

 GUIDELINES

family
ministries

*Helping Families
Become Centers
of Faith Formation*

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General Board of Discipleship

FAMILY MINISTRIES

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Some paragraph numbers for and language in the Book of Discipline may have changed in the 2008 revision, which was published after these Guidelines were printed. We regret any inconvenience.

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Welcome

You are so important to the life of the Christian church! You have consented to join with other people of faith who, through the millennia, have sustained the church by extending God's love to others. You have been called and have committed your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to a position of leadership. This Guideline will help you understand the basic elements of that ministry within your own church and within The United Methodist Church.

Called to Spiritual Leadership

Each person is called to ministry by virtue of his or her baptism, and that ministry takes place in all aspects of daily life, in and outside the church. As a pastoral leader or leader among the laity, your ministry is not just a "job," but a spiritual endeavor. You *are* a spiritual leader now, and others will look to you for spiritual leadership. What does this mean?

First, *all* persons who follow Jesus are called to grow spiritually through the practice of various Christian habits (or "means of grace") such as prayer, Bible study, private and corporate worship, acts of service, Christian conferencing, and so on. Jesus taught his disciples practices of spiritual growth and leadership that you, as a disciple, are to share with others as they look to you to be a model and guide.

Second, it means that you always keep your eye on the main reasons for any ministry—to help others grow to a mature faith in God that moves them to action on behalf of others, especially "the least" (see Matthew 25:31-46). This is an aspect of "disciple making," which is the ultimate goal of all that we do in the church.

CULTIVATING VISION AND MISSION

As a spiritual leader, a primary function you carry is to help those you lead to see as clearly as possible what God is calling your church to be and to do. Ideally, your church council first forms this vision and then forms plans and goals for how to fulfill that vision. As a leader, you will help your team remain focused and accountable to honor the vision and goals to which the church is committed. You will help your team create and evaluate suggestions, plans, and activities against the measure: *Does this move us closer to our church's vision to bring others to God in this place and time?*

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCING

While there are appropriate and useful business-like practices that apply to church life, Christian practices distinguish the church as the church. In the United Methodist tradition, how we meet and work together is important. “Christian Conferencing” involves listening not only to each other, but also listening intently for the will of God in any given task or conversation. This makes prayer essential in the midst of “business as usual.” As Christians, we are called to “speak the truth in love.” This is a special way to speak in which we treat one another as if each of us were Christ among us. As a spiritual leader in your ministry area, you have the privilege and opportunity to teach and model these practices. By remembering that each of us is beloved of God and discerning the presence of God in all that the church does, every task becomes worshipful work.

THE MISSION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church, which means in part that every local church is interrelated through the structure and organization of districts, conferences, jurisdictions, and central conferences in the larger “family” of the denomination. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* describes, among other things, the ministry of all United Methodist Christians, the essence of servant ministry and leadership, how to organize and accomplish that ministry, and how our connectional structure works (see especially ¶¶125–138).

Our Church is more than a structure; it is a living organism. The *Discipline* describes our mission to proclaim the gospel and to welcome people into the body of Christ, to lead people to a commitment to God through Jesus Christ, to nurture them in Christian living by various means of grace, and to send persons into the world as agents of Jesus Christ (¶122). Thus, through you—and many other Christians—this very relational mission continues.

(For help in addition to this Guideline and the *Book of Discipline*, see “Resources” at the end of your Guideline, www.umc.org, and the other websites listed on the inside back cover.)

Your Job as Leader in Family Ministries

You have been selected to lead family ministries in your congregation. This job should fill you with hope as you find ways for God's love to be shared in homes in your congregation and community. As you read this Guideline, keep in mind what is meant by "family ministry." It is much more than planning a yearly meal for the whole congregation. Family ministry is ministry by, with, and for families.

Your job as the designated leader for family ministries in your congregation is to:

- Work with the other leaders in your congregation to plan and implement ministry in order to fulfill the church's mission of helping all persons become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- Address the needs of families in your church and community so that all may grow in the Christian faith and live both at home and at church as disciples of Jesus Christ.

I would invite you to enter into a time of prayer as you begin your task.

O God of all families, help me as I lead my congregation to be open to the many possibilities for family ministries within our congregation. Help me lead our congregation so that it can be an open door through which all families can come to know you. Help me work in such a way that my ego and my needs do not shape our ministries for families. Open my mind and those who will work in family ministries so that we can see all the needs of families, but do not let us be paralyzed by those needs. Let hospitality, graciousness, love, and kindness be our guide as we plan and work on behalf of families in our congregation and in our community. Amen.

A Biblical Foundation

God has entrusted tremendous power to human relationships. In the Scripture we see story after story of families. Think of the witness of Abraham and Sarah; or Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz; or Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; or Timothy, Lois, and Eunice. (See, for example, Genesis 18; Ruth 1-4; John 11:1-44; 2 Timothy 1:3-7.) Take a minute and think of the stories of biblical families that you remember. Make notes about what is seen regarding families and relationships in each of these stories.

Through these stories of biblical families we see God's interest in human relationship and God's purpose carried out sometimes through and sometimes in

spite of those relationships. We are called as God’s people, living in relation to others, to be loving and just, enabling one another to grow in faith.

If all operated according to God’s plan, there might be no need for family ministry. However, because we are human, the relationships with those closest to us are often broken by such simple things as lack of time, poor communication, and self-centeredness or by such complex issues as abuse. There is need in the family—as well as in the congregation—to proclaim and hear the good news.

AN AFFIRMATION FOR FAMILIES

This Guideline is designed to direct, motivate, and assist you. What follows is a brief description of your tasks. After this job description, you will find further information for performing the tasks laid out. Finally, there are models for ministry that may be helpful to you in your situation. Consider first the Affirmation for Families on page 8.

Job Description

- 1. Pray for the families** in your congregation and in your community. Begin your job as a leader in family ministry by intentionally praying for the families you currently serve and those you seek to serve through the ministries of your congregation. You will be a spiritual leader for your congregation in family ministries.
- 2. Collect information** on the families in your congregation and the families you seek to serve in your community. You will be one of the primary sources of information about families to other leaders in your congregation. Use surveys, personal interviews, and resource materials to study the needs of families in your congregation and your community.
- 3. Analyze how your congregation is serving families** in light of the mission and the process for carrying out our mission. The *Book of Discipline* states that “the local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs” (§201). Furthermore, the function of the local church is described:

The function of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to help people to accept and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God. Therefore, the local church is to minister to persons in the community where the church is located, to provide appropriate training and nurture to all, to cooperate in ministry with other local churches, to defend God’s creation and live as an ecologically responsible community, and to participate in the worldwide mission of the church, as minimal expectations of an authentic church (§202).

Affirmation for Families

We believe that the family is the primary community through which persons enter into life. Entry is made by diverse means among which are birth, adoption, and covenant. Through this primary community, persons are received in love and given their identity and self-worth. Persons are nurtured and guided in their growth and understanding of their spiritual and cultural heritages. They are encouraged to seek their vocation as children of God.

We believe that families are communities of commitment that are diverse in size, configuration, ethnicity, and culture. We believe these families have strengths and gifts that should be affirmed, celebrated, and supported. We believe that where families are is where the church needs to be.

We believe the mission of the family is human growth and faith development. Each family is charged with the responsibility to provide the environment, resources, and support that enable individual members to reach their optimal level of growth and development in every dimension of life. In the Christian tradition, spiritual development and values formation are an intentional part of the family missional task.

We believe that families have a responsibility to live daily lives of faithful discipleship.

We believe in the shared responsibility of parenting by men and women who are responsible for children in the household.

We believe children and youth are to be shown and taught the meaning of the Christian faith and the observance of the disciplines of the faith.

We believe that the local congregation is the faith community into which diverse families are received, assisted in their faith development and spiritual growth, guided and equipped for ministry, and supported as they live out their faith daily in the community and the world. Through their ministries, congregations are intentional in developing and improving systems that enable and support the quality of life for families.

Begin by asking these questions:

- How do the family ministries in my congregation support making disciples of Jesus Christ?
- How effectively do we reach out to persons and relate them to God? How well do we nurture persons in the faith and send them forth as servants of Christ?
- Look at what you are currently doing. What are the needs of the families in your congregation? Where are the gaps in what they need as it relates to fulfilling the mission of the church?

4. Communicate with other leaders in the congregation to let those leaders know the needs of families. Ask each leader to plan in his or her area (such as Christian education, stewardship, evangelism, and worship), keeping in mind the needs of the families you serve in your congregation and in your community.

5. Participate in church council and other meetings as needed. Consider your attendance as an important part of your job. As you listen and participate in these meetings, use this as a forum to state the needs of families and ask for these needs to be addressed as plans are made for ministry.

6. Organize a group of people to help you in planning and leading the congregation in family ministry. In some congregations, this group is chosen for you by the committee on lay leadership. In others, the leader must recruit a group of people. Choose those in your congregation who have a commitment to various areas of family ministry. For example, think about such topics as marriage, parenting, singles, blended families, and domestic violence. Who in your congregation has passion, knowledge, and skills to help with the task of planning and leading the congregation in these areas?

7. Plan the year ahead to address the needs of families in your congregation and in your community. Build a realistic budget to support what you plan for addressing these needs. With your leadership group, plan and schedule for such things as marriage enrichment classes, Christian Home Month, family retreat, divorce recovery courses, and parenting classes.

8. Carry out the plans you have made, enlisting the help of others in the congregation as needed to assist you and your leadership group. Remember to communicate frequently with the congregation (through newsletters, posters, e-mail, and other means) what is planned, how they can be involved, and the results of those plans.

9. Evaluate each plan you carry out as a group. Record recommendations for changes or improvements. The next person selected as leader in family ministries will be grateful for your records!

10. Use the additional resources listed on pages 31–32. These resources will provide more programming assistance, specific help in different areas of ministries, and study materials that can be used by small groups as they increase their understanding of family ministries.

Guidance for the Leader in Family Ministries

Prayer and Spiritual Guidance

It's not enough to say, "I will be in prayer as a leader of family ministries in my congregation." Setting a plan will help you keep in touch with God as you seek to lead the congregation. Consider the following prayer plan:

Recruit two or three persons in your congregation to be prayer partners for you. Ask each person to pray for you and your leadership in family ministries on a weekly basis. Ask each person to meet with you at least every three months throughout the year to pray as a group seeking God's guidance for you as a leader in family ministries.

Pray each week for specific families in your congregation. Depending on the size of your congregation, you may pray for only one family or for several. Ask for God's guidance for this family.

Read Scripture devotionally. As you go about your regular Scripture readings, consider adding this question to your reflections through the year: "What is this Scripture saying to me as a leader in family ministries and to our congregation regarding God's plan for our families?"

Use the prayer "Festival of the Christian Home" from *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (437) to guide your thoughts. Or, you may want to use the following prayer.

Gracious God, you guide us in every task. The task of caring for families seems very large. But you know the needs of each one, and you comfort and strengthen each family. May the light of your love shine upon those whose

family members are in harmony with one another as well as those who are in discord. May you be with those families enjoying health as well as those families battling illness. May you strengthen families struggling to make ends meet as well as those with enough for their needs.

We know that not every family is the same. Thank you for the love found in every family form. Thank you for the way you created people to care for and love one another as you care for and love us. Help us be aware that this is the gift of families. Help us confront cruelty and abuse, lifting up your vision of family as a place for support, love, and care. We pray today in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Knowing the Families We Seek to Serve

The work of family ministries involves promoting faith formation in families of many configurations. Take a moment and think about the variety of families in your congregation. You may have in one congregation:

- singles
- single parent families
- foster families
- grandparents raising grandchildren
- blended families (those who have been previously married and have children from those marriages)
- families with children
- married couples with no children
- widows and widowers

The Nurturing Community

The community provides the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of their humanity. We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in individuals. Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important—because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ and not because they have merited significance. We therefore support social climates in which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons and their growth. . . .

A) *The Family*—We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity. We affirm the importance of loving parents for all children. We also understand the family as encompassing a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children (the nuclear family). We affirm shared responsibility for parenting where there are two parents and encourage social, economic, and religious efforts to maintain and strengthen relationships within families in order that every member may be assisted toward complete personhood (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶161A).

A SAMPLE FAMILY MINISTRIES SURVEY (1)

The Family Ministries Team (or Council or Committee) wants to build its programs for families in accordance with the needs and interests of our families and our community. Please take a few minutes to respond to the following items. Your response is important to us. Return this to a member of our committee or leave it in the church office. *Thank you!*

1. Tell us about your family and household:

- Single, living alone
- Single with children at home
- Couple, no children
- Two parents with children at home
- Two parents with adult children at home
- Stepfamily, with children at home
- Grandparent raising grandchildren
- Other (specify) _____

2. Tell us about your interests and concerns:

Which of the following would you be interested in attending if your church offered workshops, seminars, or small groups in those areas:

Faith sharing

- Faith growth in marriage
- Family worship
- Sharing my faith as a parent of preschoolers
- Sharing my faith as a parent of school-age children
- Sharing my faith as a parent of teenagers
- Sharing my faith with my adult children
- Fostering family communication skills
- Caring for aging parents
- Skills for parenting children for parenting youth
- Stepparent issues and skills

Marriage

- Surviving the first year of marriage
- Surviving the first year of parenthood
- Engaged couples—enrichment and training
- Growing together as a couple (marriage enrichment)
- Married again
- Married but separated by distance (armed forces, school, prison, etc.)

Issues

- Divorce recovery for children for youth for adults
- Family survival after the loss of a family member
- Sexuality—talking with my children

- Sexuality—issues for adults
- Prejudice reduction workshops
- Twelve-step program
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- AIDS awareness
- Grief
- Respite from care for a loved one

Parenting

- Outreach projects for families
- Love, marriage, and the family—what the Bible really says
- Family support—what our community offers
- Parenting for peace and justice
- Celebrating holidays and holy days in the home
- Talking with my parents for children for youth
- Parenting a child with special needs

3. Tell us what will best work for you in meeting these needs:

- Ongoing small group for couples, other than Sunday school time
- Ongoing small group for singles, other than Sunday school time
- Short-term studies on Wednesday night
- Short-term studies on an evening other than Wednesday
- Short-term studies during the day
- Marriage enrichment retreats
- Engaged couples retreats
- Family retreats
- Topics covered as part of ongoing Sunday school class

4. Tell us about your gifts and interests:

A. Tell us where you have skills in leading any of the topics identified:

B. Are you interested in leading a group on this topic?

5. Tell us other interests and concerns you have not mentioned above that you would like to see the church offer to families:

A SAMPLE FAMILY MINISTRIES SURVEY (2)

The Family Ministries Team (or Council or Committee) wants to build its programs for families in accordance with the needs and interests of our families and our community. Please take a few minutes to respond to the following items. Your response is important to us. Return this to a member of our committee or leave it in the church office. Thank you!

1. Describe your family for us:

2. Do you need resources for home devotions and worship?

Yes No

Would you prefer these resources as books church newsletter articles Web articles? (Check all that apply.)

3. What kinds of congregational activities would be important to you and your family? List your suggestions here:

4. Tell us what topics or areas you would like to see our congregation provide information on regarding what's available in our community (for example, divorce recovery, financial planning, parenting).

5. How family friendly would you say our congregation is (very, so-so, poor, failing)?

6. What could we do to improve?

(Available on the CD-ROM accompanying the complete set of Guidelines.)

Families are in need of guidance and support to become centers of faith formation and to achieve a better quality of life in a physical, emotional, and spiritual sense. There is also a great concern of congregations to address the needs of families. *A Christian family can provide the framework for faith formation for children, youth, and adults supporting one another to become disciples of Jesus Christ and to continue to walk with Christ in daily life.* The church can respond by providing resources and leadership and by being an advocate for the needs of families. These may be needs of the family unit as well as needs of individual members of the family. To discover these needs, survey the families of your congregation. Use either or both of the surveys on pages 12–14 by adapting them to fit the needs of your congregation, or write your own.

Advocating for Families

Depending on the organization of your church, plan to relate to the following church bodies:

Church Council: Your job would be to attend and report to regular meetings of the church council, keeping the council informed of the plans on behalf of families. Serve as an advocate for families, reminding the rest of the council of the needs of families as they relate to other areas of the church. For instance, when plans are made for the yearly stewardship campaign, remind those who are planning of the various types of families in your congregation and of the financial needs of families in your congregation that may affect the financial plan for the church.

Council on Family Ministries: This team may be recruited by the committee on lay leadership of the congregation. You may be responsible for recruiting your own team. In either case, you set up a meeting schedule, chair these meetings, and oversee the plans of this committee.

Ministry Team on Education/Nurture Committee: In some congregations, the person in charge of family ministries is asked to serve on the nurture committee or the education committee. Attend meetings, help the committee plan with the needs of families in mind, and advocate for families.

Leading the Team

The role of the family ministries team is to:

Empower and provide resources for families so that they might:

- build faith traditions and rituals
- receive help in setting priorities (Christ at the center of the home, prayer, and devotional time)
- follow practices that allow them to walk with Christ in daily life and to grow in faith (with the support of the congregation).

Provide resources for families and for the congregation in life issues

that are part of the home, the workplace, the church, and the community including:

- an up-to-date referral list of services in the congregation and in the community for families seeking financial help, help in abuse situations, marriage counseling, parenting help, mental and physical health needs
- regular study opportunities through the Sunday school or small groups to address ways to live faithfully in the family, as couples, as singles
- lending libraries of tapes, videos, newsletters, and books that can be circulated among the families in the congregation.

Serve as advocates for the needs of families of many configurations in the congregation and in the community.

Plan family ministries programs and opportunities, such as:

- January family ministries annual planning retreat
- May celebration of the Christian Home Month and Family Week
- church family camp
- workshops, small groups, and seminars that address needs of families.

The Family Ministries Team Meetings

As you begin considering your leadership with the family ministries team, begin with prayer. God, who called you to this ministry, is also guiding you. It is in prayer that we listen to God's guidance and direction to lead us in ministry. Record biblical passages or ideas that you discover while in prayer.

Think about those in the congregation who have been invited and feel led to work with you in family ministries. Pray for each person on the team. Call together those who have agreed to work on the team. Invite other leaders in the congregation who work with children, youth, and adult ministries to be part of the team.

Meet every month or two. You will need to increase the frequency when working on a major project. You may need to meet less frequently at other times of the year.

As you plan your meetings, consider using the following format:

1. Open with a prayer, including sharing known joys and concerns of families in the congregation.
2. Include a devotional reading and a reflection on Scripture.
3. Review the role of the family ministry team. (Do this at every meeting. It's helpful to remind and renew commitment.)
4. Develop at the first meeting your vision and goals for the ministry of the team. Review these at subsequent meetings.
5. Design or review action plans.
6. Share reports as they relate to each goal.
7. Make assignments for work needed prior to the next meeting.
8. Make announcements.
9. Close with prayer.

Planning for Ministry

1. Set the Vision

- Remember the mission of The United Methodist Church: *to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*
- Remember the primary task of the local congregation: *reaching out and receiving persons, relating them to God, nurturing them in the faith, and sending them out to make our communities more loving and just.*
- In order to accomplish this, *what is your vision for your ministry area in your congregation?* _____

2. Know Those You Seek to Serve

The only way to know if you are serving those you seek to serve is to ASK THEM! Every leader needs to take time to survey the people, both with written polls and through informal conversation. In either case, remember: You are asking for their ideas, opinions, and desires. Your role is to record, to listen, and to clarify. You may use the survey on pages 12–14 of this Guideline. Keep the results before you as you set your goals.

3. Determine the Goals

What are the expectations and goals that will be realized if you move toward your visions? *Think in terms of what will be, not what you hope for.* This is a subtle, but important difference. If you say, “We hope to increase the number of children and their families involved in the life of our church,” there isn’t much specific to go on. Say instead, “Families in our church will receive and use devotional guides prepared by our team during the seasons of Advent and Lent.”

Goal Development

List 3 goals and 2 or more results you will expect because of those goals:

GOAL #1

SHORT-TERM
RESULT _____

LONG-TERM
RESULT _____

GOAL #2

SHORT-TERM
RESULT _____

LONG-TERM
RESULT _____

GOAL #3

SHORT-TERM
RESULT _____

LONG-TERM
RESULT _____

Some of your results may be short-term goals. This would be something that would be achieved through a specific event or program. You may also want to think of some long-term results that you would come back and look for a year from the event. For instance, you might have as a goal: To enable families to grow in faith in a setting away from home where they will work with other families in the congregation and the community. A short-term result might be: Families engaged in outreach to homeless families through service at the shelter. A long-term result might be: The number of families involved throughout the year at the shelter increased by five.

Sample: From General to Specific Goals

GOAL: *Our congregation is seen as family friendly.*

- **Specific:** Plan for coffee and fellowship times with specific individuals assigned to seek out and introduce new families to others in the congregation.
- **Specific:** Make our church building more friendly to visitors by posting room location maps, color coding rooms for different age levels, and having enough greeters that they can take visitors to the location they need.
- **Specific:** Welcome new visitors by taking gifts such as fresh-baked bread and cookies, along with an introductory video of our church within the first week of their visit.
- **Specific:** Offer nursery and childcare for every event held by the congregation.

GOAL: *Recognize important events in families by providing rituals and traditions.*

- **Specific:** Recognize all marriage anniversaries in the church calendar and through worship.
- **Specific:** Establish a bulletin board for the recognition of church members' awards, community involvement, and family achievements.
- **Specific:** Plan a yearly service of recognition of those family members who have died.
- **Specific:** Hold a seminar during which families will plan for ways to recognize important family events through worship times at home.

Think in terms of goals such as "To provide appropriate learning experiences for families with children." List key results that will occur because of this. "Parents and children will talk together about the meaning of faith."

4. Recruit the Team

For each event or activity planned, you will probably want leadership teams beyond your initial team. Achieving the goals may well depend on who is recruited for leadership. Think first, not of persons, but of traits. What traits in persons are needed for your leadership team? Now, who are the persons in your congregation or your community who possess those traits?

You may be thinking: *This is easy enough for a small congregation, but we have 1200 members! There is no way I can know who possesses these traits.* In larger congregations, identify staff or key leaders who can help you know who might have the traits you seek. Sometimes a simple announcement in worship or through the newsletter of the traits you are seeking will bring forth volunteers you might not have considered.

List here the “ideal” leadership team for each of your goals.

Approach those you are asking with a clear plan of what you are seeking to do and how you see them contributing to the team to achieve the goals.

5. Put Plans into Action

Moving from plans to actual happenings is the sticking point for many congregations. One helpful way to begin to see what your plans might look like is to set deadlines for when certain things are to be accomplished. Use the suggested annual planning calendar found on page 28 of this Guideline. As you move your plans into action, be specific about who will be responsible for each step of the plan, the outside leadership needed, the budget needed to fulfill the plan, the materials needed for each step of the plan, and securing places for specific programs, courses, or events.

Evaluation of Family Ministries

Written and verbal evaluations help us (1) plan for improvements when we repeat specific programs, (2) provide information to those who follow us as leaders, and (3) identify future directions.

Following each specific program you implement, ask participants, planners, and leaders to complete an evaluation form. You may use the following or develop your own.

SAMPLE EVALUATION OF FAMILY MINISTRIES

Name of program _____ Date _____

1. The best thing about this program was _____
2. One way we would improve this program is _____
3. We found out about this program through
_____ bulletin _____ newspaper _____ church newsletter _____ friend
4. We decided to participate because _____
5. We would also participate in the following programs or events if provided by the church _____

Following each offering of your team, plan for an evaluation time in your next meeting. Invite the pastor or other church leaders to participate. Use the following statements to guide your discussion.

1. Our goal for this program was to . . .
2. The results we expected were . . .
3. The results we achieved were . . .
4. Ways we would improve are to . . .
5. What we need to do next is to . . .

Planning for Ministry

Planning Retreat

(This is a planning retreat for the Family Ministries team and other leaders to develop a vision, goals, and action plan for family ministries.)

1. PREPARATION

- The team sets a date, place, and schedule three months in advance.
- If the team has had discussions leading toward the expression of a vision, use those discussions to decide on a theme for the retreat.
- Find a person to lead the retreat. This could be someone on the team or someone from outside the team. If someone on the team will serve as the leader of this retreat, plan ways to help that person also participate in the retreat.
- Arrange for location, meals, letters to participants, and so forth.

2. PLANNING RETREAT SCHEDULE

- Opening Prayer
- Welcome and announcements
- Introductions: Say your name and tell us why are you here today.
- Prayer Partners: pair by two, share a prayer concern and pray for one another.
- Break
- Explain that the group will now use *Reflection Methodology of See, Judge, Act* learned from the *National Hispanic Plan*: **See:** the current reality. **Judge:** What does the word of God say about this? **Act:** To what action is God calling us individually and corporately? Proceed to the See stage.

See: To see the current reality of families in our congregation and in our community. Use the findings from the Family Survey. List the findings and distribute copies during the retreat.

Brainstorm with the group the implications of the findings: *What needs are present for families today?*

Judge: Reflection on Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20

If your team is a large one, divide into small groups of two to four each. Ask the groups to read, reflect, and report on the Scripture. Based on the current reality of families and this Scripture, what is your vision for family ministry in your congregation?

Ask each small group to report its ideas on newsprint to the total group.

- Lunch Break
- Develop a group vision

Once you have determined some of the needs of families in your congregation, reflect on what the word of God is saying about these needs. Formulate a vision of what family ministries would look like once you address these needs. *(A) If your team is small enough (six or less) for interaction, proceed with writing a vision for family ministries in your congregation. (Then proceed to Act.)*

The vision of the Family Life Council team for family ministries is:

(B) If your team is a large one, divide into small groups and ask those groups to write their visions for family ministries in the congregation and community (as above). Then ask the groups to report on newsprint. Have the facilitator or leader bring together the words and statements that are resonant in the reports of the group. The leader then summarizes and writes a vision statement based on all the reports.

Our vision for family ministries is:

Give small groups time to respond until consensus is achieved.

Act (follow-up): Develop an action plan that reflects and responds to the need(s) and that is driven by the vision and based on the Scripture reading and reflection.

Mention the follow-up, where the family life council team will take the vision and develop goals and a plan of action for family ministries.

- Closing: Make a prayer circle where everyone who wants to say a sentence prayer has the option to do so.

Christian Home Month

At the 2004 General Conference, delegates amended and readopted the resolution naming May as Christian Home Month. This resolution encourages congregations to emphasize family worship in the home, worship and program planning in the congregation, and prayer on behalf of families. The Office of Family Ministries of the General Board of Discipleship produces annual resources to be used for observing Christian Home Month. The themes for 2009–2012 are as follows: **2009:** Families Called to Love; **2010:** Families Called to Peace; **2011:** Families Called to Justice; **2012:** Families Called to Hope. The resources are available online at www.gbod.org/family or in print from the Office of Family Ministries, General Board of Discipleship, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37202-0003.

Intergenerational Ministries

Intergenerational ministries at church can offer opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn and be in fellowship together. In church while most of the learning opportunities are specific to an age group, these multi-generational or cross-generational times can show how all of us as children of God learn from one another regardless of age. Some churches use the following for intergenerational experiences: workshops for Advent or Lent, all-church Sunday school, Church heritage studies, mission projects, church retreats. The

resource list in this Guideline and the GBOD website provide resources for intergenerational learning and fellowship.

Marriage Enrichment in the Congregation

Congregational support of marriages is key to family ministry. In planning for congregational support of marriages, examine what you are currently doing to support marriages actively in your congregation and in your community. Use the following areas to analyze where you need to establish programs or resources for your congregation.

Premarriage support. This would include youth classes on marriage and commitment, premarital counseling with clergy for couples planning marriage, mentoring programs to pair couples anticipating marriage with married couples for advice and support. The official United Methodist guide for premarriage counseling is *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* (see Resources).

Ongoing marriage support. Plans here would include regular studies for married couples through Sunday school classes or small groups; yearly marriage enrichment retreats provided by the congregation or cooperatively with other congregations in the community or area; and mentoring programs to pair couples with other couples for advice and support. Consider joining an organization that trains leaders in couple communication, such as Marriage Encounter/Engaged Encounter United Methodist; the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment; and Marriage Enrichment, Inc. Further information on these organizations is available from the Family Ministry Office, the General Board of Discipleship (1-877-899-2780, ext. 7119).

Community information and referral services. Plans would include up-to-date information on support and counseling for couples available in the community, including financial planning, domestic violence, extended family issues, twelve-step programs, and Christian counseling services.

Crisis intervention. While a single congregation may not be able to provide the crisis intervention in marriages where there have been deep hurts, the congregation can research and identify community resources for this area. The book *Couples Who Cope* (see Resources) contains helpful information for individuals or small group studies around what is needed when deep hurt occurs.

Resolution on Family Ministries

At the 2004 General Conference, delegates approved a new Resolution on Family Ministries. This is found in *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2008*. Congregations may wish to study this resolution, then make decisions around needed actions for support of families based on the information contained in the resolution

Creating Safe Sanctuaries

As much as we would like for every family to be a family of love, peace, and justice, this isn't so. Many people experience within the family physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse. Those whom they trust and love the most become those who hurt them on a regular basis. The church is called to be the safe sanctuary for family members caught in the cycle of violence and abuse. Consider these words from the *Discipline*:

Family Violence and Abuse—We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms—verbal, psychological, physical, sexual—is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the victim. While we deplore the actions of the abuser, we affirm that person to be in need of God's redeeming love (§161H).

Advocate in your congregation for:

- sermons, prayers, workshops, lectures, Sunday school classes that address the presence of violence in families.
- published information distributed through newsletters, display racks, and on the church's website giving the indicators of abuse. Include what signs to look for, not just with children but also with youth and adults.
- clear policies and forms related to the recruiting, screening, and hiring of those who work in the church.
- creating a congregational plan for responding to allegations of abuse if they occur in the church.

For more help in this area, purchase the *Safe Sanctuaries* books (see Resources). These and other resources can serve as a guide for planning a congregational response to abuse.

Family Ministry Models

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTING AND GRANDPARENTING CLASSES

- Focusing on God: How to parent so that you encourage faith formation of your children.
- Communication in the Family: Differences in communicating with children and youth.
- Family Conferencing: Format and topics for practicing Christian conferencing in the home and making decisions together as a family.
- Sexuality: Knowing the stages of sexuality and ways to foster healthy sexuality.

- Prayer: Ways to pray and to establish routines of prayer in the home.
- Discipline: Ways to appropriately discipline children at various ages.
- Media: Messages in media and ways to recognize media influence on children and youth.
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse: Signs of abuse; what to do when abuse occurs.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LIVING THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL IN THE HOME

- Love: Show unconditional love and acceptance.
- Forgive: Model forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Discipline: Provide boundaries and respect.
- Teach/Learn: Learn together the stories and teachings of Jesus.
- Comfort: Comfort one another in times of need.
- Communicate: Develop loving healthy relationships.
- Spiritual Guidance: Lead children, youth, and adults to seek the presence of God in daily life.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A “FAMILY NIGHT IN”

(Family Night In is the practice of a family to stay home together one night a week for a time for devotions, conversation, fun, and games.)

- Determine a day of the week that works most weeks for the family. (Be flexible. Some weeks there will be no day that works well.)
- Establish a schedule for what you want to happen during your family night in. A common format is dinner together (either prepared in the home or purchased but eating together at home); games, movies, or activities together; devotions and prayer.
- Family Meal: Rotate responsibilities of different family members for preparing the meal. Have once-a-month meals where a family member gets to choose his or her favorite food for the meal. Try new foods. Once a month have a “theme” meal where new foods will be tried by all.
- Family Fun: This can include family viewing movies together; looking through old photo albums and remembering family stories; taking time to write to family members who are not living in the home; playing board games together; interviewing one another about topics that are currently in the news.
- Family Devotions: Include a prayer circle with everyone taking turns to pray. Read Bible stories and share the meaning of the story and how it relates to your family.
- Family Covenant: Make a Prayer-Love-Share covenant. Include ways members of the family want to pray together, love one another, and share with others in need.

Calendar for Family Ministries

JANUARY

- Form a small group or team to serve as the family life council or family ministries team to plan for family ministries in your congregation.
- Order family ministries resources from Cokesbury and General Board of Discipleship.
- Plan to celebrate the seasons of the Christian year with families (Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) by providing special programs, worship, workshops, seminars, groups, and forums.
- Observe the Baptism of the Lord through a renewal of baptism and classes or workshops on baptism.

FEBRUARY

- Participate in the celebration of African American Families Month.
- Celebrate marriages. Recognize milestones of couples in the congregation.
- Involve families in the planning of vacation Bible school with classes for all ages.
- Plan a one-day Lenten retreat for families focusing on prayer and Bible study.
- Invite community leaders who work with families to lead a seminar. Provide nursery and childcare for younger children.

MARCH

- Order the Christian Home Month booklet from the Office of Family Ministries at the General Board of Discipleship.
- Begin plans for celebrating Christian Home month, including a worship service in the month of May.
- Involve families in experiences of sharing and service with needy families in the community.
- Provide an intergenerational workshop on prayer.
- Conduct a series of classes on single parenting and stepparenting.
- Review plans for Family Ministries for the remainder of the year.

APRIL

- Involve families in sharing time and service with needy families in the community.
- Offer a series of seminars on couples enrichment and relationship building.
- Observe Earth Day. Publish in the church newsletter suggestions for families to observe Earth Day in the home.

MAY

- Celebrate Christian Home Month with a worship service and a fellowship meal.
- Involve families in sharing time and service with needy families in the community.
- Meet with the family team to evaluate the worship, programs, and activities of Christian Home Month. Ask questions such as: What went well? What needs improvement?
- Encourage families to participate in vacation Bible school.

JUNE

- Involve families in sharing time and service with needy families in the community.
- Design and distribute a prayer card that families can use while on vacation.
- Plan a Church Family Picnic or Family Retreat for families of many configurations, including a devotional, prayers, and praise.
- Involve families in service projects in the community.
- Put together a devotional guide for families to take on vacation.

JULY

- Offer intergenerational programs on a Friday night at the church, with a potluck dinner and games for all ages.
- Encourage families to visit a neighbor.
- Invite families to a lock-in (spend the night) at the church with devotions, family prayers, games, and fellowship.

AUGUST

- Provide a back-to-school devotional for children and their families.
- Work with your school system to provide backpacks for children in families who cannot afford school supplies.
- Design short-term Bible study time for youth and their families.
- Plan to celebrate Children's Sabbath in October.

SEPTEMBER

- Begin a small-group study with families on a topic of concern in your community.
- Conduct parenting and grandparenting classes using the book *Parents and Grandparents as Spiritual Guides* (see Resources).
- Publish a listing of community resources that support couples.

OCTOBER

- Attend the World Communion Sunday service as a family.
- Plan and lead the congregation in a great day of caring with service opportunities for families in the community.
- Celebrate the Children's Sabbath with a service to remember children and their families.
- Option: Celebrate Christian Home Month with a worship service in this month.

NOVEMBER

- Provide devotional resources for families to celebrate Thanksgiving at home.
- Ask a group of families to develop an Advent prayer calendar for different families.
- Offer families opportunities to serve in soup kitchens or homeless shelters.

DECEMBER

- Plan a one-day Advent retreat for families.
- Encourage families to celebrate Advent at home with an Advent wreath and a family devotional every Sunday.
- Invite families to write stories about the nativity sets they use in their homes. Publish these in the church newsletter.
- Offer an evening prayer service on New Year's Eve for families.

Resources

**Denotes our top picks

- *Breaking and Mending: Divorce and God's Grace*, by Mary Lou Redding (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998. ISBN 0-8358-0855-6). Looks at the spiritual issues and struggles that accompany a divorce for a Christian.
- *Children's Ministry*, by Judy Comstock (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. ISBN 978-068733-413-1). User-friendly, encouraging, and full of ideas that can be implemented immediately, with little or no budget.
- ***Christian Home Month Manual*. Office of Family Ministries, the General Board of Discipleship (1-877-899-2780, Ext. 7119). Free yearly manual for celebrating Christian Home Month in May or another month.
- *Church and Family Together: A Congregational Manual for Black Family Ministry*, by Karen Jones Bernstine, editor (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1996. ISBN 0-8170-1243-5). Solid information for family congregational ministry in African American congregations.
- ***Family: The Forming Center, Revised Edition*, by Marjorie Thompson (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997. ISBN 978-0-8358-0798-2). Suggests models, rituals, and celebrations for a Christ-centered home.
- *Forgiving Your Family: A Journey to Healing*, by Kathleen Fischer (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2006. ISBN 978-0-8358-9802-7).
- *Getting It Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family, and Work*, by Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-664-22582-7). Information and leader's guide for individual or group study on providing a sense of balance in family time.
- *Growing Love in Christian Marriage: Pastor's Edition*, by Jane and Clifton Ives (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. ISBN 978-0-687-07604-8). Couple's Edition, by Joan and Richard Hunt (ISBN 978-0-687-08221-8). Material for prewedding counseling sessions for both clergy and couples.
- ***Love Never Ends: Growing Together in Marriage and Faith*, by Robert and Jeanette Lauer (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002. ISBN 978-0-8358-0949-8). Practical exercises for strengthening marriage and deepening faith.
- *Making Love Last a Lifetime: Biblical Perspectives on Love, Marriage, and Sex*, by Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.) Includes a Pastor's Guide; Leader's Guide; Participant's Book; VHS Tape and DVD.
- *Nurturing Faith in Families: 425 Creative Ideas for Family Ministry*, by Jolene L. Roehlkepartain (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-68704-921-9). Offers 425 creative ideas to help families grow spiritually and feel more connected to the church.

- *Parents and Grandparents as Spiritual Guides: Nurturing Children of the Promise*, by Betty Shannon Cloyd (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000. ISBN 978-0-8358-0923-2). Explores the ways parents and grandparents can introduce children to God.
- *ProActive Parenting* with Jim Williams (Abingdon Press: 2004) Six DVDs, each with 4 sessions and student books: Parenting 101; Communication with Your Child or Teen; Handling Anger; Your Family and Money; Discipline with Children and Teens; Single Parenting.
- *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, by Joy Thornton Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998. ISBN 0-978-88177-220-3). *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries*, by Joy Thornton Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2003. ISBN 978-0-88177-404-7).
- *Side-by-Side: Families Learning & Living the Faith Together*, by Delia Halverson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-68704-911-0). A book of Sunday school lessons that allow parents and children to learn about the Christian faith alongside one another.
- *The Switching Hour: Kids of Divorce Say Good-bye Again*, by Evon Flesberg (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-68764-976-1). Helps parents simplify family life as children transition between parents.
- *Talking With Your Child: Conversations for Life (Leader's Guide)*, edited by Rebecca Laird (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. ISBN 978-0-687-08859-1). Together with the parent's guide these resources provide the framework for six to twelve parenting sessions on communications, emotions, respect, success and failure, grief and loss, and sexuality.
- *Talking With Your Teen: Conversations for Life (Leader's Guide)*, edited by Lynn Hutton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. ISBN 978-0-687-08856-0). Comparable resource for parents of teens.
- *The Winds of Promise: Building and Maintaining Strong Clergy Families*, by Anne E. Streaty Wimberly & Edward Powell Wimberly (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88177-496-2). Self-help text for clergy families to address moving, meaning making amidst glass-house living; and managing catastrophic life events.
- www.gbod.org/family. Prayers, devotions, suggestions for celebrating holidays and holy days in the home.
- www.nccusa.org. Suggestions for family ministries with bibliographies.