

## **Igniting the Fire in Your Families...Your Church** by Professor Ben Freudenburg

When I get to Heaven, I believe my Heavenly Father will ask me, "Ben, how did it go with the gifts I gave you? Do the daughters I've blessed you with know and love me?" I believe King Jesus will be asking me this question, not the pastor, not the youth worker and not their teachers. I think He will ask the church a different question. One that sounds like: "How did you support parents in shaping children who love and obey me?"

### **What is the Church's family ministry?**

We begin examining the Church's family ministry by questioning the philosophy undergirding it. My philosophy of family ministry is:

*Parents are the primary shapers of faith and life in their children; and the role of the church is to partner with the home in that process.*

For parents to be successful in their role as primary faith and life shapers, they need to have a healthy marriage, parenting skills for every age and stage of family life, and faith imparting skills. They also need resources to shape their family's view of human sexuality and the ability to use God-given resources effectively. And, if they lose a spouse through death or divorce, and choose to remarry, they will need a new set of skills to raise a blended family.

Therefore, the church's family ministry is all about creating a culture at church that impacts positively on the home. This Biblical church culture supports parents and grandparents as the primary agents of faith formation and equips them for that role by providing an intentional training center. The church will then equip the home to be all God intended it to be.

### **Church not responsible for kids' faith formation**

I believe the current church culture has led parents to believe that the church is responsible for faith formation in children. I call the current church culture "church centered, home supported." Family ministries should help the church move towards a "home centered, church supported" culture where the church is the community of faith, agreeing with the Biblical view of supporting the home.

Listen to what David shares in Psalm 127:3-5. He asks, "*Don't you see that children are God's best gift?... Children are the fruit of the womb; His generous legacy.*" Children were not given just to sustain one's lineage but to be added to God's legacy of faith. How blessed are parents! What an honor and responsibility to receive the gift of children from God and ensure His gifts return to Him.

We know that a Christian marriage that lasts a lifetime is God's plan and the best environment for raising Godly children. I like how the Message version of Scripture makes it so clear. "And what does He want from marriage? Children of God." (Malachi 2:13) God intended the home to produce children who love God with all their heart, soul and mind, and their neighbor as themselves.

Scripture clearly says that the home is responsible for faith formation. My favorite is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Here God is talking to His people and reminding them to love Him with all they have - heart, soul, and strength. The commandments were not to stay on stone, but to be upon our hearts. Why? So that we, the parents, could teach them to the gifts our Father gave us; our children. We are to impress them on our children's hearts by talking about God's will and ways all the time. The church must not do what God intended for the home to do.

### **Shift from Family**

In recent years, there has been an unintentional shift away from the family unit. The church has moved from a congregational community built on families to a church that separates children and teens from their parents. Parents worship in an adult-only service while children and teens go to distinct and separate children's or teen churches.

As a result, faith is less evident in teenagers' lives than ever before. Families and marriages are also less valued. Kids today consider their "family" those who care for and love them. Many don't define family in terms of the biological family.

Congregations experience a change when they return to a Biblical understanding of family ministry. They find a wonderful connection between parents and children that can transform congregations. Unchurched people will also be drawn to seek help from the local church for their family and marriage.

The Church must build deliberate and intentional family life education systems that support homes and marriages via intentional marriage and family forming centers that partner with the home. The end goal? More children have a safe and secure place to grow and develop as God's children and make it home to the eternal destination their Father in Heaven has prepared for them.

### **The Family Friendly Partners Network**

Strengthening the Christian family according to God's design in Scripture is the focus of the Family Friendly Partners Network (FFPN), a ministry founded by Professor Ben Freudenburg of Concordia University Ann Arbor, Michigan, United States that has benefited many churches in recent years.

Freudenburg, a former Director of Christian Education (DCE) at Our Redeemer/Hutchinson, KS, has been a DCE for 38 years, working with children, youth, and their families to nurture their love for God and each other through the church and is presently serving as Family Life program director and professor in Family Life Studies at Concordia University Ann Arbor and is the founder of Family Friendly Partners Network. He has recently created the Family Friendly Partners Training Network and has led networks of churches in USA, Singapore, and Malaysia. In August, 2011, Freudenburg will begin equipping five leaders to serve as Regional FFPN trainers in an effort to expand networks.

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