

Getting Started in Family Ministry

If you have volunteered or been invited to serve as Family Ministries coordinator in your local church, you will find excellent startup information in *Family Ministries: Supporting Families for Faith and Service*, by MaryJane Pierce Norton (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2012), one of the *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* series, which is updated after each general conference. Your church may already have purchased the complete set for 2013-2016, which includes the *Guidelines* for twenty-six areas of ministry and a CD-Rom with the complete text of each, an Orientation Workshop, and additional tools that are referenced in the *Guidelines* themselves. The complete set is available through Cokesbury. You may also purchase a specific *Guidelines*, in either paperback or e-book format.

The *Family Ministries* booklet begins with sound information on leadership, a Biblical foundation for Family Ministries, and an “Affirmation” that summarizes some basic United Methodist beliefs about families. The *Guidelines* offers suggestions for prayerful preparation for this ministry and emphasizes the importance of considering all configurations of families and their various needs as you develop plans to help them “...become centers of faith formation and to achieve a better quality of life in a physical, emotional, and spiritual sense”(page 12). The booklet provides a brief survey that could be used or adapted to learn more about the kinds of families in your congregation and their needs. This survey and a more detailed one are also available on the *Guidelines* CD-Rom described above. You can also find an expanded survey at www.marriagelovepower.net under “Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources” under General. (<http://www.marriagelovepower.net/expanded-family-ministries-survey.pdf>)

Once you have clarity about some of the needs in your congregation and community, you can begin a planning process, as outlined in the *Guidelines* booklet. You may want to establish ongoing marriage education and enrichment, offer parenting and grandparenting classes or workshops, research and identify community resources for those in crisis, teach basic communication skills to all age groups, or schedule intergenerational events to build relationships across age groups and to bring singles and couples together. Churches can also provide resources for family devotions and other family-strengthening activities to use at home.

You might categorize your family ministries by family types: singles, families with children in the home, adult children with aging parents, and families with special care needs. You can affirm the importance of families by celebrating milestones: births and adoptions, starting school, graduations, marriages, and moving. You might also consider how best to acknowledge and minister effectively with those dealing with serious illness, divorce, and death.

The *Family Ministries* booklet provides guidance for setting goals and evaluating programs, suggests many specific strategies and a possible calendar of events, and lists some helpful resources. Other resources may be found at the Discipleship Ministries website (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>) as well as at www.marriagelovepower.net, a website focused on United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministries. You will find there a series of “Best Practices Articles and Recommended

Resources” documents which summarize current understandings and list resources that have been used by United Methodists across the connection. Articles you might find especially helpful are “United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministries: Not Just for Couples,” “Nurturing Families, Nurturing Disciples,” and “Developing a Marriage Ministry in Your Church.”

As you discover the particular concerns in your congregation and community, review the information and resources on those topics, such as relationship education for youth, marriage preparation, parenting, infidelity prevention and recovery, domestic violence, divorce care and recovery, strengthening stepfamilies, and the like. Since these articles already include copyright information, you may duplicate and distribute them. I would also appreciate feedback and resource recommendations for expanding these articles and ideas for others that I have yet to write. I am convinced that effective marriage and family ministries can help make disciples for the transformation of the world by nurturing personal spiritual growth within the context of relationships, and I hope we can help each other learn how to make them truly transformational.

Jane P. Ives, United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministries Consultant (8/12/2015)

10 Quaker Lane, Portland, ME 04103, 207-797-8930, Janepives@gmail.com

Copyright United Methodist Discipleship Ministries, www.umcdiscipleship.org - Used by Permission-