



# Developing the Family Ministry in Your Church

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## Moving to a Viable Family Ministry Model

By Steve Johnson, National Center for Biblical Parenting

Churches all over the world are returning to a biblical model of discipleship of their young people. In the 20th century, discipleship of young people became a specialized discipline. The goals of this development were good, but there have been two negative consequences. First, the division of churches along age lines has lost some of the benefits of intergenerational interaction. Second, many parents have abdicated their responsibility in the discipleship process.

Fortunately, there's a new movement of many churches, educators and mission organizations to restore the elements lost in the 20th century without losing the valuable gains of educational theory. Led by an understanding of parental responsibility taught in Deuteronomy 6, churches from a broad swath of backgrounds are working together to dedicate parents as disciple makers in their homes.

The task may seem overwhelming but when broken down into pieces, there's something that every church can do to empower parents wherever they are. Using four levels of family ministry, suggested by the National Center for Biblical Parenting, any church can evaluate its current ministry and capacity for change and discover ways to transfer discipleship responsibility back to the parents.

### LEVEL 1

#### Develop Engaging Children and Youth Programs

Most churches have some sort of children and youth programs. However, these programs do not always lead to a discipleship model that connects the church and home. A family ministry model will improve these programs in two ways. First, they will connect the generations through developing relationship. Second, and more effectively, they will connect the church with the home.

While education is a part of discipleship, studies show that developing strong, Christian relationship will develop stronger disciples who stick better to their faith beyond their childhood years. Of course the most crucial relationship is with the family. When churches develop mentoring programs that bridge the church and home, young people are better prepared for their adult years.

Churches can, without much effort, review their current children and youth programs to ensure that they're engaging young people in both scriptural discipleship and solid Christian relationships. At the same time, church can do more to connect the parents with the children and youth ministry leaders.

### LEVEL 2

#### Offer Parent Training Programs

Children are complicated. The task of parenting is huge and daunting. Parents long for help in the task as is evident with a quick search on your favorite booksellers website. The problem is not a lack of information. The problem is knowing what information is good. Churches need to help parents with this job and walk them through the stages that they face.

As churches develop family ministry, it's best to provide parent training resources that pass the test of being biblical, practical, and focused on the heart. Too often, churches introduce behavior modification training for parents missing the hearts of their kids in discipleship.

Churches can offer parent-training opportunities by rotating curriculum so that many parents can receive the information they need at a time that works in their busy schedules. Consider offering a three or four-week parenting small group or class a couple times a year, while complementing that with online resources, tips and encouragement.

## LEVEL 3

### Empower Children and Parents to Learn, Worship, and Serve Together

Since common discipleship practices have drawn generations apart, it's important for churches to find ways to pull the generations back together. Young people need to know that the church is more than a ministry to their age group and instead, need to learn to interact as part of the whole church.

Consider how you might bring generations together. Maybe this is a church-wide worship service held once a quarter, or a semi-annual all church service project, sending

intergenerational mission teams, or developing small groups that incorporate the youth in ways that are meaningful to all can help children and parents learn from each other.

## LEVEL 4

### Equip Parents to Take Spiritual Leadership in Their Homes

When done well, parents receive enough communication about what their children are learning and doing in their discipleship programs at church, that they can develop the same ideas in family times at home. When done really well, parents actually lead in the discipleship process and the church ministry echoes the parents' work.

Moving to Level 4 is the farthest reach for churches since it will require a change of structures and practices. At the same time, it has

the greatest promise for the development of long-term faith. It's the model provided in the Bible.

Churches can support home-based discipleship by providing resources for parents to use and by teaching regularly on the responsibility and the joy of teaching children in their daily and weekly family routines. Whether planned or spontaneous, parents will pass their faith along to their children. Parents who take a passive role in spiritual matters pass along a faith that is passive and disconnected from the rest of life.

**F**amily ministry takes on many faces today. In whatever form it takes, it can equip the next generation to be disciples of Jesus Christ. All churches need to contemplate how they're doing that important work. There's no one perfect model. Every church is unique. Yet many tools are available to help churches develop their philosophy and strategy.

Philosophy is important here. Churches without a clear philosophy of family ministry will develop unanchored practices. These churches tend to try a little of whatever ministry model is hot at the time and end up with many elements that don't work together and may even work against each other. These churches are scattered and often busy in ways that seem good but lack purpose.

Developing a philosophy and strategy takes time and serious contemplation. Church leaders involved in this work need to step back and look at their church from a wide angle. This task may benefit from the eyes of outsiders who can help evaluate the programs and habits of the church. Outside help is beneficial but in the end the final strategy must be developed and adopted by the church leadership and, ultimately, the church body.

However the philosophies and strategies are formed, all churches need to empower and encourage parents to take on their biblical responsibilities in discipling their children.