



Family Friendly Churches, part 1 of 2—

Family Friendly Churches

by LeRoy Bartel

What is a family? The definition of this important word has shifted over the years. Twenty years ago dictionaries described the family as “the basic unit in society having as its nucleus two or more adults living together and cooperating in the care and rearing of their own or adopted children.” More recently the definition has expressed family as “*traditionally* consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children” and also “any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family” (italics mine). These dictionary changes simply reflect cultural tensions and changes in contemporary family life.

The church faces a myriad of challenges as it seeks to minister to families in the 21st century. Never has the family been more fragmented. Today it seems like the family is being pulled a thousand different directions. The secular media, as a whole, certainly cannot be viewed as family friendly. The values portrayed on television and expressed on the radio and in popular books and magazines generally counter to the family values espoused in the Bible. Divorce, relaxed sexual standards, and homosexual behavior are increasingly accepted as normal by modern culture. More and more parents are facing the challenge of single parenting. These issues and others

impact the Christian family. They raise the stakes for the church in its evangelistic efforts. In a context like this how can the church help strengthen families? What are some of the characteristics of a family friendly church? I would like to suggest the following:



A Family Friendly Church—

•Encourages “family altar”

Family friendly churches recognize the truth of the adage that “families that pray together stay together.” Consequently they emphasize the importance of a daily time of prayer, Bible reading and worship for the families of

their church. They also provide practical help and resources to assist families in making this a meaningful and productive activity.

•Supports a “family night”

At a time when family members struggle with competing schedules and activities that drive them in different directions, family friendly churches often schedule and emphasize a “family night.” These are promoted as enjoyable times to be together, bonding, communicating, laughing, playing and growing together.

Family friendly churches suggest activities for these evenings and do their best to keep the church schedule free of conflicting activities.

•Sponsors family activities

Family friendly churches understand the value of being together as families at church. They also are convinced that many families in their community would appreciate times of family fun and fellowship. Therefore they plan and sponsor special events like film night, barbecues, picnics, outings, and holiday parties designed especially for families. They also feature trans-generational opportunities for worship, service and learning.

(Part 2 continues with more on what makes a “family friendly church.”)

Questions For Further Study—

1. List the different types of families represented in your congregation. (These might include: two parent families, single-parent families, parents with adopted children, parents who have been divorced and remarried, etc.)
2. In what ways does your church minister to the needs of the different types of families in your church?
3. What changes might you implement to better meet the needs of the 21st century family?



Family Friendly Churches, part 2 of 2—

Family Friendly Churches

by LeRoy Bartel

National Director, Commission on Discipleship

(Continued from part 1.)

A Family Friendly Church—

•Encourages and includes single parents

In a family friendly church single parents are not treated as second-class citizens. There is also a sensitive, but unspoken, awareness of their special needs. The church is sensitive to the special challenges that come with Father's Day, Mother's Day and Valentines Day. Single parents are fully and thoughtfully included in all of the family-life planning.

•Provides competent Christian counseling services

Christian families face incredible parenting challenges today. Often they need a skilled person to help them sort through issues and develop strategies as they nurture their children. Their children may need someone to talk to and pray with in order to deal with the problems they are facing. Family friendly churches will identify and resource capable, biblically guided, spiritual professionals to assist their families in crisis.

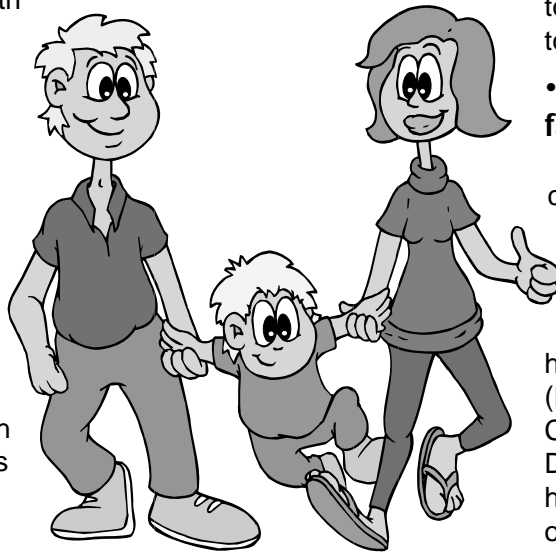
•Maintains a resource library on family issues

One of the most practical things a church can do is provide a resource library on family

issues featuring reputable family life specialists. These resources should address a wide variety of family issues and be available either at an on-site listening or reading center or to check out to read, listen to, or view.

•Provides classes in parenting skills

Family friendly churches always offer a wide variety of classes designed to help parents improve their parenting skills.



Classes that present balanced and biblical understandings of discipline, listening skills, conversation, gift identification and development, conflict resolution and child development are a must.

•Sponsors support groups for parents

Parents with children of all ages face incredible challenges

today. Family friendly churches are unwilling to let parents struggle through these times alone. They understand and value the redemptive power of Christian fellowship within the context of small groups. It just helps to be able to share your struggles with other Christian parents who have been through what you're going through. Family friendly churches are convinced marvelous help is available as individuals with common needs and problems pray together, search the Scriptures together and share together.

•Features preaching on family issues

The pastor of a family friendly church will purposefully and regularly include family issues in his regular preaching schedule. The wise pastor will take advantage of special family holidays to accent family themes (Father's Day, Mother's Day, Children's Day, Grandparents Day, Valentines Day, etc.). Other holidays also provide a marvelous opportunity to accent the importance of family from a Christian perspective (Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving).

•Provides opportunities for ministry

One of the greatest opportunities for family bonding and spiritual growth is when a family shares in ministry together. It may be as simple as cleaning the church together, folding bulletins, or visiting a nursing home to bring

encouragement to an older person. If a family has musical abilities perhaps they could prepare special music for a Sunday evening service. What blessing comes as a family plans together, prays together, and performs min-

istry together for God's glory! Blessed is the church that looks for and creates opportunities for families to do this.

God instituted the family as the primary "people-building" unit

from the beginning of time. His plan has not changed! It remains the essential unit for disciple-making. May we do everything in our power to make our churches "family friendly!"

Questions For Further Study—

1. How would you rate your church on the "family friendly scale"? What improvements could be made?

2. Brainstorm with others in your church on ways to incorporate the following:
 - Christian counseling services

 - Resource library

 - Parenting classes

 - Support groups