

Partnering with Parents in Child, Youth & Family Ministry

Why partner with parents?

- **Parents are the primary influences on the faith formation of children and young people.**

They are the primary “impact people”, for better or for worse.

Jim Burns & Mike DeVries –

‘If we truly desire to be more effective in seeing the lives of our students transformed into the likeness of Christ, the greatest resource we have is the greatest influence in their lives – their parents. Our goal is to come alongside parents to help them pass on the faith to their children. ... We should never underestimate the power of parents in the spiritual formation of their children. If spiritual formation is the key – and we believe it is – parents are too valuable to leave out of the equation. We need to bring parents into the circumstances and situations of their children, affirming and helping to re-establish parental roles in the spiritual formation of our students.’ (*Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry*, p. 17).

Rick Lawrence –

‘Nothing has more power to influence a teenager’s life – for good or ill – than home and family. Every youth ministry hour spent equipping parents to nurture faith in their teenagers is like giving money to public television: Your gift is almost always doubled by a matching grant. Parents will always outinfluence even a great youth leader, so it makes sense to invest where you get the best return.’ (*Trendwatch*)

Ben Freudenberg –

‘If parents aren’t integrated into kid’s faith development, it’s a miracle if their young people continue in the life of the church after confirmation.’ (*The Family-Friendly Church*, p. 20)

Rollie Martinson-

‘Presently, parents take their kids to church so the church can do the lion’s share of the faith teaching. We’ve got it backward. The kids should take their parents to church to be equipped to nurture faith and life skills in their children and return home ready to shape their kid’s faith.’ (quoted in *The Family-Friendly Church*, p. 75).

- **Parents know their children/youth better than we do.**
- **Parents have more “teachable moments” with their children/youth than we do.**
 - Formation is more than education – it is the learning and experience of faith in and through the folds and creases of everyday life.

Luther:

‘Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the Gospel.’

- The course of daily life is the primary classroom for faith exploration, testing and practice.
- **Parents care for their children/youth even more than us!**
- **Parents need and deserve respect, support and help.**
- **Parents form part of family systems that can either embrace or reject the ministry efforts of a congregation.**

Illustration of a mobile – family adaptation or rejection to change.

Growing to Understand Parents Better

“Mike and Molly Midlife”

- Feeling the stress of working to provide for their growing family.
- Feeling guilty about not spending enough time with their children.
- Dealing with the issues arising from the aging of their own parents.
- Feeling “out of touch” with the prevailing youth culture.
- Facing marital or post-marital relationship struggles.
- Dealing with issues of their own aging – asking what could have been and what yet might be.
- Unsure about the success or otherwise of their own parenting as their children/youth begin to assert their independence.

Search Institute-YMCA 2002 study *Building Strong Families* – 5 key findings:

1. Most parents are “going it alone”.
2. Many parents lack a strong relationship with a partner/spouse.
3. Many parents feel successful as parents most of the time.
4. Most parents face ongoing challenges.
5. Many things that would help parents are easy things others can do.

The Challenges Parents Face – SI Research:

1. Work demands.
2. Bickering among children.
3. Overscheduling.
4. Finances.
5. Pressure to “buy things”.
6. Little support.

The Kind of Advice Parents Want – SI Research:

- How to understand and deal with their children.
- How to have patience and understanding with their children.
- Opportunities to learn from parents who have been in similar situations.

What Can a Congregation Do?

Establish a Safe Haven for Parents

- ‘Parents find safety when a congregation accepts their current situation and helps them to make the most of that situation.’ (EP p. 8).
- Meet parents where they are and affirm God’s grace as the foundation for parenting.
- Recognise that God is active in families of many different shapes and sizes.

Build a Caring Community for Parents

- SI Research shows that parents want to connect with others in meaningful ways but have few opportunities to do so – 77% say that talking with other parents about parenting issues would help somewhat or very much.
- Work to create an environment where help-seeking and mutual support is honored – teach that this is a sign of strength, not of weakness or inadequacy.
- Build in opportunities for parents to relate to one another, formally and informally. Serve as a catalyst to bring together those who are in the best position to help one another.
- Work to facilitate contact between parents e.g. a parent directory, conversation-starters during an educational activity, fellowship time towards the end of a youth event.

Provide Positive Activities that Engage and Empower Parents

- Parents generally value informal, personal forms of support more than programmatic supports. SI Research – ‘Information by itself is not as powerful as information within the context of relationship.’ (EP p. 80).
- “Parents Helping Parents” gatherings or groups.
- Parenting Workshops.
Caution: Parents may perceive that learning opportunities are only for dealing with problems or telling parents what they’re not doing well.

Marv Penner: 'Parent ministry is all about developing trust, gaining understanding, and showing respect. Some of us have barged our way into the lives of parents to point out their mistakes or intimidate them with our supposed expertise, thinking that our primary role is to teach parents how to be better parents. No wonder parents get defensive at times!' (*Youth Worker's Guide to Parent Ministry*, p. ix)

- Marking major transitions in the lives of parents e.g. birth of a child, beginning of preschool and "big school", when a child becomes a teenage, end of high school.

Adopt a Partnership Approach to Child and Youth Ministry

- Good two-way communication.
- Parent survey.
- Visiting homes.
- Parent advisory group.
- Cross-generational programming.
- "Take home" thinking.
- Parallel parent events.
- Parent-child or Parent-youth events focussed around topics of family importance.
- Be sensitive to family rhythms and time pressures

Offer Support for Family Relationships

Hardel & Strommen:

'Close family relationships are important because faith is formed through personal, trusting relationships. Healthy relationships within families can be developed and strengthened in four ways, each contributing to the formation of committed children and youth:

- Parental harmony
- Effective communication
- Wise parental control
- Parental nurturing.'

(*Passing on the Faith* p.37)

The Parent Relationship

- SI Research – ‘The quality of the parent’s relationship (whether or not they were married) proved to be the most important factor in raising children well.’
- Couples ministry
 - Couple time opportunities.
 - Child-minding support.
 - Relationship enrichment opportunities.
 - Couple care groups.
 - Couple mentoring

The Parent-Child Relationship

- Addressing teen-child relationship issues in seminars/workshops/sermons/communications.
- Helping parents develop skills and understandings to communicate with their children in helpful ways, to helpfully discipline them, and to develop positive attachments with them.

Cultivating External Family Supports

- Teaching parents about the importance of cultivating other caring adults in the lives of children and youth.
- Introducing mentoring for children and youth.
- “Buddy” or “Faith Friend” programs to link the generations.
- Putting in place supports for families at points of particular stress e.g. pregnancy, infancy, sickness.

Helping Single-in-the-Faith Parents and Single Parents.

- Search out and learn of their stresses and needs, and work to put in place supports.
- Consider support groups / “buddy” relationships.
- Be sensitive to child care needs and scheduling issues.
- Affirm them in the vocation and offer hope and encouragement.

Provide Resources and Practical Support for Faith Life in the Home

- Focussing on the “Four Keys”.
- Teaching faith skills and practices to parents (baptism prep., Milestones, sermons, parent meetings).

- Introducing Church year based workshops/events.
- Building “take home” pieces into children and youth ministry events.
- Offering family service opportunities.

Extend an Invitation to Shared Ministry

‘By emphasizing and unleashing the strengths of parents, congregations not only help parents be better parents but also equip parents to live out their calling to help their children grow in body, mind and spirit.’ (EP p. 10).

- Build parent-teen or parent-child times into ministry events.
- Use “take home” or “at home” materials (e.g. First Communion program at St. Paul’s).
- Give parents specific, achievable opportunities to contribute.

‘A myth has enough credibility to be believed but not enough to be true. It’s a myth that when kids become teens they can’t stand their parents. It’s a myth that when kids become teens, their parents no longer know how to connect with them.’ (YM&P p. 41).

- Develop a Parent Advisory Group that can help the congregation to understand the needs and concerns of families and how the congregation is (or is not) responding to these.

PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

What Can a Congregation Do?

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- 2. Build a Caring Community for Parents**
- 3. Provide Positive Activities that Engage and Empower Parents**
- 4. Adopt a Partnership Approach to Child and Youth Ministry**
- 5. Offer Support for Family Relationships**
- 6. Provide Resources and Practical Support for Faith Life in the Home**
- 7. Extend an Invitation to Shared Ministry**

Partnering with Parents

Resource List

130 Ways to Involve Parents in Youth Ministry
Group Publishing, Loveland, Colorado, 1994

Embracing Parents: How Your Congregation Can Strengthen Families
Jolene & Eugene Roehlkepartain
Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2004

Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry
Jim Burns & Mike DeVries
Gospel Light, 2003

Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry
Merton Strommen & Richard Hardel
St. Mary's Press, Winona, Minnesota, 2000

Youth Ministry and Parents: Secrets for a Successful Partnership
Leif Kehrwald
St. Mary's Press, Winona, Minnesota, 2004

Youth Worker's Guide to Parent Ministry
Marv Penner
Youth Specialties, El Cajon, California, 2003