

Family Ministries

Support Families for Faith and Service



G U I D E L I N E S

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Kevin Johnson

with thanks to previous authors:

Tanya Marie Eustace and MaryJane Pierce Norton

Discipleship Ministries

FAMILY MINISTRIES

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“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

Thank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world.

Intentional Discipleship Systems

As we look out across our churches, the problem is not a lack of people, the problem is the church's inability to see and reach them. As leaders in the church our role is to find clarity in the who & what of discipleship, the how of discipleship formation, but most importantly, the why for being disciples and making disciples. This describes the work of intentional discipleship systems or pathways.

John Wesley said it best in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*: “There is a real, as well as relative, change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel ‘the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ producing love to all humankind.”

This love for all humankind is what drives discipleship. A basic desire to love God, love neighbor, love self, and repeat. To go deeper and deeper into the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to offer what we have found to those that we meet.

How do we get back to a movement of a deep love for people that drives everything we do? How do we get back to seeing all the people that God calls us to reach?

The world, now more than ever, needs disciples of Jesus, growing in faith, growing closer to Christ, with a clear vision of the world and people as God sees them. Disciples who seek to use their God-given gifts to transform their communities and the world.

Early Methodists started a movement that was focused on growing as disciples, inviting others into a life following Jesus, and helping those in their communities that were hurting the most. At Discipleship Ministries, we believe that we need to get back to these basic understandings of church and discipleship, and back to a concern for improving systems that work for all God's children, moving us toward what God intends for all.

We invite you to explore the SeeAllThePeople suite of resources (www.seeallthepeople.org) designed to equip you and your church for intentional discipleship and community engagement. Although the forms and strategies change, the main goal of the church remains: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It will always be about discipleship!

Called to Lead Family Ministries

You have been selected to lead family ministries in your congregation. This call should fill you with hope and excitement as you prepare to support, encourage, equip, and guide the families in your congregation and community as they experience God at home, school, work, and play.

Family ministry is much more than planning a few annual events for families in your congregation. It involves nurturing, supporting, and strengthening the community that each person grows up in—the family. The United Methodist Church recognizes “that families come in a variety of sizes and forms, and acknowledge[s] their significant role in nurturing the physical, moral, and spiritual development of children, youth, and adults” (the *Discipline*, ¶161, The Nurturing Community, A. The Family). Family encompasses a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children (the traditional nuclear family). As a family ministry leader, you are called to develop and sustain ministry that affirms and reflects the gospel understanding that all people are important—because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ and not because they have merited significance.

Faithful ministry requires time and intentional work. It demands that leaders focus on building relationships with people, not structures. As you begin your ministry, take time to get to know the people in your congregation, build relationships, and walk daily with the people in your community as they grow in faith. Prayerfully consider:

- Who are the families in my congregation and community?
- How can I nurture, support, and guide people who are parenting and caring for God’s children?
- How can I encourage, support, and guide the children?
- How can I be in relationship with these people as they grow in their relationship with God and one another?
- How can I support and strengthen their work as disciples of Jesus Christ in the church and the world?

Family ministry should embrace every age and stage of life—identifying and enabling all to see Christlike relationship qualities among those who call one another “family.” Effective ministry will equip households to be centers of faith formation—sacred places where people experience and respond to God’s grace and love. It will provide households with tools, resources, and opportunities to grow and live out their faith through holy work. This includes, but is not limited to, practicing spiritual disciplines together and reaching

out through mission and service. Faithful ministry will help families experience, witness, and share the light of Christ. The hope is that, when others in the community see the love and grace of God through families, they will want to join in this holy work. Family ministry extends the fellowship table to those within the congregation and those who stand outside. It welcomes them in to live in the community of the family of God.

As the designated leader for family ministries in your congregation you will:

- work with the other leaders in your congregation to plan and implement ministry to fulfill the church's mission of helping all people 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 life at home and at church as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Enter into a time of prayer as you begin your task. Here is one prayer to use:

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 the minds of 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 human relationships with tremendous power. In the Scriptures, we see story after story of families. Think of the witness of Abraham and Sarah; Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz; 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 to think of the stories of biblical families that you remember. What do these stories teach you about families and the community of faith?

Scripture teaches us about God's interest in human relationships and shows how God's purpose is carried out through—and sometimes in spite of—those relationships. God calls us to build relationships that are loving and just—supporting and enabling one another to grow in faith. Our faith story also demonstrates holy practices that can be used by families and the faith community as we grow in our faith together. These include worshiping practices of the community. Through Scripture, we:

- hear the call to love God and to keep God's commandments, reciting them to our children and remembering them throughout the day (see Deut 6).
- see the holy family, Mary and Joseph, bringing their infant son to the temple, where they hear God's plans for their young son (see Luke 2).

- witness the boy sharing five loaves of bread and two fish. This reminds us of how children bring gifts to the body of Christ and to the family. We all learn and grow from one another, no matter the age of the person in the family (see John 6).
- see Timothy learning about faith from both his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (see 2 Tim 1).
- understand Paul’s teaching to remember the stranger and extend hospitality and care (see, for example, Gal 6).

As the faith community seeks to live in relationship with God and with one another, support is essential. Take time to share and model practices that help people grow in their faith.

Because we are human, our relationships with those closest to us are often broken—sometimes by simple things, such as a lack of time, poor communication, and self-centeredness. Sometimes, though, our broken relationships are due to more complex issues, including abuse. Family ministry addresses the brokenness that occurs in families and seeks to build support for regaining health in human relationships. There is need in the family—as well as in the congregation—to proclaim and hear the good news.

This Guideline is designed to direct, motivate, and assist you. What follows is a brief description of your tasks. After which you will find further information for performing the tasks. Finally, there are models for ministry that may be helpful to you in your situation. Consider first the “Affirmation for Families” on page 9.

Prepare for Your Ministry

Take time for a thoughtful beginning—before you are caught up in all the activity of the different classes, groups, and events.

Pray for the families in your congregation and community. You will be a spiritual leader for your congregation in family ministries.

Collect information about 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 for other leaders in your congregation. Use surveys, personal interviews, and resource materials to study the needs of families in your congregation and community.

Analyze how your congregation is serving families as you seek to live into the mission of The United Methodist Church—making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (the *Discipline*, ¶120). Remember, “the local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs” (¶201). Assess how your ministry reflects the function of the local church:

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 people enter into life. Entry is made by diverse means, including birth, adoption, and covenant. Through this primary community, people are received in love and given their identity and self-worth. People 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 the church needs to be where families are.

We believe that God is actively present in the lives of all people. Each member of every family, no matter his or her age, has gifts to offer, as we all work together to strengthen the body of Christ, transforming the world.

We believe the mission of the family is human growth and faith development that equips every person to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, bringing hope to a broken world and working with God and others for the transformation of the world. Family members are responsible for supporting one another so that all might live into their full potential as God's beloved children, using their gifts to share God's hope with others.

We believe that families have a responsibility to live daily lives of faithful discipleship. In the Christian tradition, spiritual development and values formation are an intentional part of the family missional task.

We believe in the shared responsibility of parenting by the men or women who are responsible for the 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 children and youth also teach their faith communities as they model faith full of wonder, curiosity, play, and openness to multiple possibilities.

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.

Ask

- How do the family ministries in my congregation support making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?
- How do we reach out to people and relate them to God?
- How do we nurture people in the faith and send them forth as servants of Christ?

Evaluate

- What are the needs of the families in our congregation?
- Where are the gaps? What is missing as our community strives to fulfill the mission of the church?
- How is God calling us to be in ministry with these people?

Communicate with other leaders in the congregation to let them know the needs of families. Ask these leaders to keep the needs of families in mind as they plan for Christian education, stewardship, evangelism, worship, and so on.

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

Organize a group of people to help you in planning and leading the congregation in family ministry. In some congregations, the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development chooses this group for you. In others, the leader must recruit a group of people. Prayerfully consider who in your congregation has the gifts, passion, knowledge, and skills in various areas of family ministry. This group should include a diverse representation from the congregation: youth, young adults, adults without children, and older adults. Consider holding a planning retreat with the leaders you have identified.

Plan the year ahead to address the needs of families in your congregation and community. Build a realistic budget to support your plans. With your leadership group, plan and schedule for such things as marriage enrichment classes, Christian Home Month, family retreats, divorce recovery courses, and parenting classes. Identify ways you will encourage, equip, and support families for faith formation in the home. Decide how you will communicate with families—website, email, newsletter, bulletin board, social media?

Carry out the plans you have made and enlist the help of others in the congregation as needed. Remember to communicate frequently with the congregation (through a variety of means) about what is planned, how they can be involved, and the results of those plans.

Evaluate each plan you carry out as a group. Gather feedback from your congregation via online surveys (one example is SurveyMonkey). Record recommendations for changes or improvements. Suggest ways to respond. The next person selected as a leader in family ministries will be grateful for your records!

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

Guidance for the Leader in Family Ministries

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.

Prayer and Spiritual Guidance

Recruit two or three people in your congregation to be prayer partners for you.

Ask each person to pray weekly for you and your leadership in family ministries. Ask your prayer partners to meet with you at least every three months throughout the year to pray as a group to seek God's guidance for you as a leader in family ministries.

Pray each week for specific families in your congregation. Ask for God's guidance for the family.

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

Use the prayer in the section "Festival of the Christian Home" to guide your thoughts (see *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 437). Or 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. Be with families enjoying health as well as families battling illness. 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 create 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.

Know the Families You 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:

- blended families (having children from previous marriages)
- couples with children

- couples with no children
- foster families
- grandparents raising grandchildren
- multigenerational families
- single people
- single-parent families
- widows and widowers

The Nurturing Community

The community provides the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of their humanity. We affirm this in The United Methodist Church's baptismal vows, as church members covenant with families to help raise and nurture the child in Christian love. As mentioned above and in *The Book of Discipline* (§161A), families include a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children. It is important to keep this in mind as you prayerfully discern and plan your ministry.

All families need guidance and support to become centers of faith formation and to achieve a better physical, emotional, and spiritual quality of life. A Christian family can provide the framework for faith formation for children, youth, and adults, supporting family members as they become disciples of Jesus Christ and walk with Christ in daily life. The church can respond by providing resources and leadership and by being an advocate for the needs of individual family members or the family unit. To discover these needs, survey the families of your congregation. Use the Family Ministries Survey Sample (available at <https://www.umofficialresources.com/Guidelines>).

Advocate for Families

Depending on the organization of your church, plan to relate to various church bodies. The pastor should be able to identify which groups reflect these tasks and disciplinary church bodies. While the organizational structures might be called something different in your context, work to know and build relationships with the clergy and lay leaders.

Church Council. Your job is to attend and report to regular meetings of the Church Council, keeping the council informed of the plans on behalf of families. You 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.

Family Ministries. The Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development may recruit this team, or 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 council.

Christian Education/Formation/Nurture. In some congregations, the person in charge of family ministries is asked to serve on the Nurture Committee or the Christian Education/Formation Committee. You will attend meetings, help the committee plan with the needs of families in mind, and advocate for families.

Lead the Team

The Family Ministries Team has many roles to play. They include:

Empower and provide resources for families so that they might:

- build practices that allow them to walk with Christ in daily life;
- grow in faith (with the support of the congregation);
- create household faith traditions and rituals;
- set priorities that place Christ at the center of the home—designating time for prayer and for studying Scripture, the stories of the Christian faith, together.

Serve as advocates for the needs of all types of families in the congregation and in the community.

- Know the name, contact information, and the policies for your local department for child safety. Whom will you contact if/when you suspect abuse occurring in a family?
- Be aware of your responsibilities as a person in ministry with children. Does your state define you as a mandatory reporter in the case of suspected abuse?
- Know your church's Safer Sanctuary® policy and work to uphold it, while educating your congregation about the importance of this living document.
- Be familiar with the required plan of action for mandatory and voluntary reporting of abuse.

Provide resources for families and the entire congregation that **offer support and help for difficult life events**. These might include:

- an up-to-date referral list of services in the congregation and community for families seeking advice and help regarding finances, marriage, parenting, abuse, therapy, or mental and physical health needs. Build relationships with people in your community who offer these resources so you can make a faithful referral to the members of your congregation.
- regular study opportunities that address ways to live faithfully as a disciple of Christ and a Christian family.
- online information, tools, and tips that families can refer to as they live into their faith.
- lending libraries of videos, newsletters, and books that can be circulated among the families in the congregation.

Plan family ministries programs and opportunities throughout the church year. These might include special worship services, small groups, weekend retreats, classes, or outreach ministries. For suggested monthly activities, see the Calendar for Family Ministries on pages 26–29.

Family Ministries Team Meetings

Discern

Begin consideration of your leadership with the family ministries team with prayer. God, who called you to this ministry, is also guiding you. In prayer, we listen to God's guidance and direction to lead us in ministry. Record biblical passages or ideas that you discover while you are praying. Then take time to ask: "How is God calling you to respond?"

Invite

Prayerfully consider who in your congregation has the gifts and calling to work with you in family ministries. Remember, these should be people from all age spans and walks of life. For example, an older adult who has raised children in the church might be your best asset; or the single, young or older adults without children who are educators might have the gifts to develop and support healthy ministry in your congregation. Pray for each person on your list. Invite those people to prayerfully consider joining your team. Pray for them as they discern and respond to this call. Gather those who agreed to work on the team. Invite other leaders in the congregation who work with children, youth, and adults to be part of the team.

Meet every month. You will need to increase the frequency when working on a major project. Share your work and ministry with the other committees in your congregation. Inform both clergy and lay leaders of your work and solicit their help in supporting your ministry.

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

- Open with a prayer—pray for the committee members, their families, and for the families on your church's prayer list.
- Include a devotional reading and a reflection on Scripture.
- Review the role of the Family Ministry Team. (Provide this at every meeting. It's helpful to remind and renew commitments.)
- Develop your vision and goals for the ministry of the team at the first meeting each year. Review these at subsequent meetings.
- Design or review action plans.
- Share reports related to each goal.
- Make assignments for work needed prior to the next meeting.
- Make announcements.
- Close with prayer.

Plan for Ministry

Set the vision. What is the vision for your ministry area in your congregation?

Know those you seek to serve. The only way to know if you are serving those you seek to serve is to ask them! Take time to survey the people, with written or online polls and through informal conversation. Remember: You are asking for their ideas, opinions, and desires. Your role is to record, to listen, and to clarify. You may use the “Family Ministries Survey Sample” (<https://www.umofficialresources.com/Guidelines>). Keep the results before you as you set your goals.

Determine the results you seek. Part of goal setting is taking time to identify the results you hope to see at the end of your work. What are the expectations and goals that will be realized if you move toward your vision? Be specific—identify the results you hope to see.

From Desired Result to Strategy

After you have identified the results you hope to see, take time to brainstorm strategies you will use to get families involved. For example:

- **Desired Result:** “Families in our church will grow in faith through the seasons of Advent and Lent.”
- **Strategy:** Team will create and distribute Advent and Lent devotional guides, encouraging families to use them during each season.
- **Evaluate:** Take the time to gather information on the number of families that did receive and use the guides. Use online survey tools such as SurveyMonkey to poll your families and to ask how often they used the resources and how they used this process to grow in their faith. Ask families to share their stories: “How did you experience God during this time?” Keep these records and spread the word about the number of families whose lives have been affected by this action.

Recruit the team. For each event or activity planned, you will probably want leadership teams beyond your initial team. Achieving the results you seek may depend on who is recruited for leadership. Think first, not of people, but of skills, gifts, and experience. What is needed for this event? Who in your congregation or your community possesses these qualities?

If you serve a large congregation, you may be thinking: “This is easy enough for a small congregation, but we have 1,200 members!” Leaders in small congregations may ask: “Just where are the people we need going to come from?” In smaller congregations, think about people already engaged in similar ministry. Can you ask them to expand what they’re doing to encompass something new? In larger congregations, identify staff or key leaders who can help you know who may have the skills you seek. Sometimes a simple invitation—in worship or through the newsletter—for people to prayerfully consider if God is calling them to be in ministry with families will bring forth volunteers you might not have considered. Make sure to include a list of the spiritual gifts, skills, and experience you seek.

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

Put plans into action. Moving from plans to action 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 on page 23–26 of this Guideline. As you move your plans into action, be specific about who will be responsible for each step of the plan; outside leadership; budget; materials for each step; and sites or rooms for specific programs, courses, or events. As you plan for your unique context, keep these resources and categories of ministry in mind.

Christian Home Month

At the 2024 General Conference, delegates 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. Discipleship Ministries produces annual resources to be used for observing Christian Home Month (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org>).

Intergenerational ministries are ministries that affirm all people's joint participation in God's work in and for the transformation of the world. Intergenerational ministry is an intrinsic part of our identity and calling. It reflects how God is with all people, no matter their age, calling each of us to show up in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ—offering hope and working with God and others for the transformation of the world. Ephesians 4:16 reminds us how every person is needed for this holy work:

“The whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:16, ESV)

The book of Ephesians teaches that God created each person with specific and diverse gifts. We are the body of Christ, equipped and called to follow Christ's example. When each part of the body is working properly, the body grows and builds “itself up in love” (Eph 4:15-16). We are strengthened in our ministry when all people use their gifts and participate in God's work for the transformation of the world.

Faithful ministry is intrinsically intergenerational—offering hope to the world while providing ways for all people to work with God—making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.

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Intergenerational Ministries

Intergenerational ministry offers opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn and be in fellowship together. This includes worship, meals, small-group studies, and all church events, including Advent and Lenten gatherings, retreats, camping trips, and mission projects. Ministry is often created for a specific age group. Intergenerational, multi-generational, and cross-generational ministries demonstrate how all of us—as children of God—learn from one another, regardless of age.

The goal of intergenerational ministry is to create and deepen relationships between all the generations found in your congregation. Intergenerational ministry opportunities do not discriminate based on age or any other status. All are a welcome part of the congregation's mission in ministry. Simply put, if you are an age, you are engaged.

See the Resources section and the Discipleship Ministries website for resources on 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 doing to support marriages in your congregation and community. Use the following areas to analyze where you need to establish programs or resources for your congregation.

Pre-marriage Support. This includes 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 pre-marriage counseling is *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* (see the Resources section).

Ongoing Marriage Support. Plans here 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.

Community Information and Referral Services. Provide up-to-date information about support and counseling for couples available in the community, including financial planning, domestic violence, extended family issues, 12-step programs, and Christian counseling services.

Crisis Intervention. When a need arises for crisis intervention in the lives of individuals or families you are in ministry with, it is important that you proceed with caution, always honoring the deep pain and hurt experienced by those in your community. Your role as the family ministry leader is to research and identify community resources for people in times of crisis. Work with your supervisor and senior pastor as you all seek to provide faithful pastoral care to people you believe might be in crisis. Remember, an important part of your ministry is knowing when you are not qualified to help people in trouble or deep pain. Keep a list of professionals in your area that you know and trust. Know when to refer people you are in ministry with to professional care. Make sure to follow up and stay in contact—they will also need your prayers, presence, and support.

Clergy Families

As you work on addressing the needs of families in your congregation and community, don't forget the needs of your clergy family. The phrase "life in the fishbowl" is often used

to describe how a clergy family's life feels. There are pressures felt by both the clergy spouse and any children in the household. Providing ways for clergy to establish time for their own families may be part of the support you provide. Below are some specific suggestions:

- Work with the chairperson of the Staff/Pastor Parish-Relations Committee on ways to best address the needs of clergy families. This includes matters related to insurance, vacation, and sabbath time.
- Contact the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (1-800-523-8390) or the Age Level staff at Discipleship Ministries (1-877-899-2780, ext. 7014) for resources on ways to be in faithful ministry with your clergy family.

Creating Safer 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 physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse within the family. 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 Preamble to our revised Social Principles:

We have closed ourselves to God's guiding Spirit in our daily interactions with the human family and the earth. We have fallen short, and yet God loves us still.

We are grateful for God's forgiving and sanctifying love, given to us and to all and drawing us toward perfect love. By God's grace, we are called to be more Christlike, and thus to be merciful, just, and compassionate. . . . opening our hearts to the people we encounter daily; practicing compassion with our families and neighbors; honoring the dignity and worth of all people near and far. (*BOD*, Part V)

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 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, see the Safer Sanctuaries® books (see the Resources section). These and other resources can serve as guides for planning a congregational response to abuse.

Evaluate Family Ministries

After you have set the vision, identified persons you are in ministry with, determined the results you are seeking, created strategies for accomplishing those results, recruited the team, and put plans into action, it is important to evaluate the ministry.

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 program you implement, ask participants, planners, and leaders to complete an evaluation form.

The “Family Ministries Sample Evaluation” form (<https://www.umofficialresources.com/Guidelines>) asks participants about the best part of the event, what could be improved, what led them to participate, how they found out about it, and what else they might need.

What Results Do You Want?

Good evaluation depends on having in mind the ends, results, or goals that you desire. If you have not thought ahead to what you want to accomplish, your evaluation may center only on numbers—how many people attended how many events—rather than on what is happening in the lives of the people you serve. While you want your ministry to reach as many people as possible, the United Methodist mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That means you need to see people-oriented results: the changes in people’s lives that indicate a growing, deepening faith that leads to significant discipleship.

Tools that can be found with Discipleship Ministries’ Disciple Dashboard can help in planning, goal setting, and evaluating (<http://umcdiscipleship.org/disciple-dashboard>).

Following each event, class, group, or experience offered by your ministry team, plan for an evaluation time at your first meeting afterward. Invite the pastor or other church leaders to participate.

Family Ministry Models

Family ministry recognizes that families come in many shapes and sizes. Family units may include several people who are not actually related biologically, people who have created a family for their own reasons, families with no children, families in which the parenting role is filled by a different relative, or other configuration.

A Flexible Family Concept

Such a wide divergence requires creativity and flexibility in planning for families in their many forms. Consider these ideas and suggestions in your ministry strategies.

Provide Ongoing 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. Safety in technology is a particular need.
- **Drug and Alcohol Abuse.** Signs of abuse; what to do when abuse occurs.
- **Turning Holidays into Holy Days.** Ways to make your family's holidays have a more Christian focus.

Create Categories of Family Ministry Related to Family Types

Some ministry plans will address the needs of all families in a congregation. However, you may want to plan with the following general family types in mind. These are illustrative, not exhaustive:

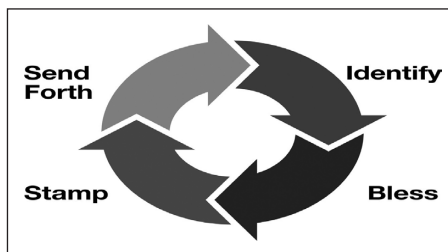
- **Singles.** Yes, singles are a part of family ministry. Indeed, many adult members of a congregation have always been single (some by choice) or have been “singled” through divorce, death, or loss of a significant relationship.
- **Families with Children in the Home.** It doesn't matter if a family involves one, two, or more adults; if rearing children is part of the mix, then these adults will have many of the same needs and issues.

- **Adult Children, Aging Parents.** Address caregiving needs related to sharing a household with older adults. Also address the issue of adult children who live in a location different from their parents but have responsibilities related to care.
- **Family Members Who Have Special Care Needs.** Families with children, youth, or adults who have constant medical or safety needs may often feel isolated and even unwelcome in a congregation. Addressing issues of hospitality and care can be part of what shapes this ministry area.

Make Milestone Ministries the Focus of Family Ministries

Milestones are those important times in the lives of individuals and families through the lifespan. Milestone ministries help identify and celebrate important events in a person's life, recognizing God's presence in those and other moments. Celebrating milestones together invites church families to journey together, taking time to stop and pay attention to God's presence in the lives of every person, celebrating all that God is, has, and will do in each person's life. We celebrate milestones by:

- identifying milestones in a person's life;
- celebrating and blessing the person and the journey;
- stamping or marking the event with a memorable liturgy, physical object (such as a Bible in the third grade or a cross at confirmation), picture, or some other memento to mark the occasion;
- sending forth people for continued work in the church and the world.



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Family ministry shaped around milestones includes home celebrations, worship acknowledgment of events, and outreach opportunities at times of both celebration and pain. Some important milestones to consider include:

- Births and adoptions
- Start of school
- Beginning a first job or new job
- Graduations
- Receiving a driver's license
- Establishing a home or closing the "family homestead"
- Marriage
- Divorce
- Death of a family member
- Moving or other transitions

Shape Family Devotional Life by the Christian Year

The Christian year shapes the worshiping life of a congregation. Providing resources and experiences for home reflection, ritual, and devotion strengthens the home as a place of nurture and mission.

- Provide an overview of the seasons of the Christian year in the newsletter, on the church website, or as a special small-group study.
- Offer Advent/Christmas/Epiphany workshops for learning about the season. Make such items as an Advent Wreath for home use and write prayers.
- Provide Lenten studies that help family members focus more deeply on spiritual practices.
- Provide Easter celebrations for the home that include hymns, Scripture, and prayer.
- Observe Pentecost. Decorate both home and church with red banners.

Advocate for Households to Adopt a Family Night In and Family Night Conversation

Family Night In is the practice where a family stays home together one night a week for a time of devotions, conversation, fun, and games. Encourage people to:

- 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 they want to happen during Family Night In. A common format is dinner together (either prepared in the home or purchased, but eaten together at home); games, movies, or activities together; devotions and prayer.
- have a family meal. Family members rotate responsibilities 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 everyone tries new foods.
- have family fun. This can include 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.
- participate in family devotions. Family members could create a prayer circle where everyone takes a turn praying. The family might want to read Bible stories and share the meaning of the story and how it relates to the family.
- make a family covenant. A prayer-love-share covenant could include ways members of the family want to pray together, love one another, and share with others in need.

Family Night Conversation is the practice of a family sharing experiences from the day, celebrating God’s presence in their lives, and praying together. Take these steps to develop a Family Night Conversation:

- Invite each person in the family to share joys (highs) and concerns (lows).
- Invite one person to read a Scripture verse that the family has chosen for the week/month/season/year.
- Offer family prayers for joys and concerns.

- Invite family members to give and receive an evening blessing. (Example: God loves you, God is with you. Sleep well, knowing you are loved.)

Calendar for Family Ministries

January

- Form a Family Ministry Committee/Team that will help you develop ministries in your congregation.
- Create a calendar of ministry for the year. Make plans to celebrate the seasons of the Christian year with families through worship, workshops, seminars, groups, special events, and forums.
- Order resources and curriculum from Discipleship Resources and Cokesbury.
- Observe the Baptism of the Lord through a renewal of baptism worship service and classes or workshops on baptism.
- Explore hosting a small group or intergenerational opportunity using Belong resources from Discipleship Ministries.

February

- Participate in the celebration of African American Families Month.
- Begin planning vacation Bible school. Include your ministry team and families in this process.
- Plan to celebrate Lent:
- Host a one-day retreat for families that teaches Lenten practices to use throughout the season.
- Create an all-church Lenten devotional guide. Invite people of all ages to submit artwork, stories, and reflections.
- Invite families to develop a Lenten calendar together. (Visit <http://www.picturelent.com> for a variety of resources.)
- Use the Lenten Coin Calendar available for download at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org>, as a family activity.

March

- Make plans to celebrate Christian Home Month.
- Design a worship service for the month of May that honors faith in the home.
- Organize a family outreach event. Invite families to serve lunch to homeless families in the community.
- Provide an intergenerational and family workshop on prayer.
- Conduct a series of classes on parenting. Include sessions on single parenting and step-parenting. Provide childcare.
- Review plans for family ministries for the remainder of the year.
- Encourage families to use Discipleship Ministries resource, Holy Week House Party, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org>, for a new family Easter activity/devotional.

April

- Celebrate Easter. Invite families to share their traditions for this important Christian holiday.
- Offer a series of seminars for couples. Include sessions for premarital conversation, relationship building, and marriage enrichment.
- Observe Earth Day. Publish suggestions online and in the church newsletter for families to observe Earth Day in the home.

May

- Celebrate Christian Home Month with a worship service and a fellowship meal. Follow this celebration with time for evaluation. Ask:
 - ♦ What went well?
 - ♦ What needs improvement?
 - ♦ What impact did this have on participants? How do we know?
- Host an Intergenerational Story Day. Invite people of all ages to prepare and share a meal together. During the meal, invite people to share how their families, parents, grandparents, or other mentors shared the faith with them. Get permission to publish the stories online and/or in the church newsletter.
- Encourage families to participate in vacation Bible school.
- Put together a devotional guide for families to use over the summer.

June

- Check out daily family faith practices at <https://igministry.com/daily-living/living-with-the-holy>. Invite families to choose one discipline to try over the summer. Ask them to share via email or social media how they are experiencing God during summer break.
- Offer a weekday ministry for children whose parents work full-time during the summer.
- Plan an all-church picnic or retreat. Invite families from your church and neighborhood. Include opportunities for devotionals, faith-based activities, prayers, and praise.

July

- Offer intergenerational programs on a Friday night at the church. Include a potluck dinner and games for all ages.
- Encourage families to visit their neighbors and invite them to attend vacation Bible school or your church's monthly family night out.
- Host vacation Bible school. Find a new, creative way to offer VBS, such as a week-end schedule that concludes with Sunday worship, or a fully intergenerational approach.

- Host a church night out at a baseball game or city park. Activities might include an all-church softball game, horseshoes, dinner on the grill, s'mores, and many more fun ideas.

August

- Have a worship service where you bless all students, teachers, and family ministry volunteers. Include a back-to-school devotional for children and their families that you can share during the worship service. Incorporate Blessings in a Backpack or other organizations to help food insecure families in your community.
- Work with your school system to provide backpacks for children whose families cannot afford school supplies.
- Plan to celebrate Children's Sabbath in October.
- Subscribe to Discipleship Ministries Newsletters from the Discipleship Ministries website: umcdiscipleship.org.

September

- Host a family faith formation seminar where you lead and practice different spiritual disciplines and ways of connecting with God every day at home, school, work, and play. Use the *Living with the Holy* resource (listed in the Resources section).
- Publish a listing of community resources that support couples.
- Make plans to Celebrate Children's Sabbath in October.

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 families.
- Option: Celebrate Christian Home Month with a worship service in this month.

November

- Invite families to share what they are thankful for: online, via social media, or in your church newsletter.
- Plan for Advent
- Create an all-church Advent devotional guide. Invite people of all ages to submit artwork, stories, and reflections.
- Invite families to develop an Advent calendar together. (Visit <http://www.pictureadvent.com> for a variety of resources.)
- Offer families opportunities to serve in soup kitchens or homeless shelters (perhaps throughout the winter).

December

- Lead a one-day Advent retreat for families.
- Create a family Advent book to hand out to families. Include:
 - ♦ weekly devotionals,
 - ♦ Advent activities for families to do together,
 - ♦ list of favorite Christmas books,
 - ♦ section on Christmas traditions around the world
- 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 stories in the church newsletter.
- Offer an evening prayer service for families on New Year's Eve.

Resources

****Denotes our top picks**

Baptism: Understanding God's Gift by Edward Phillips and Sara Webb Phillips (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012), ISBN: 9780881776362.

Birthing in Prayer: Pregnancy as a Spiritual Journey by Kim Barker, Linda de Meillon, Leigh Harrison (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2008), ISBN: 9780835899413.

Breaking and Mending: Divorce and God's Grace by Mary Lou Redding (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), ISBN: 9780835808552.

Charting a Course of Discipleship: A Workbook on Christian Discipleship, Revised Edition, by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, Jay Regennitter with John P. Gilbert (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012), ISBN: 9780881776089.

The Children's Minister by Rita B. Hays (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), ISBN: 9780881775273. Includes help for ministering with families of children at milestones and in times of crisis.

Children and Family Ministry Handbook by Sarah Flannery (Abingdon: Nashville, 2020), ISBN-13 978-1-5018-9623-1. This handy handbook offers advice and how-tos in all aspects of Children and Family Ministries, as well as relatable church-life anecdotes.

****Christian Home Month Manual.** Discipleship Ministries (1-877-899-2780, ext. 7014). Free yearly manual for celebrating Christian Home Month in May or another month.

Confirm Parent Guide by Michael A Novelli (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2016), ISBN: 781501826986.

****CyberSafety for Families CD** by Paul O'Briant (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2010), ISBN: 9780881775921. Training kit on CD with teaching plans, handouts, and slide presentations for teaching parents and other adults about ways to keep children and teens safe online.

****Family: The Forming Center, Revised Edition**, by Marjorie Thompson (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), ISBN: 9780835807982.

Liturgy of the Ordinary by Tish Harrison Warren (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), ISBN: 9780830846238.

Parents and Grandparents as Spiritual Guides: Nurturing Children of the Promise by Betty Shannon Cloyd (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000), ISBN: 9780835809238.

****Passing It On: Nurture Your Children's Faith Season by Season** by Kara Lassen Oliver (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2015), ISBN: 9780835814973.

***Scrambled Starts: Family Prayers for Morning, Bedtime, and Everything In-Between* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2015), ISBN: 9780835814997.

***pictureAdvent* (<http://lecfamily.org/advent/>) and *pictureLent* (<http://lecfamily.org/lent/>) online family devotionals.

***Safer Sanctuaries: Nurturing Trust Within Faith Communities*, Multiple Authors. Discipleship Resources, (2023), ISBN: 978-0-88177-962-2.

Teaching Images of the Christian Faith: Symbols of Faith for Intergenerational Use by Marcia J. Stoner (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), ISBN: 9780687094752.

Safer Sanctuaries®: Keeping Children Safe

Safer Sanctuaries: Nurturing Trust within Faith Communities, <https://www.upperroom.org/safersanctuaries> (Nashville: Upper Room, 2023). ISBN: 9780881779622. Practical guidance is provided in developing and implementing a substantive, holistic action plan of abuse prevention.

Safer Sanctuaries® Online Companion Guide. An interactive companion for your team as they work through developing and implementing a Safer Sanctuaries® policy.

Discipleship Ministries Contacts

Resources, tools, and tips for intergenerational and family faith formation: www.umcdiscipleship.org (Discipleship Ministries website).

Resources on social justice and pastoral care (including clergy families): www.gcsrw.org; www.umc-gbcs.org

Vital Ministry assessment tools, <http://umcvitalcongregations.org/>

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcuh.org, Madison, NJ, 973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, www.umcjustice.org, Washington, DC, 202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, www.resourceumc.org/communications, www.umns.org, Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, www.umcdiscipleship.org, Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; The Upper Room, <http://www.upperroom.org>

General Board of Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmmission.org, Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, www.gcorr.org, Washington, DC,
202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, Chicago, IL,
1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcumm.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, www.abingdonpress.com,
www.cokesbury.com, www.ministrymatters, Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, www.uwfaith.org, New York, NY, 212-682-3633

United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries, <http://www.umcrm.camp>, Pittsburgh,
PA, 862-200-7260

Wespath (retirement/benefits), www.wespath.org, Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

**For additional resources, contact your annual
conference office.**

