes around scriptural passages about marriage with practical application for the new couple.
- Recognize the potential of a wedding to be a time of togetherness and renewal for each of the families concerned. Encourage them to invite family members to this event.

Funeral Services

- Be sensitive to the special needs of the grieving family, anticipating their immediate and continuing physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs and providing for them in their time of loss.
- In preparing and delivering the various parts of funeral services, highlight those aspects of warmth and humanness in family living which characterized the deceased, giving relatives the opportunity to relive the treasured moments of family life together.

Vacation Bible School

- Build the VBS theme around the topic "Family."
- Include family living features to help children learn how to live successfully in their families.
- Involve families of children in VBS graduation ceremonies. Give opportunity for church families to mingle with non-church families over a fruit drink or during a graduation dinner or banquet.
- Conduct VBS in the evening conjointly with a family life program for parents.
- Where possible, consider using father-mother or grandfather-grandmother leader/teacher teams in VBS for the modeling effect it will have upon the children.
- Have a "parent" component so the whole family attends together.

Church Campouts

- Emphasize family strengthening at church retreats or family camps. Include special programs of Bible studies, nature studies, or social activities (games, recreation) which give parents and their children/youth opportunity to interact with each other.

Church Newsletters, Bulletins and Bulletin Boards

- Share encouraging news from the various families within the membership.
- Include articles, columns and features on family topics.
- Post items on bulletin boards which encourage families.

Church Library

- Build a family life lending library which includes books, periodicals, audio and video cassettes, and possibly even films.
- Feature a family life book/cassette-of-the-month. Give a promotional preview and encourage families to read/listen to the specially selected library item.
- Encourage members to read/listen to a selected book/tape by passing copies through the church using an attached routing list of names.

Lay Activities/Personal Ministries

- Encourage families to work together as teams for missionary activity. As parents join with their children to distribute literature, to ingather, to visit new interests, or shut-ins at home, there is a double blessing, upon themselves and upon those they visit.

Pastoral Visitation

- Pastors and local elders who visit with members in their homes, can be alert to individual family needs and opportunities created by significant family events such as weddings, births, baptisms, funerals and other life crises. During the visit, minister to the needs generated by these circumstances. Put members in touch with people, programs or resources which they can utilize.
- Make arrangements to visit families at worship time through the week or on Friday or Sabbath evening. Offer to lead the family in family worship, sharing creative ideas and suggestions to encourage them in this daily experience.

SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR SPECIFIC NEEDS

A formal program is not necessary for every family life need that surfaces in the congregation. Many responses will be informal and may be adequately met through one-to-one contacts or in the normal round of church activity. Carefully planned and presented programs are useful, however, 1) to instruct and inspire, 2) to expose participants to more effective models for relating, and 3) to provide opportunities for relational growth.

Programs may be conducted in a wide variety of settings and on different schedules reflecting the needs of the target audience and the particular aims and objectives. Programs for the general church may take the form of an annual family life Sabbath, weekend, or week coinciding with special times in the calendar year such as Mother's Day, Father's Day or in the church's calendar such as Christian Home Week or Family Altar Day.

Other programs may be multi-generational with families in the church or community as the target audience (or "super families"—made up of biological families joined by other church members for the duration of the program). Family camps provide an excellent setting for multi-generational activities.

Some family life programs will be focused on special topics. They may be single sessions or multi-sessions depending on the content and aims. Parent education classes may be held on an intensive weekend, for instance, or over an extended period, perhaps one night a week for a month or more. In one church the Cradle Roll/Kindergarten mothers met one Sunday morning per month at a Mothers' Brunch to share and study.

Experiential-type programs generally require longer periods of time. Marriage strengthening programs, for this reason, usually take a block of time—such as a weekend—to accomplish their goals of relational growth. And, while certain attitudinal changes may occur in a relatively short

time, behavioral changes require extended periods. Those kinds of programs, therefore, such as marital care groups, family clustering groups, divorce and grief recovery groups, which have behavioral change as part of their intention, may need continuing sessions for 6 to 12 months or more.

USING A FAMILY LIFE APPROACH IN OUTREACH

The great invitation we have to extend to others is to a place in the family of God. What better way to begin than with entry events (which may merge into pathways) that speak to family needs and provide non-members with an opportunity to become more acquainted with the church, its message, and its people. Bridges between the needs of families and the sharing of the gospel are too natural to be left unbuilt. Here are a few ideas:

Seminars on Topics of Community Interest

- Family finance
- Family stress management
- Caring for your aging parents
- Vacation Bible School
- You and your child (parenting classes perhaps associated with VBS)
- You and your teen
- Family health (This may take the form of Fun Runs, Aerobics, etc., that whole families can participate in together.)
- Family nutrition
- Temperament testing
- Singles enrichment
- Marriage enrichment
- Films series on family issues

Accenting "Family" Aspects of Calendar Holidays

- Mother's/Father's Day services (Poll the community for outstanding parents and honor them.)
- A Family for the holidays (Match lonely people in the community with caring church families willing to share their holiday celebrations with them.)

Programs/Support Groups Which Capitalize on Family Transitions/Stress Points

- Prenatal classes
- In-laws
- Newlyweds
- Preparing for marriage
- Making the most of retirement
- Your family and your handicapped child
- Stress management for teens
- Coping with loss and grief
- Parents' support group for chemically dependent youth
- Making it through mid-life
- Coping with divorce
- Helping children cope with divorce
- Meeting the challenge of single parenting

Acknowledging Special Family Events

"According to an article in the *New York Times* (June 1, 1984), when a baby is born, couples begin having 'sober thoughts of mothering and fathering, doctoring and proctoring, education and, for adults who do not belong to a religious institution, religion.'

"That's right, religion. Some psychologists suggest, and a sampling of what some have termed the 'unchurched' affirms, that 'often with parenthood come the first real spouse-to-spouse

discussions of religion. They are frequently followed by membership in a church or synagogue.' "Kids are the catalysts for tremendous growth in adults, particularly when it comes to such things as religion,' said William Damon, a psychology professor at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

"Parents must transmit to their offspring what the social order is all about,' Professor Damon said. 'And to some extent that means parents must first figure out what they believe in.'" (*Signs of the Times*, April, 1985, p. 7.

A packet of materials might be assembled in an attractive folder which could include items such as:

- An introductory subscription to a missionary magazine.
- A Bible Course enrollment card or first lesson of an actual study guide series.
- A description of a Cradle Roll program at the local S.D.A. church with an invitation to attend.
- A coupon for a gift copy of a children's book such as My Bible Friends.
- A sample copy of Our Little Friend, the tiny tot's Sabbath School paper.
- An invitation to any parenting programs, nutrition classes, VBS programs, marriage or family enrichment programs, etc. being offered by the local church.
- An appropriate letter from the pastor giving congratulations on the arrival of their new baby.