

FAMILY MINISTRIES

K 05 Philosophy

Scripture affirms the importance of the family and outlines the divine principles which govern family relationships. At creation, God instituted marriage—and with it the family (Gen 2:18-25)—as God’s primary setting for human development and nurturance. When Christ redeemed all human experience from the curse of sin, He redeemed marriage and family relationships. He calls family members to relate in ways that befit those who have responded to the gospel (Eph 5:21-6:4). Because the family is the primary place where the capacity for love and for intimacy with God and with other human beings is developed and where Christian values are passed from one generation to the next, the family is central to the discipling process (John 8:31, 13:35). As Scripture magnifies last day events, the spotlight again falls upon the family. The Bible predicts that before the great day of the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, God will give a final call to this generation, turning hearts to Himself and family members toward one another (Mal 4:5,6).

Ellen G White held strong convictions regarding the importance of families and ministry to them. “There is no more important field of effort than that committed to the founders and guardians of the home” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p 351). “Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . . By many this home field has been shamefully neglected and it is time that divine resources and remedies were presented, that this state of evil may be corrected”

The Department of Family Ministries recognizes the significance of family in the lives of believers and nonbelievers alike. It endeavors to strengthen the home as a discipling center where family members through their interpersonal relationships are encouraged in their relationship with Jesus Christ and His church, and where the relational skills necessary for winsome witness are developed. The department endeavors to keep in perspective both God’s ideals for family living and an understanding of the brokenness experienced by individuals and families in a fallen world. Thus Family Ministries calls individuals, married couples and parents to stretch toward divine ideals, while at the same time extending the redemptive, healing ministry of Christ. Efforts on behalf of families are held to be urgent, vital, and integral to the message and mission of the Church.

K 10 Objectives

Recognizing the mutual strength and support which the church must be to the home, and the home to the church, if the mission of the church is to become a reality, the Department of Family Ministries has adopted the following objectives:

1. To proclaim the reviving and restorative message of the everlasting gospel within the context of family living. Christ is and must be acknowledged as the Savior and Head of every home. In Him, family members are at peace with God and at peace with each other. As they are drawn near to Him they are drawn nearer to each other, in love, forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, and renewal.

2. To affirm and strengthen every Seventh-day Adventist family as a primary discipling unit. Family Ministries seeks to deepen understanding of the relational dimension of being and making disciples and to strengthen family members as disciplemakers within the family. A married couple is viewed as the primary unit of the family. The department seeks to provide couples and families with access to educational, enrichment, and counseling opportunities to enhance the development of the relational skills necessary for the effective discipling of one another and growth toward optimal Christian marriage, parent-child and extended family relationships.

3. To enable parents and families to increase the likelihood of successful transference of Christian Seventh-day Adventist values to the next generation. Family Ministries develops materials and provides learning opportunities within church and family settings designed to enable parents to make biblical values winsome to their children and youth. The department encourages an atmosphere within homes and churches which promotes questions and on-going discussion regarding Christian values and tenets of faith among parents and children, young and old, leaders and members in an effort to foster the development of mature faith.

4. To create a “family of God” experience in every Seventh-day Adventist church. Family Ministries fosters an atmosphere which respects and celebrates diversity within congregations and within the world Church, recognizing that unity is not found in uniformity, but in Christ, the Head of the body. Through a shared commitment to a common message and mission and a reciprocal openness, honesty, and vulnerability in relationships with one another, the oneness we have found in Christ may become a reality in experience.

5. To empower families for winsome witness. Beyond the priority placed on the home as the most important mission field, Family Ministries helps families to discover and utilize their spiritual gifts in the community around them. The department encourages and enables families to relate in winsome ways with non-believing family members, to befriend their neighbors, to share the good news of life in Christ, and to support, through their prayers, offerings, and service, the mission outreach of the church.

K 15 Areas of Emphasis

The focus of Family Ministries is upon relationships. It is a ministry to the “and,” such as in husband *and* wife, parent *and* child. Thus this ministry concerns itself primarily with relational dynamics rather than the needs of individuals per se. The basic target areas of emphasis for the Department of Family Ministries are premarital guidance, strengthening marriage and parent education, with attention also given to extended families, single parenting, step-family needs, and the family needs of singles. The development of relational skills fostered by Family Ministries empowers young people, singles, and families and enriches relationships both within the home and within the church, the household of faith.

The curriculum framework upon which leadership and resource development are based includes eleven major areas: theological foundations, family and mission, families in society, marriage and family dynamics, interpersonal relationships, parent education and guidance, human growth and development, human sexuality, family ethics, family resource management, and family ministries programs and implementation.

KF 15 05 Methodologies

Three broad categories define the approaches to ministry to families facilitated by the department: education, enrichment, and counseling.

1. *Education*—Substantial revelation concerning the divine purpose for families has been given. Practical principles which govern family relationships are found in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. In the preparation of resources for family life education, the department centers its research and study on these primary sources and seeks to integrate biblical principles with helpful understanding and methodologies from other compatible mental health, behavioral, and social science sources.

2. *Enrichment*—The department prepares resources and develops leadership in enrichment activities—experiential programs for married couples, families and singles groups which enable participants to make relational gains together through sharing and interacting in various events and activities. Enrichment focuses directly on the family or group as a system in a process of enhancing relationships through better communication, deeper understanding, and an improved ability to resolve anger and conflict. In the absence of extended family, enrichment groups can function as a surrogate family. When enrichment activities are conducted among individuals who are part of the same local church, a spirit of community, support, and cooperation may be developed.

3. *Counseling*—The crucial role and importance of the counseling profession in the lives of troubled families is recognized and appreciated. Many individuals and families are in such critical need as to require specialized work that is particularly tailored to assist them in resolving short or long-term personal or relational crises and difficulties. The department encourages the referral of such individuals and families to professionally qualified counselors wherever possible. While the training of counselors is not within the purview of the department, it is recognized that the content and process of leadership development provided by the department may be useful to pastors and others who may be called upon to counsel. However, the limitations of pastoral and lay counseling must be fully recognized and appropriate caution taken.

K 15 10 Evangelism—Another category of family ministry is family evangelism. In this approach SDA families reach out to families in their communities through personal and public evangelism using a variety of methodologies. There is the progressive method which utilizes a series of family life and Bible seminars, and the integrated approach that combines vital family life concepts with compatible Bible doctrines in a single evangelistic program. Family life evangelism has the benefit of educating the church and evangelizing the world simultaneously.