



GUIDELINES
for Leading Your Congregation

FAMILY MINISTRIES

*Helping families become centers
of faith formation*

*Written by MaryJane Pierce Norton
and Lia Icaza-Willetts*

General Board of Discipleship

FAMILY MINISTRIES

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Our Identity, Call, and Mission

About now a small voice in the back of your mind may be whispering, “What am I doing here? To what have I said yes? What is my role?” At the same time you may be aware that your congregation has extended to you a *call—a call to serve*. And you have said *yes—yes to leading in a vital mission*.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. You have agreed to serve as a leader bringing your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to the church. When the leaders focus on the church’s purpose—*its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ*—and link that purpose to the passions of the people, amazing things can happen.

The fundamental way we fulfill our mission is to reach out to people in the name of Jesus Christ, to relate people to God, to nurture and strengthen them in their journey of discipleship, and to send them into the world to be the church—inviting and receiving others in the name of Jesus Christ. We call this the primary task of The United Methodist Church.

Effective leaders keep the whole of the primary task in their sight, working to keep all of its aspects in concert.

Leaders in the church must be first, and foremost, spiritual leaders who model and embrace Christian discipline and teaching. *By practicing the means of grace—prayer, fasting, studying Scripture, corporate worship, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Christian conversation, and acts of mercy—church leaders stay tuned to the mission of the church and live out the primary task.* Members and would-be members should be able to look to a congregation’s leaders for spiritual example and direction, because true leaders are known by their fruits. People’s lives are changed through their influence.

Leaders use their gifts and talents to enable others to use their gifts and talents to the fullest potential. The flow of information, inspiration, guidance, and vision from leaders is an encouragement to others on their spiritual journey. Leaders help others to see new possibilities. When leaders are focused on the mission of the church, community is built and ministry occurs. The church focused on God is alive with creative energy aimed at transformation.

Four Essential Leadership Functions

Church leaders support and strengthen the church when they pay attention to these leadership functions: (1) help people discover the current

reality in which they live; (2) bring together the congregation's understandings of current reality and desired reality into a shared vision; (3) develop the plans to help the community move from current reality toward the reality of its shared vision; and finally, (4) monitor the whole work of the church as the congregation moves with God's guidance toward its vision.

1. Discovering Current Reality

Accurately describing current reality—the way things are—may be the most important function of leadership. The booklets in this Guideline series offer suggestions for leaders to pay attention to the various committees of the church's ministry. In addition, it is critical for church leaders—lay and clergy—to spend time together discussing the ministry of the whole congregation. The conversation needs to include attentiveness to God's guidance and everything that describes a congregation's "what we are, here and now." Because God is always doing a new thing, this job is continuous. When we pay attention to change, we provide a base of integrity and strength from which to move into the future. Faith in Jesus Christ and a spiritual centering in God offers the strongest foundation to move people fearlessly through the massive changes of the twenty-first century.

2. Naming Shared Vision

Ask the question, "What do you want more than anything else in the world?" and most persons will give a response that indicates that they want to live in a world filled with love, faith, security, and meaning. Because persons desire a positive future, they are willing to invest themselves in organizations that are committed to it. By its very nature, the church is devoted to the creation of a better future. When the church promises to move people personally and corporately toward their desired reality, people will invest time, energy, and resources into the church. As people see their own desires linked to the congregational vision and deeper understanding of God's future, they deepen their commitment and involvement. Building this link is a vital role of leadership.

Naming a shared vision is accomplished by asking people about their lives and their faith, and listening very carefully. By listening, we mean deep listening—the kind that requires setting aside our own agendas and entering into the worldviews of others, and listening for God through the conversation. It is a significant shift in our understanding of leadership in the church to move from telling people what we think they need to know to listening to people in order to find out who they are and what their desired realities are. Effective spiritual leaders listen to the hearts of people and begin to articulate a shared vision.

3. Developing Bridges

To span the gulf between our current reality and the hope expressed in the shared vision, leaders must build a bridge. The third critical function of leadership is to plan actions and develop systems that create the bridge across this gulf. Leaders who are elected to administrative and program committees are responsible for the ongoing work of the church and must pay attention to the present. At the same time, leaders *must* be focused on the future—keeping today and tomorrow in tension—ensuring that the church doesn't get stuck in the past, present, or future.

Church leaders who are attentive to God's leading and who can hold the tension between today and tomorrow are *visionary leaders*. Visionary leaders see it all—current reality, desired reality, and the bridges to get from one to the other.

4. Monitoring the Journey

Perhaps the most critical task for leaders is keeping an eye on the whole of the faith journey of the congregation. When leaders are constantly caught up in “doing” the administrative and program work of the church, there is not any time left for “being” with God in prayer to discern the leading of the Spirit for the congregation. Leaders must step back from “doing” constant activities in order to pay attention to the total direction of the church's mission and ministry. All elected and appointed leaders must spend time together listening to God in prayer, Bible study, conversation, and other means of grace in order to lead the entire community in the work of Christ. Anything less is not Christian spiritual leadership.

My Job as Leader in Family Ministries

You have been selected to lead family ministries in your congregation. This job should excite 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. Before you read this job description, read the Affirmation for Families below.

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/or 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 families are communities of commitment and 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.

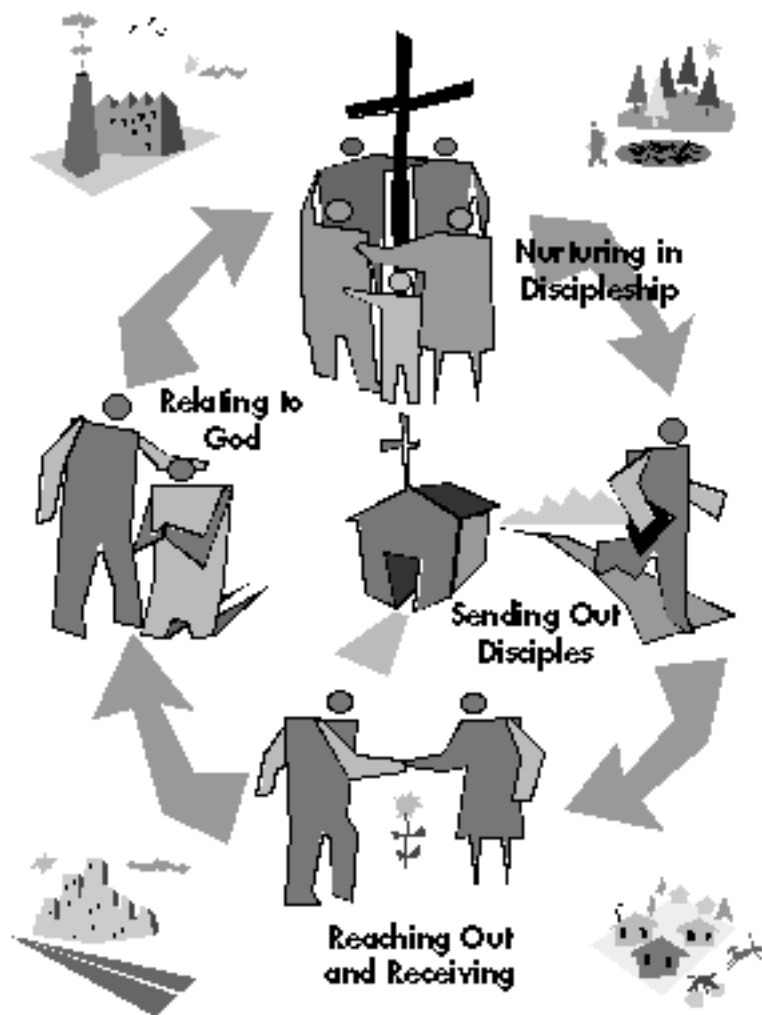
We believe that families have a responsibility to live daily lives of faithful discipleship.

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.

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.



Job Description—Leader in Family Ministries

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 source 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 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.” (Part V, Chapter 1, Section 1, *The Book of Discipline*, 2000).

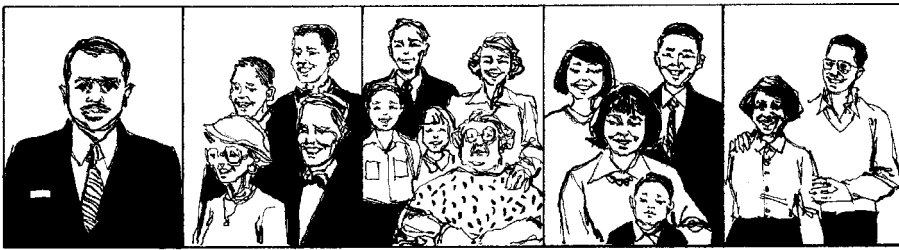
The function of the local church is described:

The function of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to help people to know Jesus Christ personally 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 (§201).

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 their 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. 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!



Guidance for My Job as Leader in Family Ministries

Developing a Plan for 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:

10 Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation

- 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 through 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.
- 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 from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, number 437, to guide your thoughts. 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 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 every family is not the same. Thank you for the love found in every family form. Thank you for the way you created people to care and love one another as you 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
- Families with children
- Single parent families
- Blended families (those who have been previously married and have children from those marriages)
- Families with grandparents raising grandchildren
- Married couples with no children
- Your family!

As you think about families, consider what we find in *The Discipline of The United Methodist Church* about families:

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 understand the family as encompassing a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children (the nuclear family), including the extended family, families with adopted children, single parents, stepfamilies, and couples without children. We affirm shared responsibility for parenting by men and women 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. (¶ 161, *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, 2000)

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. Nowadays, there is 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 needs may be needs of the family unit as well as needs of individual members of the family as children, youth, and adults. To discover these needs, survey the families of your congregation. You may use the following survey by adapting it to fit the needs of your congregation, or you may write your own.

Family Ministries Survey

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:

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 _____ 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)

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 workshop

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, meeting other than Sunday school time
- Ongoing small group for singles, meeting 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:

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/or 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 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 family forms in your congregation, and of 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 Nominations and Personnel Committee 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 Ministry Team on Education. 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:

1. *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 which allow them to walk with Christ in daily life, and to grow in faith (with the support of the congregation)

2. *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
3. *Serve as advocates for the needs of families of many configurations in the congregation and in the community.*
4. *Plan family ministries programs and opportunities, such as:*
 - January family ministries annual planning retreat,
 - May celebration of the Christian Home Month, 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 working 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 adults 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. Opening prayer including sharing known joys and concerns of families in the congregation.**
- 2. Devotional reading and reflection on Scripture.**

3. **Review the role of the family ministry team.**
(*Do this 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 at subsequent meetings.**
5. **Design or review action plans.**
6. **Share reports as needed as it relates 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. Setting the Vision

- Remember the mission of The United Methodist Church: *to make disciples for Jesus Christ.*
- 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. Knowing 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, desires. Your role is to record, to listen, and to clarify. You may use the survey on pages 12-14 of this booklet. Keep the results before you as you set your goals.

3. Determining 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, Lent, and Pentecost."

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."

Goal Development

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

GOAL _____

RESULT _____

RESULT _____

GOAL _____

RESULT _____

RESULT _____

GOAL _____

RESULT _____

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.

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/child care 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 using the book, **Capture The Moment** (see Resources) during which families will plan for ways to recognize important family events through worship times at home.*

4. Recruiting 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. 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 27 of this Guidelines booklet. As you move your plans into action, be specific about who will be responsible for each step of the plan, 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.

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 questions 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:
5. What we need to do next is:

Models for Ministry

Planning Retreat

(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, etc.

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 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**: What action is God calling us to 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 their 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. *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:

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/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.

Family Week Resources

Family Week resources are produced yearly through the National Council of Churches of Christ, Committee on Family Ministries and Human Sexuality. Materials consist of a poster illustrating the yearly theme, plus materials for family and congregations to explore the theme. The Family Week Poster and materials are available by March each year and can be used in conjunction with Family Week in May or at any other time of the year the congregation wants to highlight families. These ecumenical resources for the celebration of Family Week are available from The Office of Family Ministries, General Board of Discipleship, PO Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37202-0003.

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 actively support marriages in your congregation and in your community. Use the following areas to analyze where you need to establish programs or resources for your congregation.

- **Pre-marriage 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.
- **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.
- **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, Christian counseling services.

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, and/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 United Methodist Book of 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, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2000).

Advocate for the following in your congregation:

1. Sermons, prayers, workshops, lectures, Sunday school classes that address the presence of violence in families.
2. Published information distributed through newsletters, display racks, and on the church's Web site giving the indicators of abuse. Include what signs to look for not just with children but also with youth and adults.
3. Clear policies and forms related to the recruiting, screening, and hiring of those who work in the church.
4. Creating a congregational plan for responding to allegations of abuse if they occur in the church.

For more help in this area, purchase the book, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, by Joy Thornburg Melton, published by Discipleship Resources. This and other resources can serve as a guide for planning a congregational response to abuse.

Family Ministry Models

Suggestions for Parenting/Grandparenting Classes

- Focus on God: cultivate a personal relationship with God
- Listen to the children: Cultivate a personal relationship with your children and grandchildren (listen with your heart)
- Love: Give children love, acceptance, and respect

- Pray: Pray daily with your children/grandchildren
- Nurture: Help children in their relationship with God
- Relationships: Maintain healthy loving family relationships
- Discipline: use fair and firm discipline in loving ways
- Model: Model the Christian life with words and actions
- Avoid Abuse: Avoid spanking and verbal abuse
- Give a list of resources: Provide one resource for parents/grandparents

Suggestions for “Building a Faithful Family” Seminar

Ways to Build a Faithful Family in my Home are:

- 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/adults to seek the presence of God in daily life.
- Give a list of resources: Provide one resource that families can use.

Suggestions for “Celebrating a Family Night-In” Workshop

- Family Night In: Stay home together one night a week for a time for devotions, conversation, fun, and games.
- 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.
- Give a list of resources: Provide one resource that families can use.

Planning Calendar for Family Ministries in the Local Church

Family ministries is a congregational task. The following is a suggested planning calendar for celebrating family ministries in your congregation.

JANUARY

Obtain information and resources from the General Board of Discipleship to celebrate Christian Home Month and Family Week.

Begin plans to celebrate Christian Home Month with the congregation.

Form a small group/team to serve as the family life council, or family ministries team, to plan for family ministries in your congregation.

Order new family ministries resources from Cokesbury and the 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.

FEBRUARY

Participate in the celebration of African American Families Month.

Involve families in the planning of vacation Bible school with classes for all ages.

Plan a one-day Lent retreat for families for prayer and Bible study.

Invite community leaders who work with families to lead a seminar. Provide nursery for younger children.

Plan the Christian Home worship service. Ask several families to participate in that service in May and recruit a few families to give testimonies in the worship service.

MARCH

Involve families in sharing time and service with needy families in the community.

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.

MAY

Use Family Week Resources to celebrate Family Week.

Celebrate Christian Home Month with a worship service and a fellowship meal at lunch time.

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.

JULY

Offer intergenerational programs on a Friday night at the church, with a potluck dinner and games for all ages.

Invite families to a lock-in (spend the night) at the church with devotions, family prayers, games, and fellowship.

AUGUST

Find ways to support children and their families as they go back to school.

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 using the book *Capture the Moment*.

Conduct parenting and grandparenting classes.

Publish a listing of community resources supporting marriage.

OCTOBER

Involve families in sharing time and service with needy families in the community.

Celebrate the Children's Sabbath with a worship service to remember children and their families.

Option: Celebrate Christian Home Month 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 families of many configurations.

Offer families opportunities to serve in soup kitchens or homeless shelters.

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.

Offer an evening prayer service on New Year's Eve for families.

Resources

Family Ministries

A New Day for Family Ministry. New York: the Alban Institute, 1996.

Children and Poverty Resource Packet. United Methodist Bishops, 1998.

Children Worship! MaryJane Pierce Norton. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997.

Christian Home Month Manual. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, yearly publication.

Church and Family Together: A Congregational Manual for Black Family Ministry. Karen Jones Bernstine, editor. Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1996.

FaithHome. Created by Don and Joy Solomon, written by MaryJane Pierce Norton and Debra Ball-Kilbourne. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Family: The Forming Center, Revised Edition. Marjorie Thompson. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997.

Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation: 2001–2004, Family Ministries. Lia Icaza-Willetts and Mary Jane Pierce Norton.

Parenting Ministries

Bringing God Home: Family Devotions for the Christian Year. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1995.

Capture the Moment: Building Faith Traditions for Families. Rick and Sue Isbell. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998.

Devo'Zine, The Upper Room, bimonthly publication.

FaithHome for Parents booklets. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999–2000.

Hand in Hand: Growing Spiritually with Our Children. Sue Downing. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998.

POCKETS, The Upper Room, published 11 times a year. Written for children 6 to 12, including stories, Scripture, prayers, games.

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church. Joy Thornburg Melton. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998.

Talking with Your Child: Conversations for Life booklets. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999–2000.

Talking with Your Teen: Conversations for Life booklets. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999–2000.

Marriage Ministries

Couples Who Care. Jane Ives, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN, 1997.

Couples Who Cope. Jane Ives, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN, 1999.

Preparing to Marry Again. Dick Dunn, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN, 1999.

Growing in Faith, United in Love. Barb Nardi Kurtz, Discipleship Resources, 1997.

Marriage: Claiming God's Promises. Nan Zoller and Jack Gilbert. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998.

