Understanding Families

by
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with
Roberto Badenas, Bryan Craig,
Elaine and Willie Oliver

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Preface

"We often think that when we have completed our study of one we know all about two, because 'two is one and one.' We forget that we still have to make a study of 'and'. . . . The study of 'and' [is the] study of organization." —Sir Arthur Eddington

A central focus of this edition of the Family Ministries planbook is on the factors at work in the family unit as a whole which profoundly influence individuals in that family and affect the process of growth and change in them. Several pieces look at the various dynamics of what is called the *family system*. A systems perspective recognizes that the family functions as an entity, as a "whole," with its own structure, rules, and goals. Families are made up of husbands *and* wives, parents *and* children, brothers *and* sisters, and so on. When we think about families from a systems point of view, we come to understand that the "and" is very significant. As Sir Arthur Eddington once said, "We often think that when we have completed our study of one we know all about two, because 'two is one and one.' We forget that we still have to make a study of

'and'. . . . The study of 'and' [is the] study of organization." We might say, "The study of 'and,' and ministry to the 'and,' is Family Ministries.

Systems thinking, a relative newcomer in the study of family social science, should not be new for students of Scripture. The apostle Paul understood how systems work and used imagery drawn from the systemic functioning of the human body to illustrate the relationship of church members to each other in the Church, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 21:14-26). In this passage he focuses on how the functioning of each separate part affects the body as a whole, and how the body as a whole impacts the way the separate parts function. Once we don the eyewear necessary to recognize the relational laws of which Paul speaks, these dynamics can be seen in families and groups throughout biblical history. Indeed, human relationship systems have their antecedent in God, who is revealed in Scripture as one Being and also as a plurality of persons in relationship. Human beings are created in His image with relational laws implanted in us that enable us to function as individuals and as groups, of which the family is the most significant.

This view of families is crucial to those who would minister to them well. With this perspective, the value of an individual and the responsibility that belongs to an individual are not discounted. Each individual makes decisions, experiences consequences and is personally responsible for his or her behavior while living in his or her family. Indeed, a family systems orientation greatly enhances our understanding of individuals and their behaviors. On the other hand, understanding family systems shifts the focus of ministry to families from ministry to a collection of individuals to ministry to a dynamic organism called "family." The family is much more than the sum of its parts. Understanding this sets the sails for ministry which focuses not on individual development but on relational growth and enrichment among family members.

This planbook also includes a number of pieces compiled recently on the subject of divorce and remarriage. It is hoped that these appendix materials will help to keep leaders and church members abreast of current research which expands our understanding of children and

families where marital breakdown has occurred. In this appendix we have also attempted to provide a brief review of Seventh-day Adventist discussion and policy on these issues, including the most recent action taken at the General Conference Session in Toronto.

May God bless families everywhere and all those who seek to understand them and minister to them.

Karen and Ron Flowers
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General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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Invited to the Feast

Three Special Secrets for a Happy Marriage

by Roberto Badenas

Theme

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Theme Texts

John 2:1-12

Supplementary Reading

Ellen G. White, "At the Marriage Feast," *Desire of Ages*, pp. 144-153.

Presentation Notes

The following material is not intended as a complete sermon, but rather provides ideas and concepts which each presenter may further develop. The use of personal or other illustrations will help to contextualize the material and make it practical. Throughout the following outline, superscript numbers [1,2,3] reference material in the **Sermon Illumination** section that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

There was a wedding feast in the village of Cana, one of those old-fashioned country wedding feasts. In that time and place a wedding was not a private affair, as it more and more often is in our time. Then, a wedding was an event for the whole village. Everybody in town was invited—relatives, friends, neighbors, even visitors.

As we look in on this particular wedding occasion (John 2:1-11), it seems that everybody is going to the banquet. More people are coming than was expected, even a group of young men hiking around the region have been invited in.[1] There is joy and laughter around the tables. Everybody is having a good time. Everything seems perfect. Even the weather! The day is beautiful, but hot.

The people responsible for serving the beverages are especially busy, since all the guests are thirsty and asking for drinks at the same time. After the feast has gone on awhile, the servers seem suddenly preoccupied with some topic of absorbing interest. Something evidently has gone wrong in the kitchen. Laughter and joy have turned into embarrassing silence. Someone has found that the supply of beverages has failed. There is no more wine (John 2:3). If there is no more wine in stock, soon it will mean no more wine on the tables. And when the wine is gone, the feast is gone too. Little groups converse together in eager but quiet tones, and wondering glances are turned upon one of the visitors. . . .

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When There Is No More Wine

Why this shortage of beverages? A wrong calculation of the number of guests? The hot weather? Too many visitors invited at the last moment? The urgent question is not why the shortage, but what to do next? This terrible discovery causes a lot of perplexity and regret among the relatives of the young couple. “There is no more wine,” they repeat to each other. It was unusual to dispense with wine on such a festive occasion. Its absence would indicate a lack of hospitality. And there is no way to get more. What are the guests going to say? They will not understand! How can the hosts explain? This couple’s once-in-a-lifetime wedding celebration, this most lovely feast, may end as a disaster.

We all remember the rest of the story. What we do not always remember is that this first part of this story symbolizes the experience of many couples, many marriages, sometimes, as here in the biblical account, from the very start of their life together. There is something that we should never forget in our family life: our human provisions for happiness, represented in our story by the wine, are not inexhaustible. It is always possible to run out of wine, to run out of money, of health, of patience, of humor, of charm, of sex-appeal, of love. Happiness in marriage is vulnerable and it is always threatened.

This same story happens over and over in our own homes. “As men set forth the best wine first, then afterwards that which is worse” (vs. 10), so we usually do within our married life as couples. At the beginning we give the best we have, but as time passes, “the wine turns to bitterness, the gaiety to gloom. That which was begun with songs and mirth ends in weariness and disgust” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 148). The joy, the attentions, the affection and tenderness shown at the beginning lessen little by little and one day we discover that there is nothing left. What one day started with love, kisses, feasts and joy, too often ends with boredom, tediousness, indifference, and even hatred. After the good wine comes the bad, or perhaps no wine at all.

This wedding story reveals to us the three special secrets for a happy marriage:
Be sure to invite Jesus (vs. 2).
Do whatever He tells you (vs. 5).
Serve the best now (vs. 10).

Invite the Guest Who is Often Forgotten

Experience and statistics confirm that, unfortunately, this “lack of wine” happens today in many marriages. The reason is very simple: we are human beings and we cannot live indefinitely on our poor human resources. The capacity of our reserves of patience and understanding, the capacity of our love jars is limited, and naturally wears out, in the same way as do the provisions in our refrigerators if we do not renew them. With the passage of time, with the urgencies and pressures of work, the routine of everyday life, the wine of love can be depleted. What was once sweet can become bitter and turn sour. Our jars of kindness may finally become empty and problems come up.

Problems may be little or big. Family problems, human problems, marriage problems that we do not know how to solve. Like the people at Cana, we do not see any human solution. Our eyes do not see further than the empty bottom of our jars. And we do not realize that the

solution—when no solutions seem to be found—may only come from the forgotten Guest. The Guest who unfortunately is not always invited. . . .

The big difference between a Christian marriage and a secular one is that, in a Christian marriage, Jesus is first on the list of guests. Like in Cana of old, today Jesus wants to supply all our needs, to solve all our problems.[2] He wants to do so far beyond the limits of our human expectancies. The creativity of His love shall always be able to surprise us. He can make the empty jars of our love to overflow again. He has promised to give us abundant life, fullness of life.

Do Whatever He Tells You

God does not want that His children be a gloomy, unhappy people. In His word He has revealed the simple rules for a happy life. "If our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we shall see a compassionate Redeemer . . . . Wherever His Spirit reigns, there peace abides. And there will be joy also, for there is a calm, holy trust in God" (*Desire of Ages*, pp. 152, 153). We cannot depend on ourselves. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Human illusions vanish with time,

> But the gifts of Jesus are ever fresh and new. The feast that He provides for the soul never fails to give satisfaction and joy. Each new gift increases the capacity of the receiver to appreciate and enjoy the blessings of the Lord. He gives grace for grace. There can be no failure of supply. If you abide in Him, the fact that you receive a rich gift today insures the reception of a richer gift tomorrow. (*Desire of Ages*, p. 148)

Jesus provided help in so wonderful a way that none of the guests noticed that the supply of wine had failed. Everybody found the new wine superior to the one served at the beginning of the feast and better than any they had ever tasted before. They remarked upon the special quality of the drink, "the pure juice of the grape. . . . The unfermented wine which He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. Its effect was to bring the taste into harmony with a healthful appetite" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 149).

Turning to the bridegroom, somebody made the following compliment: "Usually people serve at the beginning the best wine; and when the people have well drunk, then that which is worse: but you have saved the best till now" (vs. 10). The gift of Christ to the marriage feast at Cana was a symbol of what He wants to do to our own marriages.

Serve the Best Now

Our only hope is in Christ. Jesus began His ministry by coming into close sympathy with a family. He came to our midst to help us to be happy. He came to transform our life, to give living flavor to our human existence, which is always threatened by selfishness and mediocrity, always in danger of becoming like common water—colorless, odorless, and tasteless.[3] "The word of Christ supplied ample provision for the feast. So abundant is the provision of His grace to blot out the iniquities of men, and to renew and sustain the soul" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 149). "By attending this feast, Jesus honored marriage as a divine institution" *(Desire of Ages*, p. 151). Jesus can sustain couples. The same Jesus who intervened in the wedding at Cana, showed His sympathy for a young couple and ministered to their happiness, is eager to intervene in our own marriages if we really want "to save the best till now".

> He [Jesus] reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them in the public streets, in private houses, on the boats, in the synagogue, by the shores of the lake, and at the marriage feast. He met them at their daily vocations, and manifested an interest in their secular affairs. He carried His instruction into the household, bringing families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts. . . . From . . . seasons [of prayer] He came forth to relieve the sick, to instruct the ignorant, and to break the chains from the captives of Satan. (*Desire of Ages*, p. 151)

Conclusion

Jesus knows that every person needs more love than he or she deserves. Whatever the circumstances may be in your family life, you can be always sure that:

Jesus is with you.
Jesus can help you.
Jesus wants to bless your home and provide greater happiness in your life.

Even what seems like the last moments of a breakdown may become, by His power, a new honeymoon. Even for those who have found bitterness and disappointment where they had hoped for companionship and joy, the presence of Jesus with them personally brings comfort.[4] May He daily fill our jars with the wine of His love until the day we will be forever with Him, finally at home.

Sermon Illumination

1. “There was to be a marriage in Cana of Galilee. The parties were relatives of Joseph and Mary. Christ knew of this family gathering, and that many influential persons would be brought together there, so, in company with his newly made disciples, He made His way to Cana. As soon as it was known that Jesus had come to the place, a special invitation was sent to Him and His friends. . .” (*My Life Today*, p. 186).

2. “Here is a lesson for the disciples of Christ through all time, not to exclude themselves from society, renouncing all social communion and seeking a strict seclusion from their fellow beings. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are; for they will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men and women touched by divine truth. Christ awakened their interest by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them at their daily avocations and manifested an unfeigned interest in their temporal affairs. He carried His instructions into the household of the people, bringing whole families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. . .” (*My Life Today*, p. 186).

3. “The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven. The home then becomes as an Eden of bliss; the family, a beautiful symbol of the family in heaven” (*Adventist Home*, p. 28).

4. “The condition of society presents a sad comment upon Heaven's ideal of this sacred

relation. Yet even for those who have found bitterness and disappointment where they had hoped for companionship and joy, the gospel of Christ offers a solace" (*Adventist Home*, p. 100).

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If the Twins Could Talk to Us

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

The family experiences of Jacob and Esau with their parents, Isaac and Rebekah, offer profound insights for contemporary parents.

Theme Texts

Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-46; 28:1-9

Presentation Notes

The notes presented in this section do not constitute a prepared sermon script. The following helps are designed to offer a framework, supportive resources, and illustrations toward the development of a sermon or sermons on the stated theme. You will want to shape these ideas in your own style, drawing upon your own study and experience to meet the particular needs of your congregation. Throughout the following text, superscript numbers [1, 2, 3] will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the **Sermon Illumination** section that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

Interviews with children often yield amazing, humorous, sometimes even shocking, insights. They are unashamedly candid. What if the subject of the interview was our parenting of them? What if our sons and daughters could be given voices and language to describe their feelings and experiences in our homes with us as their parents? What do you think we would hear them say?

Today we want to visit the ancient home of Isaac and Rebekah and discover what the Old Testament twins, Jacob and Esau, might share with us from their experience growing up in that home. To be sure, Jacob and Esau were no longer small children or even teenagers at the time of the well-known birthright episodes of the stew (Gen. 25:29-34) and the deception (Gen. 27). They were by this time some 75 years old. Esau had married two wives outside the family faith. Jacob was single. However, the responses which the twins exhibit and the interaction of the parents with each other and with the twins in these episodes reveal behavior patterns which have their roots decades before.

The Family Setting

Esau and Jacob were the only children of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac himself had been a miracle baby, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child, even in their advanced years (Gen. 17:17-19). That he was doted upon as a child, there seems no doubt. As a youth, he evidently was very trusting, compliant and attached to his parents. On the fateful journey to offer sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, he accepted unquestioningly the answer of his aged father about God providing a lamb for them. Later, he submitted without argument, without resistance, to what must have come to him as a shocking and horrifying reality that he was to be the sacrificial victim. He allowed his father to place him on the altar of

sacrifice (Gen. 22:7-9). The experience of coming so close to death must have been both traumatic and faith-building at the same time. Somehow the faith of the father that God could, if necessary, raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19) had become the faith of the son. We can assume that what is known of that Moriah pilgrimage was passed down by Isaac to his descendants and finally written down by Moses as the book of Genesis was produced. Later in life, Isaac submitted to his father's judgment and patiently waited for events to unfold as Abraham took charge of obtaining a wife for him through the visit of the emissary Eliezer, the servant of his father, to Mesopotamia where family relatives lived (Gen. 24:2-4, 62, 63).[1]

Rebekah was a distant cousin of Isaac. She was the daughter of Bethuel, a first cousin to Isaac. From what is written of her responses to Eliezer when he came to her home in Haran, she was confident, self-assured, assertive and rather adventurous. She was evidently spiritually sensitive and trusting. Did she hear the call of God in the voice of Eliezer? It seems that she did. Of her future mate, she knew only that he was part of her extended family along with whatever else Eliezer had reported. She was capable of making decisions for herself, even far-reaching decisions, as she did when she responded readily to the emissary's request that she go with him as a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24:58). As far as is known, she never visited her homeland or her relatives again. Of their wedding, the scripture records, "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Gen. 24:68).

Perhaps Rebekah filled a void in Isaac's life left over from the death of his mother Sarah for whom he had grieved three years. At any rate, it is said of this couple as of no other in Scripture, "he loved her . . . ." This reference to a couple's love is unique in the biblical record—not that other couples did not love, but that it is explicitly stated in the case of Isaac and Rebekah.

For a time, the couple suffered the agony of infertility. Like many such couples, they prayed earnestly for children. Sometimes, the desired answers to our prayers do not come. In Rebekah's case, she conceived (Gen. 25:21). It was not an easy pregnancy. She experienced such discomfort that she prayed about her condition. The nature of the discomfort was made known to her—she was carrying twins! Their struggle for place within her womb was symbolic of their future struggle as two peoples. Then God said something that she was never to forget: "The older will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). At her delivery, Esau was born first; Jacob second.

Build Relationships with All of Your Children

If Esau and Jacob could talk to us, they might well draw attention to the problems in their family that gradually developed as Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). Favoritism may begin when a parent finds in one child that which is a particular delight. You notice that the two of you "hit it off." You talk together easily; you tend to bond more readily. Sometimes favorites are very much like us. Interestingly, Esau and Isaac were as different in temperament type as were Isaac and Rebekah. Each parent was drawn to a type opposite—Esau, the carefree, adventurous one, was loved by the more reflective, passive Isaac; Jacob, the quiet, domesticated son, treasured the closeness of his relationship with his outgoing mother and was loved by her.

Favoritism shown by parents sets siblings in unnecessary opposition to one another. Eventually, in the case of Isaac and Rebekah, this favoritism resulted in the creation of a fault line in the family. When conflict escalated in the husband-wife relationship, the favoritism resulted in two parent-child alliances pitted against each other. Later, Jacob and Esau were able to bridge the gulf that had come between them, but sadly only when their mother was no longer living and their father's influence in the family had waned through old age.

Esau and Jacob would probably tell us that it is important to build relationships with all your children. Be sensitive to their differing needs, but treat them fairly as equals. Take the steps necessary to form relationships with each child, however challenging it may be to relate to their particular temperament and personality.

Be a Transitional Person in Your Family

All families have strengths and all families have struggles. Threads of both can be clearly seen woven through the tapestry of any family's history. Some families pass on a legacy of strengths. Sometimes character flaws flow across generations, such as abuse and violence, cheating, or promiscuity. In the family tapestry of Abraham, the lineage of Isaac, a common thread—deception—turns up again and again. It was Father Abraham himself who twice got his whole family in trouble, once in Egypt and once in Canaan, because he told officials that Sarah was his sister, fearing they would kill him to get her (Gen. 12:11-20; 20:1-13). Like father, like son, Isaac fabricated the same story about his wife, Rebekah, in the same Philistine court (Gen. 26:7-10)! This thread of deception is evident also in the family of Nahor (Abraham's brother), the lineage of Rebekah. Laban (Rebekah's brother) eventually deceived Jacob on his wedding day, giving him Leah instead of Rachel, the intended bride (Gen. 29:23-24). Rachel would later steal the religious figurines from her childhood home, hide them under her skirts and lie to her father about them, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period" (Gen. 31:35).

Israel had a familiar proverb, "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). This saying verified the reality of the second commandment: the legacy of sin in a family is passed on to the children. As the proverb was commonly applied, it led to the blaming of parents for ones situation and avoidance of personal responsibility. In Ezekiel 18, God introduces a radically different scenario, telling the Israelites they were not to quote this proverb any more. Each person must stand responsible before God for his or her own actions. It is not appropriate to simply blame our parents for our character flaws. As adults, we must make our own choices and take responsibility for our own actions (Eze. 18:20). This passage also conveys the hopeful truth that people can change, despite the mistakes, abuses, and poor judgments of their parents, and the character flaws that run in their families. Every parent has the opportunity to become a transitional person in their family lineage, to choose to dam up the poisons of the past within themselves, so that the water can flow clearer to the next generation.

We hear Jacob and Esau pleading with parents to change the family legacy, to stop the spread of whatever toxic water flows in the family. If the poison is deception, then dam up that flow that has seeped into the family across the generations and deal openly and honestly with each other as parents and with your children.

Meet Parental Needs and Child Needs Appropriately

As the relationship with each favorite son deepened, the marital partners slowly gravitated away from each other. Each began to find personal meaning in their favored child. Isaac's rather lackluster life was brightened by the exploits of Esau and his palate satiated by his wild game. Esau grew up undisciplined, disrespectful, and disdainful of his inheritance. Isaac evidently never even so much as expressed displeasure over his marriage to the Canaanite women (see Gen. 28:8). For her part, Rebekah apparently needed for Jacob to be dependent on her. However old he was, she would take care of him. She would not be denied; she would make him into the leader of the family.

Both parents undoubtedly felt they were being parental in their determination that their special son should have the birthright prize. Isaac expected to convey it according to custom—to Esau as the elder son. Rebekah believed it was divinely appointed for Jacob because of a revelation entrusted especially to her and because the irresponsible older son had already disdained his birthright prerogative by cavalierly bartering it away to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Gen. 25:34). In reality, the parents were self-focused rather than child-focused.

Many parents mistakenly believe that their children exist to serve their needs. The opposite is the case.[2] Many families take the command, "Honor your father and mother" to be a lifelong precept that locks their children into placing parental needs foremost. Were they able to verbalize it, Esau and Jacob would likely have urged their parents to seek adult support for themselves and offer parental support to them appropriate to their age. The counsel of Paul applies to parenting also, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). Too many parents over-function in the lives of their children when children, especially young adult and adult children, need the freedom to live lives of their own. Too many others seek to meet their adult needs for nurture and love through inappropriate alliances with their children.

Care for Your Marriage

Conflict in the marriage was evident between Rebekah and Isaac, stemming perhaps from their differences. She was assertive and outgoing, while Isaac was more passive, quiet and reflective. Isaac was an only child, born late in life, the subject of much attention and care. Rebekah was a sibling born into quite different circumstances. They had differing perspectives on life. Clearly the matter of the birthright and who should receive it festered between them. They did not talk to each other about it. Isaac, on the pretext that he was about to die (though he lived at least another sixty years), schemed and moved quietly to convey the birthright blessing on Esau (Gen. 27:2). The family was not invited to this special occasion. Rebekah was not even notified. She was eavesdropping and "overheard" the conversation between Isaac and Esau (Gen. 27:5, 6). The couple were non-communicative and locked in a power struggle.

Isaac's unilateral move triggered a countermove by Rebekah. Jacob at first offered a feeble resistance, then he capitulated to Rebekah's scheme of deception. This tragic episode resulted in further distress and emotional upheaval in the home. Waves of anger and anxiety washed over the family. Stemming from the turmoil, Jacob left the country and was cut off from his family for many years. He never saw his mother again.

This family situation is complex, but at the core can be seen the central role which the marital relationship played in the family. The marriage of a husband and wife has been likened to the heating system in a home.[3] A healthy marriage, where there is an acceptance of each other as children of God, where there is mutual respect and effective communication, where there is affection and intimacy, where differences are valued and enjoyed for the strengths they bring, creates an experience of warmth that pervades the household. On the other hand, if conflict pervades the husband-wife relationship, if the marriage partners struggle by means of manipulation, deceit, and inappropriate alliances with others to achieve a sense of place or to take power and control, a chill settles over the home. Children's behavior often serves as a barometer of the climate set by the marriage.[4]

One of the most important pieces of counsel to come from this story is that fathers and mothers should do everything they can to strengthen their relationship with each other and to deal directly with each other in resolving their conflicts and differences. The Matthew 18:15 instruction for resolving conflict eliminates triangulation: "Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." God knows the human tendency to form emotional triangles, where two who are in conflict draw a third individual into the fray. He is aware of the pain and stress borne by the individual who gets trapped in the middle of conflict between two others, who may be both his relatives or friends. God would have us learn to communicate and to take responsibility for resolving our conflicts with one another directly, to avoid drawing others into them unnecessarily. This will leave our family relationships stronger.

Renewing Love

When Isaac and Rebekah married, they loved each other. Jacob and Esau must have known their love story and of their commitment to trust in God in the selection of their marriage partner. As a young couple, they faced and surmounted the hurtle of infertility. They managed to get through the difficult period when Isaac betrayed his marriage with a lie to Abimilech. They coped with grief and loss and separation from parents. When difficulties arise in the home, the love of parents for each other and their commitment to work things out is vital. No doubt Jacob and Esau would encourage couples, whose relationships, like their parents', encounter great difficulty. They would tell them to remember their early love and affection for each other and to recover and renew that love. Ellen White counseled individuals in times of darkness, "look to the place where you last saw the light."[5]

Conclusion

This episode has been left as instruction for us by a caring Heavenly Parent in His Word. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). With the vantage point of history, we can see that God did not abandon this family, despite the difficulties. He was with them through all the turmoil. His covenant love and faithfulness abides and His purposes come to pass. Like the patriarchs of old, we too can put our trust in Him.

Sermon Illumination

1. "In ancient times marriage engagements were generally made by the parents, and this was the custom among those who worshiped God. None were required to marry those whom they could not love; but in the bestowal of their affections the youth were guided by the

judgment of their experienced, God-fearing parents. It was regarded as a dishonor to parents, and even a crime, to pursue a course contrary to this.

"Isaac, trusting to his father's wisdom and affection, was satisfied to commit the matter to him, believing also that God Himself would direct in the choice made" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 171).

2. "Parents exist to serve their children, not children to serve their parents. It is a fundamental law of life that the older generation must be willing to sacrifice its interests to those of the younger generation" (Mace, 1985, p. 25).

3. "Mutual affection between husband and wife will be to the family what the heating system is to a house. It will maintain the relationship of all family members in a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere" (Mace, 1985, p. 109).

4. A couple wondered why her primary and junior-aged sons fought when their father came home from work, when the rest of the time they seemed well-mannered. A pattern of family behavior seemed to be displayed at each fighting episode: (1) mother and father, upon confronting each other when father comes home, begin quarreling; (2) the children start fighting with each other; (3) the boys' behavior upsets and angers dad who administers harsh discipline; (4) an angry silence settles over the household; (5) mother and dad cease quarreling and go about doing separate household tasks. The couple were able to see that their marital conflict precipitated the children's response. Intentional improvement in the parents' relationship that was visible to the sons was encouraged, with the thought that this would likely lead to improved behavior on the children's part. The need to enact a scenario that would result in mother and father stopping their quarreling would be reduced.

5. "When temptations assail you, when care, perplexity, and darkness seem to surround your soul, look to the place where you last saw the light. Rest in Christ's love and under His protecting care. When sin struggles for the mastery in the heart, when guilt oppresses the soul and burdens the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, remember that Christ's grace is sufficient to subdue sin and banish the darkness. Entering into communion with the Savior, we enter the region of peace" (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 249).

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Many, Yet One Family

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

Through Christ we can find oneness in our families both at home and at church.

Theme Texts

John 17: 1, 2, 6, 20-26

Hymn

The Church Has One Foundation

Presentation Notes

The notes presented in this section do not constitute a prepared sermon script. The following helps are designed to offer a framework, supportive resources, and illustrations toward the development of a sermon or sermons on the stated theme. You will want to shape these ideas in your own style, drawing upon your own study and experience to meet the particular needs of your congregation. Throughout the following outline, superscript numbers [1, 2, 3] will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the **Sermon Illumination** section that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

Introduction

The last words spoken by individuals are often among the most poignant words they ever speak.[1] Families often stay close beside their friends and loved ones in their final moments and cherish their final words. The words of Jesus spoken in Gethsemane (John 17:1-26), in the final hours before His crucifixion, are poignant words.

He prays first for His disciples (John 17:11), then for Christians of all time (John 17:20-23). What recurring theme is found in this prayer? It is is His desire for unity among His followers.

Why the Unity of His Followers Is Important to Jesus

The benefit to the Church. Surely there are benefits to be experienced among the believers from being in unity. It is encouraging to meet with fellow believers, individuals with whom you are close, people who think and feel and act in common accord with each other. It takes energy and effort to relate to people who are different from you, people who may be outside your comfort zone—older than you are, younger than you are, in a socially different circle from yours, with different temperaments, habits and customs, perhaps even with theological views that are different from your own. Many pastors report that members often drop out of church attendance because of the tension created by differences among members. The lack of harmony is unbearable for them. Sometimes disgruntled members say, “When the church gets united, then I’ll be interested. But not until.” So there are obvious *internal* benefits to unity.

The benefit to the world. But the benefits of unity to believers were not uppermost in the Saviour's mind in Gethsemane (John 17:21, 23). In his mind the reason oneness among His followers was so important had to do with whether or not His mission to earth would be validated, whether or not He would be believed and believed in. He was anxious that the world acknowledge that He really was who He said He was, not in an egocentric way, but because He knew His mission to earth was the world's only hope.

To quote Jesus' prayer as recorded in *The Message* Bible by Eugene Peterson, the purpose of the believers' unity is to "give the godless world evidence that you've sent me and love them in the same way you've loved me." The oneness of believers bears testimony to the validity of the gospel. The oneness of believers is a living demonstration which confirms that Jesus is the Christ, the emissary sent of God to redeem this planet. The oneness of believers is evangelistic. The oneness of believers testifies of God's love. (The antecedent of the final "them" in John 17:23 is not completely clear. While Jesus has been praying about believers, the "you . . . have loved them" may include both God's love for believers and His love for the world.)

In commenting on the Savior's prayer for unity, Ellen G. White penned these arresting words:

> It is our duty to study, daily and hourly, how we may answer the prayer of Christ, that His disciples may be one, as He and the Father are one. Precious lessons may be learned by keeping our Saviour's prayer before the mind, and by acting *our part* to fulfill His desire. (*Gospel Workers*, p. 447, emphasis supplied)

His Body—Our Oneness

We cannot unify ourselves. Before we consider the meaning of Ellen White's reference to "*our part*," we must saturate our minds with *God's part*. We must understand what God has done to bring about our unity. We cannot appreciate God's part until we face a hard reality—we cannot unify ourselves. As Jesus indicated to His disciples just a short while before His prayer in Gethsemane, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Our world church is growing in membership every day.[2] In addition to our evangelistic outreach and growth, concern for unity is uppermost in our minds as a church.[3] We want that unity among us for which Christ prayed. But we face constant challenges. Humanly, we cannot really unite ourselves. We can try very hard for uniformity in our official doctrinal statements, in our constitution and by-laws, in our forms of worship, in our Sabbath School Bible study guides, through making decisions together at one General Conference session each five years, etc. Yet similarity, or even uniformity if it could be achieved, is not the unity for which Christ prayed.

As a world church, as a local congregation, as individual households and families, we must find our unity *in Christ alone*.

United in Jesus. The issue of unity was a concern from the beginning of the Christian church. John 17 is a piece of the gospel of John, written toward the close of the first century. At that time, false theologies and practices swirled about within the Christian community. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John recalled Jesus' prayer about unity and Jesus' teaching about the way that unity was centered in Himself.

A grapevine. Jesus used a familiar illustration of a grapevine for His relationship with believers (John 15:5). The organic union in this and other growing plants makes it a fitting symbol of the unity of believers in Christ. It is an illustration well understood by farmers, horticulturists, botanists, gardeners, anyone who ever planted a seed and watched a plant grow.

A building. The apostles Peter and Paul referred to the close connection between Christ and His followers as a building with many parts resting on Christ as the foundation (1 Peter 2:5; Eph. 2:20-22). Realtors, architects, masons, carpenters, builders, and anyone who ever lived in a house can have some appreciation for this symbol.

A body. The most profound concept used in the New Testament to describe the unity of believers with Christ is the metaphor of the Church as a "body," of which Christ is the "head" (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22; 5:30; Col. 1:18). Every person can appreciate this illustration.

The Church as the Body of Christ

The Church was not formed by a group of believers sitting down and deciding to create a religious club or institution. Though it is made up of human beings, the Church, as the Bible conceives it, is not merely a human organism. The New Testament use of "body of Christ" to speak of Christ's people is not just a clever metaphor or symbol. Paul uses the illustration of the human body to describe characteristics of the Church, but the concept of the "body of Christ' is much more than an illustration. It is the expression of a divinely-determined reality.

The Church is the visible presence of Christ on earth. Those who believe in Jesus constitute the Church; they make visible His invisible body. It is interesting that in the Bible people are not asked to "join the Church" per se. In biblical terms, the Church is not something one joins. The Church is the body of Christ, and people are called to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord and to accept our placement in that body.[4]

God puts us into Christ's body. "When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 72). This binding together of humanity with Jesus at His incarnation is very important. In God's eyes, the first Adam represents the old humanity. Jesus is the second or last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and represents a new humanity. Therefore, in God's plan of redemption, what Jesus does, the new humanity does. His choices are the choices of the new humanity. His doings are the doings of the new humanity. Where He goes, the new humanity goes. This is the basis on which Paul can affirm that humanity died on the cross with Him, was buried with Him, was raised with Him and is seated in heavenly places with Him (Eph. 2:5, 6; Col. 3:3).

Christ dwells bodily in heaven and believers are hidden with Him spiritually there (Col. 3:3). This truth is a part of a great spiritual reality. The other piece to that reality is that believers dwell bodily on earth and Christ is hidden among them here. His body is invisible, but becomes more and more visible as individuals respond to the good news, accept Him as their personal Savior, and are thus "added to the Church" (Acts 2:41, 47). It also becomes more visible as our unity speaks powerfully of His presence and transforming power in our midst.

Christ's part in our unity. All human beings, alienated from God, have been reconciled to God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18). All human beings, alienated from one another through sin, have been brought together in Christ's body on the cross (Eph. 2:16). So God's part in the unifying of humanity has been accomplished in the person and work of Jesus. That is why Paul can say, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5).

This is a profound truth for us to accept anew, to bask in, and, by God's grace, to live in. We are one body in Christ. Our unity is in Him. It is unthinkable that a living body could be divided. This is why Paul can ask the Corinthians, with all their factions and fractured fellowship, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:11-13).

Our Part

To these believers at Corinth Paul gave the most profound lessons about unity. A "body of Christ" motif pervades his letter to the Corinthian church.

Knowing we are members of the body of Christ guards us from sexual sin. Our bodies are members of Christ's body. We dare not disgrace Christ's body by the wrongful use of our own bodies (1 Cor. 6:15).

Knowing we are members of the body of Christ leads a group of believers toward becoming a well-organized, respectful, caring community. Taking as his illustration the natural human body, Paul describes parallels in the body of Christ. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it" (1 Cor. 12:12, 27). Some specific insights from this passage include:

Individuality is important, but so is connectedness. Individuality is not justification for separation from the body. We are not justified in saying of a fellow believer: "I'm not like him or her; I don't want to associate with him or her" (vss. 15, 16).

All parts function purposefully and compliment the functioning of all other parts. If every part was alike, the complex organism of the body could not function. The design of the body is God's. We must recognize that each believer has been drawn to the body by God Himself. Each is vital to the health of the body. We need each other (vss. 17, 18, 19).

Each individual, even the weakest, contributes. Each member deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. We need to sensitively recognize strengths and protect vulnerabilities of various members so that fairness and harmony prevail (vss. 21-25).

We are connected to each other. The functioning and experience of one, whether positive or negative, affects the whole. Empathy and sympathy should pervade our relationships (vs. 26).[5]

The implication for Paul in this outstanding chapter of 1 Cor. 12 is that Christ, the same Creator who made the complex organism of the human body, has a plan to incorporate and

utilize all believers in His spiritual body. Ultimately His plan is for the good of believers and the common good. We glorify Him when we cooperate with His design.

Other implications for life in the Body of Christ. Remember the quotation about doing our part to answer the prayer of Christ for unity (*Gospel Workers*, p.447)? Ellen White wrote that passage in the context of her discussion about the spirit that should prevail in church business meetings. She had noticed one spirit in worship services and prayer meeting and another when the Church met to discuss practical issues and needs. As we mature in our love for one another and our unity in the body of Christ, some changes will undoubtedly take place among us:

Desire for improved communication. We will have a greater desire to communicate clearly, to listen and understand one another rather than to argue or belabor our personal points of view.

Warmth and trust. Our tendencies toward personal defensiveness will begin to melt away in the warmth of trust that we feel with fellow members of the body of Christ.

Humility. Humility will replace desires to control and have our own way. Phil. 2:3, 4 will become our guideline: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Collaborative conflict resolution. In our conflict resolution, we will work to resolve issues collaboratively in win-win kinds of ways.

Consensus decision-making. In our decision-making, we will take fewer votes and work more for consensus.

A growth attitude toward differences. We will take a positive attitude toward our differences, reframing them as opportunities for growth.[6]

Primacy of our personal union with Christ. When there is the potential for discord with our brothers and sisters, we will recognize first our need to re-examine our personal union with Christ.

Unity in our families. Life in the Church as the family of God has a reciprocal effect upon life in our households and homes. Our awareness of being part of the body of Christ influences life in our families. We recognize that all our relatives are precious to Jesus Christ. By His death on the cross He has brought us together with ties closer than those of flesh and blood.

Conclusion

> The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to

> do—but union with Christ. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. (*Adventist Home*, p. 179)

Sermon Illumination

1. On February 26, 1993 terrorists detonated half a ton of explosives in the underground parking garage beneath the World Trade Center in New York City. Tragically, six lives were lost. It is a miracle that more were not. Thousands scrambled down the 110 stories of staircases when elevator power was cut off by the blast. Engineer Carl Selinger was alone in one elevator when it stalled. Thick smoke soon filled the elevator and Selinger thought he would die. In his pocket he found a pen and a little piece of paper. He began to write,

> "To my family—from Dad. 12:40 p.m., smoky elevator 66, 2/26/93. A few thoughts if I am fated to leave you now—I love you very much. Be good people. Do wonderful things in your life. I'm so proud of my children—they're each so wonderful. Things I love and cherish: ideas, people, Cooper Union College, my work, my family, doing the best I could. Nothing more to say. Love, Dad (Carl Selinger—Bloomfield, N.J.)" (Dwyer, 1995, p. 205).

Carl Selinger was rescued, but when He was confronted with the reality that his life might be over, he was able to distill his most important thoughts into these few words.

2. "In seconds, the numbers were: in 1995, every 47.8 seconds one person joined this church; in 1996, every 43.8 seconds; in 1997, every 42.3 seconds; in 1998, every 38.5 seconds; and in 1999, every 28.9 seconds. . . .

"Some people ask how are we doing against the population explosion rate. It will interest you to know that in 1995 there was one Seventh-day Adventist for every 647 people in the world. In 1996, one for every 621 persons in the world. In 1997, one for every 602 persons in the world. In 1998, one for every 583 persons in the world. In 1999, one Seventh-day Adventist for every 551 persons in the world.

"So under God, we are not doing too badly against the population explosion. Our world membership has now passed the 11 million mark, increasing from the 10,939,182 figure as of December 31, 1999" (Thompson, 2000, p. 8).

3. "As we look forward, growth brings its own challenge. It's an enormous blessing. I mean this is why we are here. And yet it presents a major challenge as the church has to be very deliberate in its plans and that has to do with the church as its develops being able to stay together. Making sure that growth does not become a growth into fragmentation but a growth that is simultaneously a strengthening of all the elements that bring us together. So growth, the miracle, must be accompanied by corresponding attention to all the elements that hold us together" (Johnsson, 2000, p. 4).

4. Ellen G. White notes the difference between being a member of the church and being united to Christ. "It is one thing to join the church, and quite another thing to be united to Christ. Unconsecrated, world-loving professors of religion are one of the most serious causes of weakness in the church of Christ" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 357).

5. “We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light, are to another most difficult and perplexing” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 473).

6. “Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family, for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. When this is the case, each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings and respect the right of the others. By this means mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed. Harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each” (*Child Guidance*, p. 205).

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Hannah

by Karen Flowers

Grandma and the aunts and uncles rocked back and forth in the long swings which hung from the roof of the big porch. The three cousins, who were so happy to be together for a week of fun at Grandma's, continued their game of hide and seek in the bushes. But they did not venture far. They kept hoping that Grandma and their aunts and uncles would start talking about all their other relatives. Eventually, they knew, Grandma would send one of them for the big family Bible. Families sometimes use a family Bible to keep a record of things like who married whom, who was born when, who moved from where to where, and important dates like weddings, and births, and deaths, and baptisms.

There was one story the cousins were waiting for. The one about the stow-away. Oh, they knew the story word for word. But listening never made them tired. It was the story about their great, great grandma. It began longer ago than they could imagine, half way around the world on another continent. Every time, they dared to hope that Grandma would resurrect one more detail in her memory, or uncover some hidden fact never before discovered in the family Bible's records. The problem was that Grandma had pretty much remembered all that she could, even with the help of the old Bible into which her mother had written many interesting things about their family's history. For the cousins, the story would just start getting interesting when Grandma forgot, or Great Grandma had recorded no more details.

Later, the three cousins would lie awake late into the night, talking in whispers as they stretched out beside each other with one of Grandma's quilts pulled tight under their chins. The part about the story of their relatives that kept them awake was the part about Hannah. Poor Hannah! First off, she had three brothers—one named John, another named James, and, oh too bad, Great Grandma forgot to record the name of the third. Never mind, just being the only girl must have been bad enough. But worst of all, their parents died when they were very young, and Hannah and her brothers had to go live with their uncle who was very rich.

Now, living with a rich uncle sounded nice enough. Think of having all the money you could spend! But probably, the cousins thought, the rich uncle did not want four children, all of a sudden, very badly. They would chatter on and on about what might have been. But there was one piece of the story which they knew for sure. Hannah was not happy. So she decided to run away. Each of the cousins remembered out loud the times when they had been angry and thought about running away. Of course they had never gone far. Usually they started thinking about where they would sleep and what they would eat if they really left home.

Of course Hannah's situation was different. She was a young woman, ready to begin supporting herself. So when she decided to leave her uncle's home, she decided to really leave! Afraid that her uncle or her brothers would try to stop her, she slipped away after dark. As she made her way from their home in Devonshire to the English coast, her mind was racing. In her heart burned a desire to go to America and begin a new life. But how could she?

Then she got her chance! The cousins were wide-eyed just thinking about it. Carefully

slipping through the darkness, Hannah crawled up the gangplank and hid herself in the hold of a big ship reported to be leaving for America the next day. She must have been very good at hiding, because no one found her until they were too far out to sea to bring her back. She was the cousin's great, great grandmother, who eventually married and had five children. Their Grandpa had been born into this family down the line, and that was all they knew. The cousins would wiggle their sheets and blankets into a tangle with questions about her. But finally they would settle down and go to sleep, for it did no good to come up with more questions. Nobody knew the answers to them anyway.

Have you ever asked your mom and dad, or your grandpa and grandma and aunts and uncles about your family history? Maybe you have an old Bible in your family where some of the names of your relatives have been written down. It can be very interesting to find out who you are and where you have come from. Sometimes the stories we learn about our relatives make us proud. Other times we are embarrassed to think about who some of our relatives were and what they did. Every family has relatives of both kinds!

But the good news is we are all related through one Relative who is the best in all the world. He never did anything to make us ashamed. He will never do anything to hurt us. He just loves us. And He wants to put His love into our hearts so we can love each other in our families here at church, just like He loves us. That Relative is Jesus. Did you know that when Jesus came to earth as a baby, God made Him our brother. Well, He did! And if He's our brother, then God is our Father, and we are His children. Aren't you glad Jesus is in our family history?

Lahemane Mushe

by Virginia Moyer as told to Karen Flowers

The three boys stopped dead in their tracks. *They* were three boys from Sierra Leone. But who on earth was *he*? Only moments before, the three of them had been chattering their way down the path that led from the school to the headmaster's house where they were hired to do household chores. Now they were holding their breath behind the palm trees that lined the long driveway. Venturing another look, they made sure they hadn't just been imagining things. No, he was really there. And with *him* there, they weren't going any closer—not for anything!

He was much older than they were. But it wasn't his age, nor anything unusual about his hair, or his long blue-and-white-stripped shirt, his sandals, or even his height that made him so alarming. But his face! Big black designs bulged from the flesh of his cheeks and forehead as he scowled in every direction, watching. And in his right hand he held the longest spear the boys had ever seen. At the slightest noise he would lift it, at the same time readjusting the fierce looking hatchet that hung from his left shoulder.

Actually, he had been hired while the boys were studying that day. Thieves had frequently broken into the school compound in recent weeks, and the headmaster had decided it was time for action. And so it was that Lahemane Mushe (La-ha-ma-nee Moo-she) became the school watchman.

It could never be said that the three boys got over their fear of Lahemane Mushe. He was enough to make even the headmaster shiver if he met him unexpectedly. There was so much mystery about him. Like the little black pouch he carried everywhere.

"What's in your bag?" the principal's wife questioned one day when curiosity got the best of her.

"It's for men only," was Lahemane's reply.

One day she watched him from the far corner of the garden as he ceremoniously opened the pouch and took out a tuft of what seemed to be monkey's hair. Carefully he placed it under a leaf at one corner of the compound. Muttering something to himself, he deposited a polished leopard's tooth in another corner, a smooth stone in another, and an old wheel from a watch on a piece of string in another.

Slowly, in bits and pieces, the mystery of who Lahemane Mushe was and where he came from unraveled. He was from a tribe in the North. A nomadic band of his people had been forced to migrate South in search of pasture land for their animals. Perhaps it was because he now lived in a strange place that Lahemane so fiercely preserved his tribal family heritage. Take that black pouch for instance. Since a watchman cannot watch everywhere at once, wise men of his village had taught him how to hide certain charms in every corner of the village to watch for him and protect the village from harm when he was not there.

And the black marks on his face? They were not strange or scary to him. Every man in his tribe wore them with pride. And every boy

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looked forward to the day when he would become a man and have his face permanently marked with the identifying pattern of his father's family and the tribe.

Then there was his name. Lahemane Mushe. According to ancient custom, his father had spent the first seven days after he was born deciding on a name for his son. The name chosen was very important because they believed that a child will become like the person he is named after. On the eighth day, the village buzzed with expectation. After morning prayers, all watched as his father bent down and whispered the name his parents had chosen for him into the baby's ear. They believed that a child should be the first one to know who he is. Drums sounded again as father ceremoniously bent and whispered one more time, this time to the village schoolmaster who nodded and smiled. The drums intensified, and at last the announcement was made for all to hear. The baby would be called "Lahemane Mushe" after his great-grandfather, a revered tribal chief. Lahemane Mushe was a distinguished and honorable name to be sure.

One thing completely baffled Lahemane when he first came to the Adventist school. From time to time he would hear one of the boys speak of changing his name when he became a Christian. Change his name? It was unthinkable! All of his proud heritage was linked to his name. This was strange indeed. Lahemane Mushe he would remain!

From time to time a traveling storyteller would come to the marketplace and tell stories about the history of the tribes. Lahemane would listen with interest, eager to learn more about his tribe and the family to which he belonged. And with pride he would repeat his name over and over to himself. Then he would pick up his spear, readjust his hatchet, and take up his watchman's post at the school.

Have you ever asked your mom or dad about your first name? Does your name have a special meaning? Are you named after someone important in your family? Ask and see what you can find out. Did you know that Jesus knows your name? That's because He made you and is interested in being your friend.

Last names tell what family you belong to. Did you know that Jesus Christ has called us by His name? We're called Christians because we're part of His family. What makes you glad to be part of Jesus family? I'm glad to be part of Jesus family too. I think it's the best family in the world!

The Mysterious Life of a Pond

by Karen Flowers

Note: You may wish to adapt this nature lesson to include plants and animals well known to the children in your locale to teach the same lesson. Pictures will heighten interest and hold attention.

Have you ever looked into a pond? What did you see?

The water in some ponds is so clear you can see to the bottom. You can see plants growing, maybe a fish, and the squishy pond bottom under your toes. Some ponds are so covered with lily pads and other plants you can barely see the water. Some ponds have a thick green scum on the top with lots of interesting insects and maybe a black and yellow water snake making his way along.

When Kelly was a little girl, there was a "green scum" pond near where she lived. The water wasn't deep, but it was mysterious. It was a favorite place for all the children in the neighborhood. There were some logs that had fallen out over the pond. The children would carefully slide out on the logs on their bellies and poke long sticks down into the pond to see what they could feel. They would stir the green scum, trying to see what was underneath. Sometimes they would make up stories about what would happen to children who fell off their logs and disappeared under the mysterious green scum.

A pond is a really interesting place. All kinds of wonderful creatures live there. Some are big like the great blue heron you may have seen standing as still as a statue at the water's edge until he sees the fish he wants for dinner. Some are little one-celled creatures, so small you can't see them without a microscope. Yet they come in all kinds of colors and shapes. And some, like an amoeba, can even change its shape to move itself along.

Kelly especially liked to watch the water striders. These bugs, with their long, slender legs, can stand right on the water. They have large flat feet which are lined with a velvety coating of waxy hairs that repel water. They can walk, run, skate or skim on top of the water in search of something to eat. Even more amazing, they can jump six inches into the air. In human terms, this would be like your being able to jump from the ground to the roof of a five story apartment building!

While the water striders skate on top of the water, the crayfish is a pond-bottom dweller. He looks like a miniature version of a lobster. He eats a wide variety of food, including partly-rotted plants that would otherwise fill up the pond. Catfish also clean up little bits of plant and animal matter that would build up and make the pond smelly and unpleasant.

For the salamander, however, the smell of the pond is very important. A salamander is a lizard-like creature that hatches from eggs in a pond, but lives its adult life in the woods. The unique smell of the pond in which it was hatched as a baby is the way the salamander finds its way back to the pond to breed. When it's time, the male and female return to the pond of their birth and do a nose-rubbing mating dance. Then the female releases her eggs by the two-hundreds into the pond just as her mother did, and her mother before her.

The fire-red water mite lives among the pond plants. You could line 10 bright red water mites up on your ruler side by side and all ten would measure about one inch. They can get themselves around by using the hairs on their legs as paddles. But most often they hitch a ride on insects, worms, and other creatures that pass by. And they not only don't provide any thanks for the ride, they slowly suck out the other creatures life juices through a long, sharp beak while they are traveling along!

Ducks love ponds. Have you ever noticed that a male duck is usually much more brightly colored than the female? One reason Jesus made them this way is that the female usually cares for the young, and her dull colors don't attract the attention of predators that might make a meal of her little chicks.

Plant life in a pond is very important to all the creatures that live there. The tall slender-stalked cattails which fringe the edge provide a protected home and a place to hide from harm. Did you know that cattail leaves are so strong they can bend and twist without breaking, even in the fiercest wind? The sweet smell of the water lily lures all kinds of creatures to live safely under its big umbrella leaves and in its folds.

Tiny drifting plants and animals known as plankton are so small that a single drop of water contains thousands of them. But they are the source of food for many other creatures like the waterflea. The waterflea which swims by paddling one of its two pairs of antennae. The tiny waterflea is clear as glass. You can see all of its internal organs, including a small yellow heart which pumps colorless blood around its body.

Ponds are so interesting that many scientists have spent their entire lives learning about just one of the creatures that live there. Scientists are now learning that it can be even more interesting to study how all the animals and plants living in a pond affect one another. They are interested in things like who eats what, and who protects what, and who cleans up after whom. That's because in order for a pond to stay alive and well, all the plants and animals have a part to play. The salamander needs the algae to smell. The water flea needs the plankton to eat. The ducklings and their mother need the cattails to nest and hide in. The fire-red water mite survives by stealing a ride and nourishment from another insect or worm. And everybody needs the crayfish and catfish to clean up after them. Every plant and animal has its effect on everything else. And each is dependent on the pond as a whole to survive.

People are like that too. Your family at home, your friends, and our family here at church. Everything we do and say affects the others around us. And we all need each other to stay alive and well. When you wake up in the morning and decide to be grumpy today, it's harder for the people around you to be cheerful. When you smile and offer to help your friend with a hard math problem, people around you might find themselves smiling and helping too. The Bible says, "Encourage one another and build each other up." See what you can think of to make your family and our church a happy place this week.

The Power of Oneness

by Elaine and Willie Oliver

Theme

Christian marriage is based on the biblical model of leaving father and mother and cleaving to one's spouse. In addition, the notion of becoming *one* is of paramount importance to the unity that God intends should exist between husband and wife.

Using this Resource

This marriage strengthening resource may be used by a group of married couples with a facilitator or by a couple on their own.

Session One: Understanding Oneness

According to annual surveys conducted across the United States, "Most people say that having a good marriage is one of the most important goals in life, and no other variable is more predictive of the health, happiness, and general well-being of adults than whether or not they are in satisfactory marriages" (Glenn, 1996, p. 15). Currently, approximately 45 percent of all first-time marriages end in divorce, yet about 60 percent of those who divorce remarry. These statistics confirm that people have a tremendous need to love and to be loved.

Every human being was formed by the Creator with a deep need and longing to be in relationship—first with God and then with another human being. We can clearly see in the Bible that love and relationships are central to God's plan for humankind. God wants to restore oneness between us and Him, and the relationship which most closely reflects our relationship with Him is the marital relationship.

The notion of oneness and separateness is at the core of Christian theology. In fact, very different modalities of oneness are presented in the Bible for us to ponder—the Trinity, the relationship between Christ and the Church, the body of Christ—represented by the members of the Church—and also marriage, the most central of human relationships (Stanley et.al., 1998, p. 15).

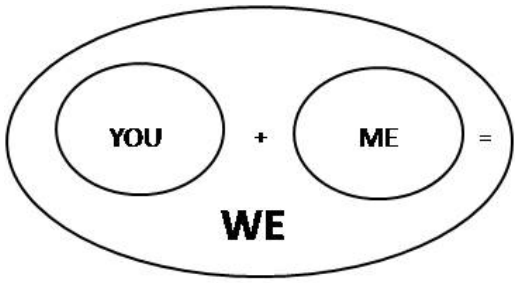
Exercise: Read the following scripture passages, and underline key words and phrases that promote oneness with others. Then, based on these verses, share with your partner what oneness means to you:

- "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).
- "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).

Elaine and Willie Oliver write from the Department of Family Ministries, North American Division.

- "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:4-5).
- "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (Philippians 2:2).

The Mystery of Oneness



"This oneness thing is quite a mystery," a newly married individual might say. "I mean, Lord, you said that the two of us would become one—but which one?"

We cannot develop true oneness in marriage by having one person's identity integrated into that of their spouse. One person's identity is never to be lost in the other. To make this point abundantly clear, Ellen G. White presents in her book *The Adventist Home*:

> In your life union your affections are to be tributary to each other's happiness. Each is to minister to the happiness of the other. This is the will of God concerning you. But while you are to blend as one, neither of you is to lose his or her individuality in the other. God is the owner of your individuality. (p. 103)

Make no mistake, however. Every lasting relationship involves a compromise of personal independence. We call it accommodation. In no way should we confuse accommodation with assimilation. In assimilation one loses one's identity. Accommodation is planning for the benefit of both husband and wife; for the good of the whole. To be sure, in a meaningful and healthy marriage, the concept of "being in control of my own life" does not exist.

God intends that we should come together with our wonderful diversity and form a powerful new oneness that is unique. In 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, the apostle Paul describes the body of Christ as being one but made up of many individual parts, each unique in its own function. It is one body with multiple functions.

The mystery of oneness, then, is to be interdependent. Husband and wife are distinct individuals, yet allies. Husband and wife are on the same team—like a professional basketball team. Each member doesn't always get to the basket to score, however, each member contributes to the process of getting the ball up the court and into the basket of the opposing team in order to win the game.

As a couple, we need to put aside anything that blocks the possibility of our one-flesh relationship. We cannot allow society to set our pace—the pace of fast, frenetic lives where we have no time to feel, think, and experience God and one another. There must be an understanding, a deep commitment, and a strategy to win for the team.

Exercise: Individually, reflect on the following questions for a few minutes. Then discuss your answers with your spouse. Encourage each other to really explore the answers in depth in order to gain a sense of how you can foster more "we-ness" and less "me-ness." Close your discussion with prayer together.

- Do you feel that you and your mate are a team?
- When do you most feel that you and your spouse are a team? At what times do you feel that you are playing on different teams? Are there ways in which you are competitive with each other in unhealthy ways?
- In your daily life, are you more inclined to individualism or teamwork? Are there ways in which you may be selfish with your mate? How can you be less selfish?
- Think of three nice things to do for your spouse this week (and thereafter) that would foster a greater sense of teamwork between the two of you. Don't discuss these with your spouse, just do them.

Session Two: Facilitating Oneness through Communication

Exercise:

- Ponder the following text together for a few moments: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger" (James 1:19).
- Sit facing one another. Hold hands, then take turns listening to your spouse speak for two minutes. Use active listening. Maintain positive, accepting eye contact, but do not interrupt for any reason, just listen. The speaker may speak about anything s/he chooses. Each partner should have a turn as listener and speaker.
- Discuss with each other how it felt to be listened to without interruptions. How did it feel to speak without interruptions?

"Communication is the marital glue of oneness" (Meredith, 1999). Unfortunately, most couples have not learned how to communicate effectively, especially when they have disagreements. For many couples, the main problem is not finances, sex, or in-laws, but their inability to resolve these issues without destroying their oneness.

As a couple, you must learn to create a safe, loving environment which fosters a positive atmosphere for communicating; in essence you must learn the secrets to dialogue. Susan Heitler in her book *The Power of Two* (1997) says it well:

> Picture two soccer players with a ball that they are kicking as they run the length of a field. They may take turns gently kicking the ball back and forth as they move forward. One player may dribble the ball most of the way, the other running alongside. One could kick the ball at the other, intending hurt rather than play. One could kick the ball in a different direction, veering away from the direction the two of them had been traveling. Actually, there are infinite variations in how the two runners and the ball might interact—the tone between them, how they pace themselves, how they share the ball, and what path they run.

It is much the same when you and your spouse converse. Different patterns are created as you share the "conversational ball." There is frequent back and forth interaction as the two of

you take turns listening and speaking. When each partner is intentional about directing the conversation toward the same goal, then the conversation will stay on a positive or straight line. Like a teammate, each of you needs to be conscious of how much you speak, how much your partner speaks, whether or not you are connecting or isolating one another as you converse, pay close attention to your tone and certain patterns in your dialogue.

There are conversational skills or techniques which you can learn in order to better facilitate communication and foster oneness. Although communication techniques or skills may feel awkward or uncomfortable at first, the key is to practice them so that they become a part of normal behavior. Learning to communicate effectively with your spouse is critical to managing conflict properly.

The Four S's of Dialogue

Heitler (1997, p. 87) suggests that effective dialogue generally has four important characteristics: *symmetry*, *short segments*, *specifics*, and *summary*. Here's an explanation:

1. **Sustain symmetry**. Symmetry is the balance of how much each partner listens and speaks. Be sure when you are speaking that each partner is receiving equal airtime. It can be tiring and annoying to only listen, there needs to be a give and take in order to achieve balance.

2. **Speak in short segments**. Short segments refer to how much is said at one time. In order for your spouse to really hear and digest what you are saying, like eating, it has to be taken in small chunks. When you are speaking, pause often to allow your spouse, the listener, to paraphrase what you just said, to be sure your partner understood you. Keep your speeches short; try to cover just one point at a time. Then the listener can become the speaker, you can now respond by sharing your point.

3. **Share specifics**. "Specifics" means details. Details are crucial especially when you are trying to problem solve as a team. Of course, this doesn't mean that you start the dialogue talking about what you did from the moment you woke up this morning. That might be an invitation for your spouse to tune out. However, you need to be very specific about the issue that you are discussing, sharing your thoughts and feelings, and what your needs are regarding the discussion.

4. **Summarize**. Summaries are not necessary when you are just having a casual conversation with each other. But they are very powerful when you are trying to resolve a specific dilemma. Summaries consolidate all the information that has been shared by both partners, and gives the opportunity to restate or clarify what was said by either party earlier. Summaries help to move you from just discussing the issue at hand to beginning to generate possible solutions.

Using the Four S's For Couple Dialogue: Symmetry, Short Segments, Specifics, Summary

John Gottman (1999) says that the most obvious indicator that a discussion is not going to go well is how it begins. According to his research, the first three minutes of a fifteen minute conversation can predict the outcome of a conversation. If there is a "harsh startup," then

chances are the conversation is destined to failure. For instance, if you begin the conversation by blaming, accusing, or in other negative ways, there is little chance that you will resolve the problem. So if you start your dialogue with a "harsh startup," take a breather, ask for pardon, and start over by "softening your startup" (p. 157).

In the following example, Nancy is concerned that Bob has been staying very late at the office. She has tried in the past to speak to him about it, but usually attacks him upon arrival home, naturally leaving the issue unresolved because of the negative path of the conversation. Nancy and Bob have been learning how to use the four S's in couple dialogue and so she is trying to practice this new skill. Bob and Nancy have previously found a mutually agreed upon time to have this discussion—a time when they are not as tense, perhaps after the children have gone to bed, so they can speak without distractions.

Nancy: Bob, I've been concerned that for the past three weeks, you have come home after 9:00 every evening. I know that things have been very hectic for you at the office, but I really miss having dinner with you in the evenings and the time that we spend together.

Bob: You are concerned that I have been coming home late and not spending much time with you?

Nancy: Yes. I am also concerned about your health and well-being. I think it is causing you a lot of stress to be putting in so much time at the office without having any down-time.

Bob: I really have been very busy at work and can't seem to be able to get to the bottom of my piles. Each day, I feel that I have not accomplished much and feel that I am not producing as much work as is expected of me.

Nancy: It sounds like you are not feeling very successful right now.

Bob: Absolutely. So I need you to understand that it is not that I don't want to spend time with you, I just need some extra time to try to catch up at work. But I also don't want to jeopardize my health and I certainly don't want to take you for granted. I really could use your help brain-storming about some possible solutions to this dilemma.

(Bob and Nancy begin brainstorming about possible solutions to their dilemma. They choose a solution to their problem and then summarize.)

Bob: I know that the last few weeks have been very difficult for you. I am committed to making whatever changes I can, in order to affirm you and let you know I love you and care for you very much. I will stay late only two nights a week as we agreed for the next few weeks until I get caught up at work.

Nancy: I really appreciate your understanding and being sensitive to me in this matter. And I want to be as supportive to you while you go through this very hectic time at work. I will try to give you the space that you need to unwind in the evenings and know that if you need some quiet time, it's not because you do not want to spend time with me.

Exercise: Now it's your turn. One of the most powerful ways in which you can learn how to change your pattern of communicating on sensitive or conflicted issues is to practice. For this session, choose a topic that is not a heated issue for the two of you to begin your practice. Talk about anything of interest to either of you: your dream vacation, goals for the future, sports, concerns at work, etc. Spend fifteen minutes practicing the techniques of the four S's. Don't try to solve problems or come up with solutions at first, just talk. Make sure that you keep the balance of speaker and listener, speak in short segments, be specific, and summarize.

Practice every day in your daily dialogues. When you feel more comfortable with the technique, then move up to tougher and deeper issues and begin to practice problem solving.

Session Three: Maintaining Oneness: The Power of Commitment

"Love. . . is not self-seeking . . . love always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13:7

When God designed marriage, He designed it with lifetime commitment in mind. Having a long-term view of marriage is essential to developing and maintaining oneness in marriage. Couples who understand that no relationship is consistently satisfying will be successful because they will be committed to their relationship through thick and thin.

In order for marriage to thrive over time the long-term perspective is crucial. It gives each person in the relationship a feeling of security to know that their mate will be there when it really counts. When a secure and safe environment is created, then you feel more at ease to take the risk to reveal intimate details about yourself (Stanley et al., 1998, p. 180).

In the story of Ruth, this long term view is expressed beautifully when Ruth says to Naomi: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). In this statement you find the kind of commitment that expresses a future together, it conveys that oneness that we have been talking about all along.

Exercise: Take a few moments right now to read and discuss Ruth 1:16 together. Share with one another what this text means to each of you.

In order to maintain oneness in marriage, husband and wife MUST be committed to the ideal of oneness in marriage. Unless the notion of oneness in marriage is a high value for a couple, chances are that such a preferred future will not be sought after.

Couples who are committed to maintaining oneness in their marriage look at their relationship something like investing in the stock market. There is a measure of realism that is aware of the fact that there will be low times and high times in the marital relationship—bear markets and bull markets—if you will. However, there is a commitment to staying in the relationship for the long haul and giving close attention to the little things that nurture the relationship, just like experienced investors do with the stock market.

If your marriage has become tired and routine, it will be important to stop and reflect on what your relationship was like when it was vibrant, in order to recapture the oneness you once had. Perhaps you will need to take the counsel the true and faithful witness, Jesus Christ, gives

to the church at Ephesus: “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (Revelation 2:3-5a).

Exercise: Take a few moments and reflect on the following together:

- **Remember** what you used to have together. What attracted you to each other? What did you do on your first date? What kinds of things did you do for fun?
- **Repent.** Decide to turn things around. Talk together and commit yourselves to getting away from the routine in your lives that has brought you to this point. You have the power to change your mind and the current direction of your life. Pray to the Lord for strength to change your current pattern of living which is leading you to be alienated from each other.
- **Do the things you did at first**. Set aside time each week for you and your spouse to talk as friends, just like you did when you first started dating. Schedule time to do some of the fun things you used to do together in your early marriage. Commit yourself to being less self-centered and more other-centered. Ask the Lord’s help for the willingness to act on these convictions that will give you the power of commitment to maintain oneness in your marital relationship (Stanley et.al., 1998, pp. 193,194).

In *Happiness Homemade,* Ellen G. White encourages married couples in their commitment to maintaining oneness by saying:

> “Determine to be all that is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions.In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. . . Let there be mutuallove, mutual forbearance. Then marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love” (p. 24).

Always remember that you are not alone in your quest for oneness in your marriage. It is not an easy road, but it is a real possibility. The promise of success is found in Philippians 4:13 which states: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Trust God, and watch your marriage grow from strength to strength.

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Empowering Your Teen
A Seminar for Parents

by Ron Flowers

Theme

With greater understanding of the dynamics at work in the family with adolescents and by developing more effective skills in living with their teenage children, parents can strengthen family ties and help young people develop emotionally and spiritually.

About This Resource

The following resource is designed to assist pastors, family ministries directors and other church leaders in conducting several sessions for parents of adolescents. The content addresses several issues in families with adolescents—how to understand this particular developmental stage and how to negotiate the changes that are necessary to foster greater adolescent autonomy. The material may also be adapted for use in parent support groups or for distribution to individual parents in the absence of a seminar or support group.

SESSION 1

THE ADOLESCENT FAMILY

Supporting Material

Parenting Seminar Resource *Getting Understanding*

Presentation Helps

Draw from the following material—"Introduction," "Good News About Teenagers," "Parenting is a Disciple Making Mission"—to introduce the seminar.

Introduction

Adolescence is a challenging time in the life of a young person and the young person's family. It is an era of transition into which the family is plunged when the first child reaches this stage of development. Some of us as parents did not have very good parental modeling during our own adolescence, so we need guidance and coaching as we help our own children through this period. Even in the case of those of us for whom parental modeling was wholesome and effective, rearing adolescents at the present time can be quite different from our experience growing up. As Christians, our parenting mission at the time of our children's adolescence continues to be that of introducing them to Jesus who loves them and is their Savior and encouraging them as they hear and respond to His invitation to them to be His disciples. In adolescence this, as with other tasks of parenting, becomes more complex. The purpose of our meeting together is to become more aware of the dynamics at work in our family relationships at this time, to be informed regarding the best skills and tools available to us today for developing and maintaining wholesome relationships, and above all, to support one another as fellow Christian pilgrims in this journey of parenting teenagers.

Good News about Teenagers

Adolescence is not an inherently difficult period. Research on adolescence in the last 25 years has brought some very good news and some revised thinking about adolescence. On average, psychological problems, problem behavior and family conflict are not more prevalent in adolescence than at any other stage of human development. About 10 percent of teenagers are troubled or get into trouble. Study given to the 90 percent has shown that, though adolescence is a time of change, these are waters which can be successfully navigated by children and their families.

"Good" children rarely go "bad" because of their friends. Adolescents generally choose friends whose values, attitudes, tastes, and families are similar to their own.

Parents remain the major influence on their adolescent child. Teens care what parents think and listen to what they say, even if they don't always admit or agree with every point. Teens want parents in their lives, though they may not always say so. Parents can make a difference. Change in any part of the family system affects the whole system. Growth on the part of parents in understanding their children, in understanding themselves, and in developing parenting skills can make a significant difference.

Adolescent change must be seen positively. The way we frame our relationship with children is critically important. Adolescence is a time of change. Though once the parent was responsible for directing the life of an immature human being, now the role is more like that of a partnership—the senior partner (parent) has more experience, but anticipates the day when the junior partner (adolescent) will take over the business of running his or her own life. The adolescent doesn't want the parent to solve every problem anymore. Adolescents will find ways to assert independence. Some ways are relatively benign—demanding more privacy, wanting to choose their own clothes, music, friends, and asserting the freedom to decide about their participation in extra-curricular activities and when they will do schoolwork. Other ways, less benign, put them at high risk for sexual promiscuity, drugs and alcohol. If we welcome the changes as signs they are growing up, this can be the most rewarding time in our parental career.

Parenting Teens Is a Disciple Making Mission

In His great commission, Jesus directed His followers: "Go and make disciples . . ." (Matt. 28:19). Christ identified two major characteristics of true disciples. "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31). To "make a disciple" in this sense is to impart cognitive truths, information and values. Elsewhere, Jesus presented a relational component to discipleship: "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:35). To make a disciple in this context means to develop the capacity for love and loving by nurturing a loving relationship with someone and encouraging his or her reciprocal response. It is in the experience of parenting that these "working definitions" of disciple making—teaching cognitive truths and bonding relationally—come together.

In all our parenting tasks, our central spiritual mission is to invite our children to meet Jesus and become His disciples. "You may be evangelists in the home, ministers of grace to your children," wrote Ellen White (*Child Guidance*, p. 479). The mission of parenting is the

gradual induction of the child into a lifestyle of Christian discipleship. Because of the natural processes of attachment and interaction that God designed to occur between parent and child, no one is better positioned to accomplish the discipling function than a parent. For this, reason Christian parents do well to understand the nature of the changing relationship with their adolescent children and to discover the most effective ways of continuing their spiritual mission of disciple making.

Group exercise: *Getting Understanding*. Read and discuss the Parenting Seminar Resource for Session I *Getting Understanding*, in groups. You may choose to assign the three parts—"Understanding Teenagers," "Understanding Ourselves," "Understanding Us"—to three different groups or to divide the overall time for this exercise into thirds and assign the three portions accordingly. Allow time for group members to read the material aloud to each other and to discuss it. Then debrief as a large group. To what extent do these identifying marks of adolescence, mid-life and the adolescent family correspond with life in your family? What difficulties have you faced? What resolutions have you found?

Additional exercise: *What It Was Like For Me*. Draw a picture of your family of origin. Using a bird's eye view of a room or several rooms in your childhood home, remember a typical family setting when you were about the age of your teenager. Draw stick figures to locate yourself and other members of your family inside or outside the house. Write one or more adjectives beside yourself and each other person which describes him or her—i.e., happy, sad, frightened, angry, contented, worried, anxious, withdrawn, moody, cheery, lonely, upbeat, revengeful, etc. Describe to others in your group your situation as an adolescent. What insights from your adolescence have given you insights into your child?

Homework assignment. Retrieve a personal photograph of yourself during your teen years. As you reflect on the photo, in what ways are you more sensitive to the adolescent experience of your child? Show the photo to your child and note his or her observations or questions. (Remember, your purpose is not to lecture your child about "the way it was" or "what life has taught you," but to manifest your sensitivity to adolescence and to open dialogue.)

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SESSION 2

CHANGING BOUNDARIES IN THE ADOLESCENT FAMILY

Supporting Material

Visual aids. A floor plan drawing or blueprint; string; a rod or stick about 1 ½ meters in length.

Presentation Helps

The following material may be used to develop the didactic portion of the seminar. The presentation may be interspersed with the group exercises included.

Family Boundaries

"Good fences make good neighbors," said Robert Frost. Fences form boundaries

between properties. Countries create boundaries between them or within themselves. The Great Wall of China is an incredible visible boundary, 25 ft. high, 20 ft. wide and stretching 1500 miles across the northern and northwestern frontier of China. It was designed to be a defense against raids by nomadic peoples. Some countries have boundaries which are quite invisible. Usually everyone near the boundary knows where it is, however, and knows the rules that are related to the boundary, i.e., crossing the boundary is permissible only at designated points; transport of certain goods across the boundary is prohibited; authorization is required to work in the adjacent country.

It is necessary for families to have boundaries also. Boundaries define the family as a whole and its sub-groups or subsystems. Important subsystems which must have appropriate boundaries are the husband and wife (the marital subsystem), the person(s) responsible for parenting (the parental subsystem, which may or may not be the same as the marital subsystem), and children (sibling subsystem). Boundaries function by protecting the family and its subsystems from inappropriate interference from outside or from one another. Boundaries allow each family subsystem to carry out its special tasks. For example, a father and mother go out alone to their favorite restaurant to celebrate their anniversary, leaving their children in the care of a competent sitter. Though the children may want to go too, their parents explain that this is a special time just for them. In effect they are maintaining a boundary around their marriage, which gives them opportunity to attend to that which is very significant for them as well as for the family—strengthening the attachment between them.

Rules. Boundaries get established by the family rules. Rules are the unwritten laws in families about how things are supposed to be, how people are supposed to act and interact, when and with whom. Our rules may have such sources as our culture, our families of origin, our religion, or be influenced by our personalities and temperaments. These rules are usually hidden, unspoken, and operate in the unconscious realm, but they are very real and powerful. In the preceding illustration about the couple celebrating their anniversary alone, there is a rule that governs their behavior: “In this family mother and dad have special times together that are just for them.” That rule sets an appropriate boundary around the marriage, the marital subsystem. Healthy families seek to understand their rules, to discuss them and to decide together about them.

The boundary around the children in a family (sibling subsystem), which identifies them as a special sub-group in the family, is important. Children, especially as they grow older, should be able to play together, relate to each other, and work out problems and conflicts together without inappropriate interference from adults in the family. An appropriate rule would be: “In this family children are allowed appropriate individual space and opportunity to work out problems and conflicts without adult interference except where health and safety are involved.”

Illustration*. One mother, who cared for her own and several other children during weekdays, found herself frequently besieged as they brought their power struggles with each other to her for resolution. She would help them to listen to each other and clarify their feelings with each other, believing that it was best if they could work their problems out themselves. Once she heard the children racing up the basement stairs to seek her adjudication of some matter or another. Then she heard the oldest child stop and say to the others, “Look, she’s only going to tell us what we said, so might as well figure it out by ourselves.” The children evidently*

found a way to resolve their concerns, for no one complained.

When parents open their teenager's mail, read their diaries, invite themselves into their conversations with their friends, or consistently step in to settle quarrels, they violate the boundary around their teen. Parents should not emotionally abandon their children nor avoid being closely enough involved in order to nurture them and teach them. But, at some point, particularly as children enter adolescence, parental interference in their affairs must be kept to a minimum. This protects the sibling boundary.

A "generation line" exists between children and their parents. This boundary is crossed inappropriately when marital problems cause a dissatisfied husband or wife to seek emotional support from one of the children. In this sense the child becomes a kind of substitute marital partner. In the same way, when a parent abdicates responsibilities in the home, some one of the children, often the eldest, may feel obligated to pick up the parenting tasks. Once again, the generation line has not been respected. While in some cases it may be necessary to distribute some parental tasks to children, healthy families find ways to let children be children.

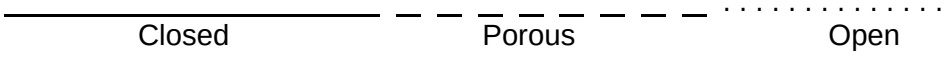
Rules can be healthy or unhealthy. A family may have the rule: "Individual family members are allowed to think their own thoughts and feel their own feelings." Such a healthy rule establishes an appropriate boundary around each family member, whereby he or she is respected as a person. An unhealthy rule is, "Nobody is ever allowed to challenge the parents in the family or make them feel uncomfortable in any way." This rule certainly puts a boundary around the parents, but one which is too restrictive and does not allow sufficient relational contact with their children.

Group exercise: *Family Rules*. Discuss with your small group the following family rules. Which are more healthy? Which are problematic for families? Which are likely to be challenged by adolescents? How could the unhealthy rules be altered to be more healthy?

1. Children get responsibility when they get to be adults.
2. Teens set their own bedtime.
3. No one is allowed to change; everything and everyone must stay exactly as they are.
4. Parents make all major decisions for their children.
5. Parents involve their teenage children in major decisions regarding the teens.
6. Fathers do not hug adolescent daughters.
7. All parts of the house are always accessible to parents.

How many windows and doors? Think of a floor plan for a house. Each family subsystem is like a room in the overall plan. *(Use visual of a house floor plan).* A room is a room, because it is connected yet separate from the rest of the living space, by virtue of its walls, doors, and windows. The walls and doors make for privacy and security inside. Some things are kept in and others are kept out. Likewise each subsystem needs space to be itself and to carry out the tasks that are appropriate to it without interference from other subsystems.

Boundaries can be *closed*, *porous* or *open* (See figure).



Continuing the illustration of the rooms in the house, a *closed* boundary is like a room which is completely walled off with no windows and no doors, or, if there is a door, it has been locked. Relationships with closed boundaries are either cut off or characterized by little or no communication, rigidity, and indifference. An *open* boundary, on the other hand, is just the opposite; it is too permeable, and therefore weak. The room, we might say, has insufficient walls, or maybe too many windows or open doorways. Passage in and out is completely unrestricted. There is no privacy. Families with open boundaries believe that everyone must think and feel and do everything together.

Porous boundaries offer the best balance between togetherness and individuality. They allow people in families to be *differentiated*. Porous boundaries can be compared to a room that has a reasonable number of windows and doors which can be opened at times and closed at other times. An individual can be free to be himself and yet fully engaged as a member of the group. Flexible boundaries like this are characterized by clear communication, a healthy sense of self, and the ability to distinguish between one's own thoughts, feelings and problems and those belonging to others.

Boundary Problems

Problems at the extremes. At the extremes, very open boundaries create *enmeshed* relationships. With closed boundaries, family members are *disengaged* from each other. Serious problems may be present in these types of relationships.

Illustration*: Invite several volunteers to represent a family of four or five members. As the group is clustered tightly together, wind string or cord tightly around them to represent enmeshment. Ask one to fall down (carefully) to further illustrate what happens when one in the family has a problem. The tightly enmeshed family are likely to all be taken off balance since they do not have sufficient differentiation to help the distressed one.*

Illustration: *Invite two volunteers to represent two family members. As the two face each other, tie each one to the end of a stick or rod long enough to separate them so that their hands cannot touch. Invite one or the other to fall down (carefully). Observe that the one cannot do anything to help the other. They are connected, as illustrated by the stick to which each is tied, but their disengagement keeps them from being able to help one another.*

Triangles. Triangles are formed whenever two people are experiencing conflict and focus on a third person or activity or thing which draws attention away from the conflict and relieves some of the pain it is causing. Triangles often result in boundary violations. The story of Isaac and Rebekah clearly illustrates boundary violations in the family (Genesis 27). Conflict evidently existed between Rebekah and Isaac, stemming perhaps from temperament differences, cultural differences, family of origin differences, lack of communication. Isaac turned to a favorite son for emotional nurture. Perhaps his rather lackluster life was brightened by the adventurous Esau. Isaac's boundaries were open, diffuse, weak toward his son Esau. Esau grew up undisciplined, disrespectful, disdainful of his birthright. Isaac evidently never so much as expressed the family displeasure over his marriage to the Canaanite women (see Gen. 28:8). Esau is admitted to certain privileges with Isaac which are not available to Jacob. A

problematic triangle developed because of unresolved conflict between the parents which led to Isaac's alliance with Esau against his wife Rebekah.

Rebekah does something similar toward Jacob. Jacob was his mother Rebekah's favorite. Jacob was quiet, single, domesticated, and without the rugged physique of his twin brother. In contrast to Esau, Jacob was a "smooth" man (Gen. 27:11). Jacob and his mother formed an alliance and schemed to increase Jacob's power in the family. They teamed up against Isaac and Esau.

The Matthew 18:15 instruction for resolving conflict avoids triangulation: "Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." God knows the human tendency to form emotional triangles. He is aware of the pain and stress borne by the individual who gets trapped in the middle of conflict between two others, be they his relatives or his friends. God would have us learn to communicate and to take responsibility for resolving our conflicts with one another directly, in ways that will avoid drawing others into them unnecessarily. His methods will leave our family relationships much stronger.

Renegotiating Boundaries

Adolescents' sense of boundaries can often be erratic, with an expectation of parental involvement in their lives one minute and a desire for independence from parents the next. A popular book for parents *Get Out of My Life But First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?* (Wolf, 1991) expresses these mixed emotions. Often adolescent boundaries toward parents will grow more rigid. Typically, they want privacy and more time with peers. This requires family renegotiation of rules to allow healthy differentiation of adolescents while keeping the family stabilized and connected.

Rules		Renegotiated Rules
Parents are able to come and go at will in the house.	⇨ Parent-Teen Renegotiation ⇨	Parents knock at their teenager's door before entering.
It is disrespectful to challenge the parents in the family.	⇨ Parent - Teen Renegotiation ⇨	It's okay to question and dialog with parents about their views.
Children sit with their parents in church.	⇨ Parent - Teen Renegotiation ⇨	Teens may sit with friends during church.

Maintaining Boundaries

The skill of listening with empathy is a primary tool that parents can employ to help maintain family rules and boundaries. Cloud and Townsend (1998) provide a list of statements which parents can use as they endeavor to listen to their children, but hold the rules in place:

I understand how frustrating this must be for you.
I bet that's a bummer, since other kids are getting to go.
I know. I hate it, too, when I have to work instead of doing things I want to do.
That's really sad, to miss something you were really counting on.
I know, I know. It's hard.
I know. I would rather be playing tennis than doing the wash. Isn't this the worst?

Homework assignments

1. My Family's Rules. In the following categories, try to put into words the rules of the family in which you grew up. In what ways did the rules change or not change as you became an adolescent? In what ways were you or were you not involved in the adolescent rule-making process? What aspects of your own family's rule making process when you were an adolescent would you like to retain? What would you like to do differently with your own adolescent? Think about your present family rules regarding selection of friends, activities with friends, dating, communication, asking permission, sex, spending money, extracurricular activities, home chores, going to church, homework and school performance.

2. *Renegotiations.* Identify several areas of boundary difficulty you may be having with your teenager. Select one area in which you sense your teenager would appreciate some renegotiation. Put into words the rule which governs the boundary as it is now. How do you see the rule being modified with your teen to be more suitable? What changes will this mean for your household? Plan how you will discuss this with your teenager and manage the changes that occur.

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SESSION 3

ENCOURAGING ADOLESCENT AUTONOMY

Supporting Material

Parenting Seminar Resource *Choices and Consequences*

Presentation Helps

The following material can be used to develop the didactic portion of the session. The presentation can be interspersed with group exercises.

Autonomy

"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me" (1 Cor. 13:11 NIV). Adulthood differs from childhood—in speech to be sure, but also in ways of thinking, reasoning and relating. The verb in "put childish ways behind me" has the sense of "abolish," "wipe out," "set aside." It is more than just "leaving the past behind"; becoming an adult involves an intentional, decisive break with childhood. This acknowledgment by the apostle Paul of the appropriateness of parting with childhood can be helpful to adolescents and their parents as they endeavor to understand and cope with the radical, and often stressful, transition that occurs between childhood and early adulthood.

Life ownership. *Autonomy* comes from two words—"self" and "law," i.e., "self-rule," "independence," "self-government." The development of autonomy in offspring is one of the primary goals of Christian parenting. "The object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government" (*Education*, p. 287). One way to think of the development of autonomy is to think of it as assuming life ownership, taking responsibility for one's own life. Key to the task of parents in helping teen development is to allow autonomy to develop gradually and steadily. Autonomy is not something which suddenly emerges at the end of adolescence. There are

forces within the developing child which instinctively encourage him or her toward independence and autonomy; there are also forces within the child which resist taking responsibility, along with the accompanying loss of the privileges and prerogatives of childhood. The parent of a teen constantly encounters these two forces as he or she helps the child acquire autonomy. The amount of personal responsibility granted to children, and expected of them, needs to keep pace with the physical and intellectual changes which are occurring within them.

Doing too much or too little. The development of autonomy in adolescence and the parental role in the process is like helping a child learn to climb stairs. The child's balance is shaky at first, so the parent remains close by, perhaps touching or holding her. As she becomes more capable, the parent gradually moves away, until at last the child possesses the necessary strength and skill to navigate the staircase unaided. Some parents carry their children up and downstairs longer than they need to. Some are not as watchful over the child's stair-climbing as they should be. Likewise with the development of autonomy in adolescence. Some parents do too little for their children, forcing them to assume more responsibility than is appropriate for their developmental stage. David Elkind (1981) speaks of the "hurried child" who is required to grow up too fast too soon. Other parents are over-responsible and do too much, encouraging an under-responsibility and dependency in their children. The goal of parenting is to achieve balance between doing too much and doing too little for children.

Characteristics of overly-dependent children. Osborne (1989) lists characteristics of overly-dependent children, such as whining, clinging, tattling, blaming others for their problems, expecting others to make them happy, omitting common courtesies, having difficulty conversing with adults in non-manipulative ways, showing poor sportsmanship, dropping out of activities and projects, fear of new situations, and giving up quickly. Encouraging children's autonomy, i.e., their life ownership, helps them develop the capacity to solve their own problems, to take responsibility for their lives, and to relate more effectively with others.

An Empowerment Curve

The New Testament counsels us to "build each other up"(1 Thess. 5:11). "Build . . . up" comes from a word meaning "to strengthen.**"** Jack and Judy Balswick (1987, 1989) bring this text into the arena of parenting by offering a design for Christian parenting which they call "a maturity-empowering model." "Empowering can be defined as the attempt to establish power in another person. . . . Empowering is the process of helping the other recognize strengths and potentials within, as well as to encourage and guide the development of these qualities" (Balswick & Balswick, 1987, pp. 44, 45).

Optimal parental empowerment of children moves through stages.

Telling—when children are young and unable to make decisions

Teaching—when communication is more two-way and children take some responsibility, but still need careful instruction and monitoring

Participating--when parents are modeling appropriate behavior for their pre-teens and working alongside them

Delegating—when highly mature children are both able and willing to take responsibility and perform tasks on their own.

Across these stages, as the child matures, parental control and direct involvement diminishes. While younger children respond positively to their parents help to master task, adolescents may interpret such help as a sign their parents do not have confidence in them.

The Power of Parental Words

1 Thess. 5:11 also admonishes us to "encourage one another." Since adolescents are extremely sensitive to the words that are spoken to them, one of the challenges for parents is to affirm their teens without being patronizing. One helpful concept is to be aware of the difference between *praise* and *encouragement*. Praise tends to evaluate the person; encouragement recognizes effort, contribution, and feelings of confidence and satisfaction.

Praise. Praise is an external evaluation which places value judgments on the child or the child's behavior for the purposes of social control. "You're such a good girl!" "You always do such good work!" "You got an A! That's great!" "I'm so proud of you!" Such praise can be counterproductive as the child may feel that he or she is not always "good" or that one is only deserving of affirmation when one gets an A.

Encouragement. Encouragement attempts to motivate through internal means, focusing instead on a description of the effort or contribution and the person's internal evaluation of the outcome. "You worked hard for that A, didn't you. I can see that you're proud of it."

Words that empower. "I liked working with you in the kitchen this morning." "You're handling that well." "Look at the progress you've made!" "It's coming along quite nicely isn't it?" "I'm impressed by the way you worked at the project." "I have confidence in your judgment." "Let me know if you need my help." "That's a tough one, but I think you can work it out." "We've got a problem out there. Could you go handle it?"

Statements to avoid. "If you'll just do it like this . . . ." "Don't forget to do that." "Please remember what I told you last week." "If you do it, you might get hurt." "You're hopeless! Just let me do it." "You are SO slow!" "Do I have to do it myself?" "You plan to earn an award in tennis? But you're just a freshman." "Are you sure you want to take guitar lessons? It takes a lot of practice to be any good."

As Your Teen Learns Something New: A Few Guidelines

Give clear instructions. If necessary, walk her through the project, but don't make it sound as if she'll be incompetent.

Ask questions like, "What else do you think you will you need for this project?" "When will you need to start in order to finish painting the porch in time to go on your hiking trip?"

Let him do the project or job assignment alone.

Remember: It's okay for her to fail. Let her make a mistake, if necessary.

Help him out, but don't bail him out. Instead, give a suggestion to point your child in the right direction. If you must show him, *only* show him. Let him do it on his own. "If you give him the perception that you will jump in, that you won't let her do it anyway or you can't even let her try, your child won't want to develop a skill, much less have the motivation to try it" (Sanders, 1997, p. 106).

Developing Autonomy through Choices and Consequences

Many parents have a pattern of rescuing their children, bailing them out of difficulties of one type or another, supplying their every need, fixing their problems. This over-functioning on the part of parents signals that the boundaries between them and their children are too open and weak. Parents can develop healthier boundaries with their adolescents and become better differentiated from them (and enable their children to be better differentiated from their parents) by treating them with dignity and affection, but respecting them as separate persons with their own wishes, feelings, preferences, choices and responsibilities.

Adolescents are often quite adept at getting their parents to take responsibility for their problems. Often, however, teens display dissatisfaction by whining, complaining, or persistent over-dependency whenever the parent endeavors to do so. The over-functioning parent is caught in a no-win situation. To not help her child is to feel guilty; to help her child is to set herself up for complaints and dissatisfaction. However, in the teen years children should be taking more and more responsibility for working out their problems. Parents encourage autonomy and responsibility when they allow teens to bear the consequences of their actions. Suppose a teen-age daughter calls home and asks mother to bring her the books she forgot. If the daughter is not usually forgetful, Mother may respond, “I’ll bring them as soon as I can get away.” However, if the daughter has a pattern of carelessness and forgetfulness, it would be more appropriate for Mother to say, “It’s too bad you forgot your books, but I won’t be able to bring them to you.”

Allowing a child to experience the reality of the natural or logical order of things teaches him to reason from cause to effect and to make changes in his behavior accordingly. Such a process will undoubtedly involve some level of discomfort for the child. This is where parents must be supportive, but not undo the lesson that is being learned out of guilt or mistaken kindness. Avoid making the discomfort worse by saying, “I told you so!” Avoid removing the consequences. “We do not have the right to assume the responsibilities of our children, nor do we have the right to take the consequences of their acts. These belong to them” (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 77). A teen must be allowed to experience the consequences of his actions and choices always within the context of a loving relationship with his parents. Parents should not imply that the consequences their teens experience are in any way intended to be punitive.

Types of consequences. Consequences are of two types: *natural* and *logical* (Dreikurs, 1964). *Natural* consequences (Parenting Seminar Resource *Choices and Consequences*, Fig. 1) are those that come about because of the natural order of things, events which may be expected to occur if there is no interference. In situations where natural consequences would be unacceptable, then a reasonable substitute must be found, i.e. a *logical* consequence (Parenting Seminar Resource *Choices and Consequences*, Fig. 2). Natural consequences represent the pressure of reality without any specific action by parents. Since logical consequences apply a reasoned conclusion which may be challenged by the teen, they may be less effective.

A Word about Spiritual Autonomy

As young people grow toward spiritual maturity, some may go through a time of questioning, even apparent rejection of at least parts of the faith of their families before they can embrace it for themselves.

> Some teenagers arrive at their convictions only through a process of rejecting what they have been taught. . . . If teenagers do not care enough about their faith to question their

parents' or their church's beliefs, their faith will remain undeveloped. (DeVries, 1994, p. 137)

Parents may feel as if their teen's questioning or rejection of the beliefs they hold dear is tantamount to a rejection of them personally. In some cases, the parents and their faith have become so closely identified as to be indistinguishable in the teenager's mind. In such situations as the teen moves toward greater autonomy and differentiation from his parents, he may—at least for a time—also feel the need to separate himself from his parents' faith. The process of movement toward greater autonomy and differentiation from their parents has led youth to simultaneously separate themselves from the parents' faith. In their religious education of their children parents can help their children to make a distinction between persons and their beliefs. A healthy sense of differentiation can allow parents to love and accept their child as a person, despite his doubts, questions and perhaps disappointing choices.

This process growth toward spiritual autonomy in the adolescent can be especially unnerving to parents. But the parents' private intercession for their child, their non-anxious presence and their determination to hold on to the relationship with their son or daughter, despite their questionings, affords their greatest hope that the family's heritage of faith will be passed on. C. S. Lewis offers this word of encouragement regarding God's interest in such youth:

> When a young man who has been going to church in a routine way honestly realizes that he does not believe in Christianity and stops going—provided he does it for honesty's sake and not just to annoy his parents—the spirit of Christ is probably nearer to him then than it ever was before. (Lewis, *Mere Christianity,* cited in DeVries, 1958, p.137)

Group exercise: *Helping Adolescents Toward Autonomy*. What would you recommend in the following situations to help parents better develop their adolescent's autonomy?

1. Joshua's mother shops for all of his clothes and decides each morning what Josh, at age 14, will wear.
2. When sixteen-year-old Gina and her parents go shopping for her, she doesn't have a chance to speak for herself because her parents speak for her.
3. Father introduces himself to the barber in a shop near the academy, and then says, "This is my son, Kevin, who will be coming here once a month to get his hair cut. I just wanted Kevin to find out where the barber shop is and to meet you."
4. When Tami was a freshman in high school, a group of older girls decided to pick on her. They would chase her down the hall and threaten her. Her father wanted to talk to the principal about it, but Tami didn't want him to. Her father asked around, got the names of the girls and called each of their fathers. He also called the principal and gave him a piece of his mind.

Homework assignment: *Your Teen's Budget and Resumé*. Choose one of the following and work with your teenager to develop *a budget* or *a personal résumé* to be used with job applications.

Budget. Budgeting helps teens develop responsibility. A weekly or monthly budget shows income and expenses. Income includes allowances, earnings, interest income on savings accounts, and gifts. On the expense side include expenses for which the teen is

responsible, i.e. tithe, offerings, savings, meals eaten outside the home, school supplies, transportation, toiletries, clothes, entertainment, hobbies, gifts and some “mad” (miscellaneous) money. You may decide to design a simple ledger, to utilize a computer software accounting program or to purchase an inexpensive ledger/accounting notebook in which your teen can record the budget along with income and expenses.

Résumé. Developing a résumé helps teens attain a sense of identity and individuality. A résumé should include: *education*—the school currently attending, any other educational experiences he or she has had, and any honors or scholastic achievements he or she has received; *work experience*—with pay or without pay as a volunteer, including extracurricular work at school, such as serving on the school paper or yearbook staff, or any work that required following directions, being accountable and exhibiting qualities of efficiency, promptness and courtesy. Baby sitting, maintaining a paper route, participation in school government are common examples; *special skills*—such as typing, computer usage and familiarity with software programs, fluency in a second language, artistic layout and design; *personal information*—birthdate, background, and interests, i.e., music, hobbies, sports; *references*—names of two or three non-relatives who know the teen well enough to describe his or her abilities, talents and character. The teen should solicit permission before providing a person’s name using them as a reference.

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Getting Understanding

"In all your getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7 NKJV).

Understanding Teenagers: Adolescence

Adolescence is the most difficult period to define in terms of age limits, with puberty marking its beginning and the achievement of adult competencies and the assumption of adult responsibilities marking its close. The pending breakaway from childhood and the transition into full adolescence is marked by a growing restlessness, spurts of physical and sexual growth, and new inner tensions.

Never before and never again, except perhaps in the infirmity of old age, will so much of an individual's attention be focused on his or her physical being. And not only is the teenager's own view fixated on himself, but so are the eyes, it seems to him, of the whole world! Children should be informed in advance about changes they can expect in their bodies with the onset of puberty. Without information, these changes can be very frightening to a child. This is a time of painful sensitivity. Girls, who often develop earlier than boys, may hunch over to minimize their height or hide their breasts. Boys may find all manner of excuses not to expose themselves to their peers for fear their physique may be different from others. Parents should take care not to tease or make fun of these changes and thus confirm the adolescent's preoccupation with the thought that the whole world is focused on his body. The onset of puberty can provide parents with a precious moment to affirm their child and celebrate God's goodness in creating them male and female and giving the gift of sexuality.

The child's movement toward the achievement of psychological autonomy and individuation, a process underway since early childhood, accelerates in adolescence as the young person seeks to establish himself or herself as a separate individual and to accept the values of a group while at the same time maintaining some connection with the meaningful elements of the past. The adolescent must achieve a sense of healthy separation from his parents. He must heed the "adolescent mandate" and turn away from childhood and childish feelings. This requires cutting inner dependency ties—a difficult, scary assignment, but one that is absolutely essential if he is to emerge as a full person in his own right. Separateness from parents is necessary for this private growing up and growing away. Though separation behaviors are often similar for both sexes, boys tend to absent themselves physically from the presence of their father and mother, while girls are likely to spar with parents, especially with their mother. How severely any youth rebels depends on his emotional hunger and whether the development of his autonomy has been encouraged by parents throughout his childhood. If there are few remaining threads to snip, then declarations of independence are not drastic.

The adolescent's sense of inner balance is precarious. She will likely do some absurd things, but she's in no position to laugh at them or to be teased. The sense of self is fragile and sensitivity to real or perceived assaults is at an all time high. A kiss, a question or even a word of encouragement from a parent can all be embarrassing. It might be better to take the risk of her catching cold than to ask, as she and her friends head for the door, "Are you wearing your warm gloves?"

An adolescent may reject the world of childhood violently, but secretly longs for its comfortable assurances. He or she wants adult privileges, but fears its responsibilities. The adolescent may not be the same person two days in a row or two hours in a row. Yesterday he accused you of overprotecting; today he wonders why his favorite shirt isn't ironed. This is the period when the child fights to achieve a clear and stable self-identification. She tries on different attitudes, opinions and personas as if they were hats or socks, to see how they look on her. Behavior in one setting may differ from the same child's behavior elsewhere. Stability and integration will gradually occur. At this time, the adolescent needs to be allowed to think ahead in terms of what certain value commitments will mean to him and others in the long run. A necessary part of self-discovery is deciding what he stands for. You can expect questions, doubting and trying on ideas for size.

Understanding Ourselves: Adults in Mid-life

Work in the field of human development in the early 20th century focused primarily on children. Later, it was recognized that humans develop and change rather predictably throughout the whole life span. One of the continuing stages of development for adults is mid-life, a period which ranges anywhere from age thirty-five to the mid-fifties. It is also a state of mind; as a person senses the passage of time his values and view of life begin to change. It is a period of evaluation and assessment, a time when a man or a woman comes face to face with fulfilled and unfulfilled dreams, achievements, goals and relationships. It is a time of realizing potentials and accepting limitations.

The issue of identity comes to the forefront for many men and women. A number of social factors often render this time of transition a crisis period. Generally, these factors affect the middle-aged adult's sense of self-acceptance and self-esteem. There may be an awareness of failure to reach a lofty goal, a sense of being replaced by robots or by more youthful, better-trained college graduates at work, or a comparison of one's own accomplishments with others who have done more.

Individuals in mid-life may attempt to appear young by the way they dress or by improvements to their physique. Some work even harder to prove they are still worthwhile and valuable. Studies show that a mid-life reversal occurs. Men tend to move toward passivity, tenderness and intimacy which they previously repressed. Women tend to become more autonomous, aggressive and cognitive, seeking more instrumental roles, such as a career, money, and influence. Often there is a desire on the part of men to be more nurturing at the same time as women may be seeking to pick up their professional careers outside the home now that children are maturing and require less attention.

Understanding "Us": The Adolescent Family

As people pass through individual phases of development, their families also react to the changes in each member. Ways must be found to adapt to each change if family life is to remain healthy. The period of family life between the time when the first child reaches puberty and the time he or she leaves home is one of the most complex phases in the family life cycle. It has been called the "adolescent family." The key developmental task of the adolescent family is renegotiation of autonomy and control between adolescents and parents. This realignment of

relationships prepares the child for that time when he or she will be able to leave home in such a way as to insure continuing healthy interdependence of family members.

This complex transition period in the family may be marked by conflict as the internal emotional turmoil of adults in mid-life and young people in adolescence rub up against each other. Often a struggle occurs to maintain the family the way it was. Either the youth, the mid-life adults or both may lack self-confidence or otherwise feel insecure. In an effort to establish themselves as individuals, adolescents exert their independence. Parents who are secure in their own identity can accept this. Parents who are not so secure are likely to have difficulty with their children. Parents may feel minimized or dishonored by their children's view of them as old fashioned, when in reality their child's attitude says nothing about them as persons, but expresses the need of the young person to find ways to distance himself or herself.

The normal withdrawal of their teenagers can be disturbing to parents, especially dads, who may be reaching a point in life when their careers are established and relationships are becoming more important to them. The father's pursuit of a relationship with his teenager may collide with the young person's need to distance himself or herself somewhat. With the childhood years in the past, some mothers may be ready to re-enter the job market. Despite their own need for accomplishing some separation from their parents, teens may be confused or disturbed by the changes in their parents.

Parents at this stage often find themselves sandwiched between the needs of their senior citizen parents who often are becoming more dependent upon them and the needs of their own adolescent children. The needs and desires of each generation must be considered and balanced.

Often without realizing it, parents relive their own adolescence at this time. They may interact with their adolescents much as they once interacted with their own parents. Old, unfinished business from their own adolescence and process of separation and individuation may interfere with their ability to relate well with their teenagers. This reliving process can be constructive if parents view a child's growth phases and struggle as an invitation to continuing growth of their own.

In adolescence the relationship between the child and the parents has experienced a shift—the child's participation in the world beyond the family has increased and his status in that world has increased. Successful adaptation to this shift involves a change from a parent-child type of transaction to that of parent-young adult. The young adult is given increased autonomy and responsibility appropriate to his age.

Choices and Consequences

BEHAVIOR	CONSEQUENCES
Staying up late	Fatigue
Laundry process not completed	No clean or ironed clothes to wear
Homework not done	Teacher's displeasure; grades affected
Music not practiced	Unable to play instrument or sing well; loss of opportunity to perform with choir or band
Failing to report to work on time	Loss of pay or loss of job
Frivolous use of spending allowance	No money available until next allowance

Fig. 1
Natural Consequences with Teens

BEHAVIOR	LOGIC	CONSEQUENCES
Speeding with car	Driving a car requires taking responsibility, but speeding shows irresponsibility	No use of car; car can be driven when supervised
Failure to care for pet	Pet depends on regular care	Find pet another caregiver
High music volume	Loud sounds detrimental to hearing	If teen will not reduce volume to protect hearing of family members, must wear headphones

Fig. 2
Logical Consequences with Teens

Speaking Together in Love

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

Communicating in potential conflict situations without shaming others.

Target Audience

Multigenerational activity for the entire church. The following may provide program ideas for Sabbath School, AY meeting, prayer meeting, Friday evening service or a special event for Sabbath afternoon. The format is built around four pairs of brief dramatizations which depict contrasting styles in communication. Discussion after each mini-drama is designed to highlight ways in which improvements can be made so as to protect the worth and dignity of persons. Situations may need to be adapted to the cultural setting.

Cast

Leader (introduces scenes and leads discussions)
Actors
Scene 1—Jon, age 7; Mother
Scene 2—Dad; Carol, age 12
Scene 3—Dad; Mom; Bryan, age 17
Scene 4—Church Member; Mrs. Smith; Suzie, age 5

Note: Actors should be chosen in advance so they can familiarize themselves with the vignettes. However, great polish is not necessary to stimulate good discussion.

Props

Simple stage props may be readied beforehand as available.

Presentation Helps

Leader: Someone has observed that we say things to each other at home and at church that we would not say to our enemies, much less to our friends. It's not that we don't love each other, it's just that we often don't think about the effect of what we say on the other person.

All of us have a deep need to feel valued and respected. People who are affirmed and treated with respect by those they love are happier, better able to cope with life's problems, and better able to relate to others. People who are shamed in their families and by others close to them often struggle in their relationships and tend to treat others in the same hurtful ways they have experienced.

These mini-dramas will draw back the curtain on a few familiar situations.

SCENE 1

(Seven-year-old Jon is seated at the supper table with the family.)

Jon: "Mom, may I have another glass of juice?"

Mother: "Say 'please'!"

Jon: "Please!"

(Mother passes the drink. Jon pours a glass full, then knocks it over as he tries to make room to put the pitcher down.)

Mother: (Jumping up and grabbing for a dish towel.) "Jon! I can't believe you've done this again! You are so clumsy! When will you ever learn to be careful? I get so tired of cleaning up after you! Now, eat your supper, and give me your glass. I think I'll need to pour for you for awhile."

For Discussion

- How do you think Jon feels?
- How do you think Mother feels, now that it's all over?
- What kind of messages do you think Jon is getting about his value in the family and as a person?
- What potential is there that these messages will affect him over his lifetime?

Leader: Let's try it again, a better way.

SCENE 1A

Jon: "Mom, may I have another glass of juice?"

Mother: "Say 'please'!"

Jon: "Please!"

(Mother passes the drink; Jon spills it as before. Mother reaches for the dish towel and hands it to Jon.)

Mother: "Here. Catch as much as you can. I'll get you a clean plate."

(Mom returns to the table with a clean plate.)

Mother: (With understanding in her voice.) "It's so frustrating when you can't seem to pour a glass of juice without spilling it."

Jon: (Nods his head.)

Mother: "You must be growing again. Seems like your arm gets places before you expected it to lately. Don't worry, you'll get used to it."

For Discussion

- What made this scene an improvement?
- How will Mother's response build Jon's sense of personal worth and encourage him?
- In what ways might Mother's response help Jon to respond to his younger brother when something like this happens to him?

SCENE 2

(Dad is seated in a chair reading the paper. Twelve-year-old Carol approaches.)

Carol: "Do you have a minute?"

Dad: (From behind his paper.) "Yeah, sure. What's on your mind?"

Carol: "Well, I'm having some trouble with my math."

Dad: (Still reading.) "Uh-huh. What's the problem?"

Carol: "I can do the math problems all right. My problem is the teacher."

Dad: (Still reading.) "You just do what the teacher says and everything will be all right. (Dropping paper slightly to make a brief, but stern, eye contact.) And you better not be disrespectful, young lady!"

Carol: (Turns on her heel and leaves the room.) "Never mind. You don't understand anyway."

For Discussion

- How do you think Carol feels?
- What are the messages her father is sending by his response?
- How is he sending them?
- What is the likelihood her father will ever learn what is really on her mind?
- How might many experiences like this affect the relationship between Carol and her father over time?

Leader: Let's try it again, a better way.

SCENE 2A

Carol: "Do you have a minute?"

Dad: (Putting down his paper and motioning for her to sit down beside him.) "Yeah, sure. What's on your mind?"

Carol: "Well, I'm having some trouble with my math."

Dad: (Maintaining eye contact and showing interest.) "So what's the problem with your math?"

Carol: "I can do the math problems. My problem is with the teacher."

Dad: "You understand the concepts, but you're concerned about something between you and Mrs. Jones."

Carol: "Yes. She calls on me all the time in class. She embarrasses me."

Dad: "The way she talks to you makes you feel singled out."

Carol: "She doesn't do it just to me. She does it to everybody. It's like she enjoys putting us on the spot. She never used to be this way."

Dad: "She's not herself."

Carol: "We know her husband's in the hospital and all that, but why does she have to take it out on us?"

Dad: "It's hard to be understanding, even through you have a hunch her behavior is connected to the stress that she and her family are under."

Carol: "Yeah. It must be pretty tough. We should probably get together and make a big card for her husband like we did for Mr. Johnson when he was sick. Then she'd at least know we care."

For Discussion

- What makes this scene better?
- What messages is Dad sending Carol this time?
- How would you analyze Dad's responses? What common elements do they have?
- How do Dad's responses affirm Carol as a person?
- How do they encourage Carol's respect for her father?

SCENE 3

(Father and Mother are seated together. Seventeen-year-old Bryan pulls up a chair.)

Bryan: "I don't know how to tell you this, but I won't be going to church with you tomorrow."

Mom: "What do you mean you're not going to church? Have some of your friends talked you into this?"

Bryan: "No, I made this decision by myself."

Dad: "Well, I don't know what this is all about, but I can tell you this. As long as I pay the school bills and you put your feet under our table, we expect you to live as a Seventh-day Adventist, and that includes going to church on Sabbath. Is that clear?"

For Discussion

- What messages have Mom and Dad sent Bryan in this exchange?
- What do you think will happen Sabbath morning?
- Is there any way the likely outcome could have been prevented?
- What should Mom and Dad do now?

Leader: Let's try it again, a better way.

SCENE 3A

Bryan: "Mom and Dad, I don't know how to tell you this, but I won't be going to church with you tomorrow."

Mom: "Something's happened to make you not want to go to church."

Bryan: "Not really anything in particular. I just don't want to go any more. It's not for me."

Dad: "Church just isn't very appealing right now."

Bryan: "It's just boring, that's all."

Mom: "Nothing much going on to hold your interest."

Bryan: "Mr. Jones tries. I just don't like to discuss things in Sabbath School, okay? I feel guilty if I don't cooperate, but I don't have anything to say."

Mom: "You feel pressured to say something when you don't want to."

Bryan: "Yeah. And if I do say something, the other kids laugh."

Dad: "It's hard to risk your thoughts when you're afraid you'll be put down."

Bryan: "Let's just say I'm shy."

For Discussion

- How do you feel about Mom's and Dad's responses this time?
- Are they really better?
- How do you think Bryan is feeling?
- What do you think will happen Sabbath morning?
- What choices do the parents have?
- What will be the likely outcome of each of these alternatives?
- How do you feel about the way the scene ended?
- What do you predict for the future as far as Bryan's commitment to the church is concerned?
- What hopeful signs are there?
- What will increase the likelihood that Bryan will keep talking to his parents?
- How do you think he pictures God?
- How might their acceptance of his feelings and listening to his opinions open the way for Bryan to want to come to church?

SCENE 4

(Set two rows of chairs to simulate pews.)

Narrator: The Smith's have had a hectic morning and arrive at church at the last minute. They are forced to take seats in a pew near the front and crawl over several members because all the back seats are taken. Little Susan begins to squirm and talk aloud almost immediately and has to be taken out. People seated around them turn and stare, looking very annoyed. A church member meets Mrs. Smith as she comes through the back door of the church.

Member: (Annoyed.) "We do try to keep it quiet and reverent in the sanctuary, Mrs. Smith."

Mrs. Smith: "I'm sorry. Susan is having a hard morning."

Member: "Well, when my children were small, they learned to sit still and be quiet. Children can be taught, you know."

Mrs. Smith: "Yes, I know. I'm trying, believe me, I'm trying!"

Member: "Well, I do hope you can get here earlier next week and sit in the back where your children will cause less of a commotion. I always sat in the back when my children were small."

For Discussion

- How is Mrs. Smith feeling when she has to leave the sanctuary?
- How is she feeling after her exchange with the church member in the hall?
- What effect will all of this have on Susan?
- What might happen to this family if many of these experiences occur?
- What may be the reasons the church member reacts as he/she does?
- In what ways might the church member be of encouragement to Mrs. Smith?

- In what practical ways might she help?

Note to Leader: Give your group a chance to rewrite the script this time. Encourage volunteers to take the parts of Mrs. Smith and the church member to dramatize some better scenarios. Discuss the improved responses, remembering to affirm all participants. You may wish to close by observing that by our communication with each other at home and at church we either encourage or discourage one another. “Therefore,” as Paul writes, “pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify (build up) another” (Romans 14:19).

Understanding the Family as a System

by Ada Garcia

There are different ways to look at families. In an individualistic society we sometimes think of the family as a collection of individuals bound together by blood or contract. Here we will look at the family as a whole unit, a family system, and discover how each member of the family affects and influences the whole family and vice versa.

Definition of a System
Any system consists of several individual parts that are related to one another and essential to a desired outcome. Each part acts as a starter for all the other parts and the whole is characterized by on-going, constantly changing actions, reactions and interactions. A system has life only when the component parts are there to give it.

Sound confusing? Here is a practical example: If you put yeast, flour, water, salt and sugar together, you have bread. The bread isn't like any one of its ingredients, yet it consists of all of them. Each ingredient works on the rest to form that whole. A small change in the ingredients will bring as a result a totally different kind of bread. If we forget one of the ingredients, the results are at least unsatisfactory, if not totally disastrous!

The main idea about a system, then, is that there is an interconnection, a constant action, reaction and interaction of elements that form together an entity—in our case, a family. As Goldenberg says in *Counseling Today's Families*, "The wholeness of the system, how it is organized, the rules underlying how its component parts relate to one another, its repetitive or redundant patterns—these are the system's vital signs" (1998, p. 20).

Interconnections. When we think in terms of systems, we focus on the mutually influenced and reciprocal interactions among the parts and their effects on each other. This is different from linear thinking in which we tend to think of simple cause and effect. Paul uses the image of the human body as a system to show us that the way church members relate affects every other member of the Church (1 Cor. 12:14-26). When physicians look at the human body, they do not assume that the part of a human organism that is in pain, or failing to function properly, is necessarily the cause of the problem. Problems in any organ can be related to the excessive overfunctioning, underfunctioning or disfunctioning of another. They know that focusing on symptoms alone, or on a part that is not working correctly, will bring only short-term relief. The same is true for the human family. If one part of the organism is treated in isolation from its interconnections with another, as if the problem were solely its own, fundamental change will not

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happen, and the family will only deny the very issues that contributed to making one of its members symptomatic (Friedman, 1985).

Elements of a System

In a very simplistic way we could say that an operational family system consists of the following:

- *A purpose or goal*. Why does the system exist? In families, we could say that among the primary purposes are enhancement of the growth of existing persons in the family and the bringing of new persons into the family.
- *Essential parts*—adults and children, males and females.
- *An order to the parts' working*—rules and communication.
- *A means to start the system*—the male and female getting together.
- *Power or means of maintaining energy* so the parts can work. In families, food, shelter, air, water, activity, and beliefs about the emotional, intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual lives of the family members and how they work together.
- *Ways of dealing with changes from the outside*—how to relate to that which is new and different.

Family Organization

Open family systems. A family may be organized as an open or closed system. An **open** system permits input—new information—from its surroundings and sustains itself by continually interacting with those surroundings. Members are free to move in and out of interactions with one another, with extended family, and with extra familial systems such as the school, church, and neighborhood. It tends to stress adaptability to unfamiliar situations, particularly if that adaptability serves a purpose or a goal that the family finds worthwhile. Because an open and honest dialogue is prized, disagreement and dissent may be common, and yet not pose a threat to the ongoing functioning of the family. Negotiation, communication, flexibility in shifting roles, interdependence, and authenticity are signs of an open system. They are organized to be adaptable, open to new experiences, and able to alter patterns, discarding those that are inappropriate to the present.

Closed family systems. A **closed** system does not participate in such transactions with its surroundings, or participates very minimally in them. A closed family system is an isolated family. Such a family tends to hold on to the traditions and conventions of the past and avoid change. New ideas, new information, new outlooks are all seen as threatening. They impose strict rules and a hierarchical power structure that force individual members to subordinate their needs to the welfare of the group. Family loyalty is paramount; rules are absolute; traditions must be observed; any deviation in behavior can lead to chaos. Parents see to it that doors are kept locked, family reading matter and television programs are screened, children report their comings and goings scrupulously, and rigid daily schedules are kept as closely as possible. Stability is achieved through the insistence on maintaining tradition.

Virginia Satir (1972), a pioneer in the study of family systems, believed that human beings cannot grow in a healthy way in a closed system. They can only exist. She saw the closed family as synonymous with a conflictive family. Others are of the opinion that open or closed family systems are not in and of themselves healthy or defective. Some think that in early years of child rearing it is better if the family is somewhat closed and then becomes more open as the

children grow and develop.

Parts of the System: Subsystems and Boundaries and how they Work
A family is a network of subsystems, i.e., parts of an overall system assigned to carry out particular functions or processes within the system.

Suppose there is a specific family—the Gordon's—that has five members: Alice [adult female, 38], John [adult male, 40], Joe [adolescent male, 16], Bob [adolescent male, 15] and Tess [child female, 9]. Each person is an individual self and can be described separately by name, physical characteristics, interests, tastes, habits, talents, personality—all the qualities that relate to him or her as an individual. In the Gordon family, Alice, for example, is an individual person. As such, she lives and breathes and takes a certain dress size. From one perspective, each individual stands alone as an island and constitutes a subsystem by themselves. But anyone who has lived in a family knows that no one can remain an island for long. Family members are connected by a whole network of ties that link them together as a family.

Families usually have pairs of individuals and other subdivisions or subsystems that are formed by having something in common, such as the generation to which they belong, their gender, or their interests. Roles and functions within the family can also be the basis of subsystems. Consider Alice again. She is connected to other members in the families through her roles. She is a wife when she is with John, a mother when she is with Joe, Bob, or Tess. Her roles are like different hats she wears as the occasion demands. She only uses a particular hat when she is with the person who corresponds to the role-hat. She is constantly putting on and taking off hats as she goes through her day. Her situation is even more complex because she is also a daughter and sister in her family of origin. Besides, at work she is a peer with co-workers and an employee of her boss. Sometimes this can become confusing. An individual like Alice might keep wearing one hat when she needed to put on another and behave in quite a different manner! If she were to play all her roles at once, it would be as tricky as wearing a pile up of hats!

Husband-wife subsystem. One readily identifiable pair is the husband-wife subsystem, a unit that is basic, central to the life of the family, especially in its early years. Any dysfunction in this marital or spousal subsystem is bound to reverberate throughout the family, often with dramatic effects on the children. Certain children may become scape-goats. Others may be co-opted into alliances with one parent against the other, and so on. The way spouses make decisions together; manage conflict; plan the family's future; and meet each other's sexual, dependency and other needs, provides a model of male-female interaction and husband-wife intimacy that will surely affect the children's future relationships.

Parent-child subsystem. The parent-child subsystem is involved in child-rearing: nurturance, guidance, limit setting, and socialization. Through interaction with the parents, children learn to deal with people of greater authority, developing in the process a strengthened or weakened capacity for decision-making and self-direction. Problems in this subsystem—serious intergenerational conflicts involving rebelliousness, symptomatic children, runaways, and so on—reflect underlying family disorganization or instability.

The parent-child subsystem expands the boundaries of the individuals who on the one hand are

husband and wife (and need to retain this special boundary), but on the other hand are father and mother. Arrival of children complicates family life. Alliances and coalitions (some along age lines, some by sex, some by personality characteristics or attitudes) may make an impact on the spousal subsystem. The sudden shift to child-related issues may be especially taxing on young adults' marriages, challenging each spouse's own degree of individuation and dependency.

Sibling subsystem. The siblings subsystem represents a child's first peer group. Through participation in this subsystem, a child may develop patterns of negotiation. cooperation, competition, mutual support, and later attachment to friends. Interpersonal skills are honed here and may develop further in school experiences and later in the workplace. The influence of this subsystem depends on how viable other subsystems, such as the parental subsystem, are.

Push-pull in Family Systems

All individuals in the family are tied together so that each one is affected by every other one. Any one person can be pulled in many directions at once. It is impossible to avoid being pulled. What is important is to learn to live creatively with the pulls.

Let's go back to the Gordons. To illustrate the forces in families, let's suppose that John is standing in the middle of the floor, straight and balanced. Alice takes his right hand, Joe the other. Bob grabs him around the waist from the front and Tess around the waist from the back. This might represent what it is like for John when has he just come home from work and Alice would like his company. Joe, Bob and Tess also want his attention. Everybody wants his attention, and at once. Everybody is pulling gently, slowly, but firmly toward themselves until everyone is feeling the pull, especially John. Can you imagine how John feels?

John cannot stay in this position forever. He has to do something. Some ways John may respond are:

- *Endure until he is numb and no longer feels anything (Martyr)*. The family might let go, but will be left with the feeling that "Daddy doesn't care."
- *Force or "bull" his way out (Bulling)*. Some of the family members might accidentally get slugged or knocked over as he struggles to free himself. John may feel guilty that he has hurt his family and blame himself for not being able to do what all of them want, or he may become resentful of them for putting burdens on him. The others feel that Daddy is mean, unloving, and hurtful.
- *Collapse (Poor-me)*. He may drop to the floor, which represents his solution to the problem by becoming sick or helpless. The family might thereby feel they are bad, because they have hurt Daddy. He might feel angry at them for making him feel weak.
- *Negotiate deals by bribing or making promises he probably can't keep (Con-artist).* John can ask the price he must pay to be let go. The sky's the limit! Whatever they ask, he says "yes." But promises can be easily made and easily broken. Distrust in him is the likely result when promises are not kept.
- *Yell for help (Passing the buck).* He may call his mother, therapist, pastor, a neighbor, or a friend, "Get me out of this mess!" If the other has a powerful enough influence on the family, John can be freed. But a real or perceived alliance with an outsider introduces new opportunities for rifts in the family.

- *Tell how he feels and ask the family directly for relief, aware that he is important to all*.

Those pulling are not feeling the same as he. If asked directly and kindly, most probably others will comply. Very few individuals share their situation plainly and provide others with directions which can help to resolve difficult or painful circumstances.

A wife and mother like Alice might feel pulled in many directions, as her husband John wants her to discuss home remodeling plans with her, Joe has cut himself and needs some first aid, Bob is late for the clarinet lesson to which she usually drives him, and Tess is yelling, "Mama!" from the top of the stairs. Alice could share with the others the tension she feels because of her differing roles, or she might exercise some of the above options by complaining of a headache and lying down, going to the bathroom, making a phone call to the pastor, etc.

How could Joe best respond when he is going out on his first date and Alice is giving him instructions on how to behave, John is warning him about staying out too late, Bob is teasing him about shaving, and Tess is pouting because she wanted him to help her with a class project? Or what should Bob do when Alice scolds him for being careless with a knife, John is telling him to be brave, Joe is calling him clumsy and Tess is crying at the sight of his cut? Or Tess, who, because she got two low marks on her report card, is being consoled by Alice, lectured to by John, winked at by Joe and called a dummy by Bob? Each can choose to communicate directly about her feelings and ask for relief or they will find themselves dealing with the push-pull in the family in less healthy ways.

Handling push-pull in the family system. What can we learn from this?

- *Every family member has to have a place*. Each is to be fully recognized, accepted, and understood.
- *Every family member is related to every other family member*. It is important to understand these relationships.
- *Every family member affects and is affected by every other family member*. Everyone matters and contributes to what is going on with any one person and has a part in changing that person.
- *Every family member is subject to being pulled in different directions.* Multiple relationships result in many forces being exerted on family members. It is crucial to learn how to deal comfortably with these forces.
- *Families develop over time and must build on what has already developed*. To understand the present, we need a perspective of past experiences, whether good or bad.
- *Every family member wears at least three role-hats.* It is important to wear the role-hat that matches what you are saying and doing. (See *Peoplemaking,* pp. 141-169.)

Triangles

In families we live in triangles. For each person born to two parents, three triangles form. A triangle is a pair plus one (Satir, 1972). Since only two people can relate at one time, the third person is always odd man out. Let's look at the three self-pair triangles of mother Alice, father John and son Joe. Each triangle is different: (1) in one of the triangles, John is the odd man, watching the relationship of his wife and son; (2) in another triangle, Alice watches her husband and son together; (3) in the third triangle, little Joe watches his father and mother together. How troublesome any particular triangle is depends on who is odd man at the moment and whether or not he or she feels bad about being left out. The odd one in a triangle always has a choice

among breaking the relationship between the other two, withdrawing from it, or supporting it by being an interested observer. This choice is crucial to the functioning of the whole family network.

In family relationships there are always temporal triangulations that are normal and non-pathological, providing that the roles and alliances are able to change. Such triangles are not fixed. However, all kinds of games go on among people in triangles and these may become pathological. When a pair is talking, the third may interrupt or try to draw attention to himself. If the pair disagrees, one may invite the third to become his ally, changing the triangle. The odd person can be a mediator, trying to make peace or arrange things, i.e., parents fight and son moves in to counsel father with whom he has more influence. The original pair may also focus on a third individual, worrying about him or accusing him. For example, spouses who are distanced in their marital relationship, may start worrying about a son and thus be brought closer together.

It is a given that when the tension between two individuals rises, a third person will be triangulated to lower the original anxiety. The third person may be someone inside the family (son, foster parent, grandmother, etc.) or outside the family (an extramarital affair, a best friend, a counselor, a nurse). Whenever you take sides in favor of one person at the expense of another, you are triangulated.

Living comfortably in a triangle. When an individual feels good about himself and is able to stand on his own two feet without having to lean on someone else, life in a triangle will be more comfortable. Likewise triangles are less problematic when an individual can be temporarily odd man without feeling bad or rejected, able to wait without feeling he is abused, able to talk straight and clearly, and to let the others know what he is feeling and thinking without brooding and storing up his feelings.

Gossip, i.e., talk focused on a third person's incompetence or pathology, is a form of triangulation that is universal. The level of anxiety in a family can be measured by the quantity of gossip circulating. Often a relationship with a person is consolidated at the expense of a third, or anxiety diluted by bringing others to ones side. Talking about a third party does not always involve triangulation, as when the purpose of the conversation is to obtain a more objective perspective on a problem.

Triangles can stay in place for years, even across generations. From one perspective, if triangles are flexible and adaptive, they can be a natural way to manage anxiety. If they are rigid or fixed, they create dysfunctional relationships in families.

Getting out of an uncomfortable triangle.

- *Stay calm*. Take a low-keyed approach when stress hits. Anxiety and intensity are the driving force beyond triangles. Maintain a warm, nonjudgmental, nonreactive position.
- *Stay out*. Do not advise, help, criticize, blame, attempt to solve problems, lecture, analyze or take sides in the problems of the pair.
- *Hang in*. Maintain emotional closeness with both parties. Do not cut off the relationship with the persons in the pair. You can temporarily seek distance if the emotional temperature becomes too "hot" or uncomfortable, but don't avoid them or disengage completely.

Avoiding triangles.

- *Talk directly to the person involved*. If you are angry with someone, that's the person you should deal directly with, even if the individual is resistant, rebellious, or rude.
- *Speak in your own voice*. Don't bring in an anonymous third party by saying "others think you're difficult to work with." Nameless, faceless criticism increases anxiety and is neither fair nor helpful. If you have an issue with someone, use the word "I" (*I* feel, *I* think, *I* want, *I*'m concerned. . .). Let other people speak for themselves.
- *Avoid secrets*. Everybody needs privacy, but keeping secrets is usually not healthy. If someone wants to share a secret with you, let them know there are certain secrets that you will not be able to keep.
- *Don't invite others to take sides.* Block other family members from getting involved in your battles and don't invite them to be your allies or take your side.
- *Don't make a triangle out of someone else's relational problems*. If someone complains to you of their relationship with another person, you can listen sympathetically, but without blaming or taking sides. Others have the best chance of working out their own anger and negotiating their differences if you stay calm, stay out, and stay emotionally connected. A concerned, but neutral position is, in the long run, the most supportive, for it helps facilitate creative problem solving in others (Lerner, 1985).

Stability (Homeostasis) and Change

For a family to maintain its continuity, it must be able to tolerate change. Change is a normal and necessary part of every family's experience as it goes through its life cycle. A system must have the ability to remain stable in the context of change and to change in the context of stability. Stagnation caused by resistance to change—an unwillingness to modify family rules under any conditions—may disrupt the family's level of functioning. Yet chaos can result when too many changes take place too rapidly. A family must maintain enough regularity and balance to maintain adaptability and preserve a sense of order and sameness. At the same time, it must subtly promote change and growth within its members and the system as a whole.

We tend to manage change by regulating cycles of growth with cycles of stability and comfort. We prefer comfort, but there may not be growth in comfort. If we do not make the effort to change, eventually we may be physically alive, but we will not be living. If we risk change, we need to be able to self-soothe while going through the process and the anxiety of change. If we confront ourselves and soothe ourselves with the comfort that God gives, eventually we grow. We develop faith in our abilities and enjoy a more productive and stimulating life. The same happens with relationships. Avoiding anxiety and emphasizing comfort and security brings low sexual desire, depression, lack of intimacy and separation from the other person. Non-resolved issues that are evaded get infected and erode relationships. That is the problem when we avoid conflict. It may be that, if no one changes or grows in a family, and the challenges of life are few, there can be "a satisfactory family life." But, as one person starts to grow and differentiate, chaos will result unless there is a reciprocal attitude toward change on the part of others in the relationship.

Implications of Family Systems Thinking for Family Ministries

- *Think wholistically*. We must think more in terms of the whole person and the whole family. Ministry to one family subsystem will likely need to be accompanied by efforts for other subsystems of the family if permanent changes are going to happen. Family Ministries should

work in very close collaboration with all other ministries of the church if the needs of the family, in its constant process of change, are to be helped.

- *Provide experiential preventive educational programs.* The dynamics of family life do not change just by information gathering. The information needs to be accompanied by experiential exercises that will help the system start a change in patterns of relationships.
- *Let go of cause and effect thinking.* When talking about negative behaviors, instead of focusing on who or what *causes* what, the focus should be on helping people learn to identify which relational patterns are sustaining undesirable behavior or can help to change it.
- *Be aware that change is a process*. In our desire to promote change, we must remember that stability is also necessary. Help prepare people for expected changes throughout the family life cycle by providing and promoting education and planning. Support them with support persons or groups when they face crises such as bereavement, abuse, marital disruption, remarriage, etc. Provide support for the typical challenges of parenting, marriage, and family living as well.
- *Focus on strengths*. In systems thinking we know the importance of building on the strengths already present. God gives us grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to assist us in our growth and change. Families need to experience the grace of forgiveness and the hope of transformation at the same time as they recognize and deal with their needs and weaknesses.
- *Remember the power and responsibilities of the individual in the system*. In the same way that the family system affects the individual, each individual in a system can be a positive or negative influence in the system. When individuals are encouraged, supported and challenged to do what they need to do, systems experience change and growth.

Conclusion

It might not be easy in our individualistic society to recapture the vision of the family as the primary group or system for helping individuals live, grow and mature. As leaders in Family Ministries, it is important to see the individual in the context of the family and in the broader context of neighborhood, school, church, city, state, nation, the world and ultimately, the universal family of God. Even though the families of earth became dysfunctional as a result of sin, the Heavenly Father puts at our disposal all the resources of heaven to bring us back to the ideal of fully functional families so that, by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit, we can face the difficulties, frailties and conflicts of life and continue to change and grow together.

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Boundaries between Parent and Family Education and Family Therapy

The Levels of Family Involvement Model

by William J. Doherty

The model presented here addresses the crucial issues of where to place parent and family education in the spectrum of professional services to families, and how to distinguish between education and therapy in work with families. A 5-level model of involvement with families is offered as an alternative to the dichotomous distinction between education and therapy. Implications are offered for professional training, staff development, and research and evaluation in parent and family education.

Perhaps no issue has plagued the profession of parent and family education more than how to distinguish education from therapy. In order to define a unique terrain for parent and family education, theorists have struggled, without success, to stake out its conceptual differences from therapy. Practitioners, for their part, have continually wrestled with the question of how deeply to go into the feelings and experiences of individuals who are participating in parent and family education activities, without crossing the boundary into family therapy.

Progress on this issue has been scanty for nearly a century. Following a decade that witnessed the consolidation of parent education in the United States, Lindeman and Thurston (1935, as cited in Brim, 1965) wrote that "parent educators are now searching for that new line of demarcation which reveals where education leaves off and psychotherapy begins" (p. 13). Brim (1965) saw little progress three decades later. His own distinction between education and therapy specified that education focuses on conscious (and near-conscious) aspects of the personality of the learner, where as therapy focuses on the unconscious aspects of personality. Although this distinction may have made sense when Brim was writing the first edition of his book in the mid-1950s, an era when psychoanalytic therapy dominated therapy practice and family therapy was not yet visible, it cannot be sustained in a era when many models of psychotherapy deliberately avoid dealing with unconscious processes.

The last three decades have not yielded any better resolution of the problem. In their authoritative *Handbook of Family Life Education*, Arcus, Schvaneveldt, and Moss (1993) articulated, but did not try to resolve, the ongoing tension between "educational approaches and therapeutic ones" (p. 22). However, the authors raised two important questions that the present article seeks to answer: "Is there a legitimate *conceptual* distinction between these two approaches, or

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do they simply reflect different points along some continuum? How would clarification of this issue influence the nature of family life education?" (p. 23). The present article argues for a continuum approach to working with families, rather than a dichotomous approach, and suggests that this clarification has important implications for parent and family education.

If education for family life were viewed as a regular academic subject such as geography or mathematics, the distinction between education and therapy would be easy: the former deals with cognitive knowledge only, whereas the latter deals with personal and experiential issues. The problem is that contemporary definitions of parent and family education universally involve a personal and experiential component: the feelings, motives, attitudes, and values of the learners are central foci in the process (Arcus et al., 1993; Darling, 1987). This personal element distinguishes a parent education group from, say, a standard college course in child development.

Here, then, is the conundrum: In order to accomplish its purpose, parent and family education must have more personal depth than other forms of education, but too much depth or intensity risks harming participants, or at least scaring them away. Participants must be able to tell their stories, express their feelings and values, and be encouraged to try out new behaviors. However, if they recount in detail their most traumatic memories, ventilate their most painful and unresolved feelings, or take major behavioral risks, the experience can be damaging.

Why damaging? First, if the context of the program is defined as educational, not clinical, the participant does not enroll expecting highly intense interactions and searing personal disclosures. If such experiences occur, the participant might be overwhelmed emotionally and feel unsafe, even if the disclosures are completely voluntary. Second, if the educator has received the standard training in parent and family education, he or she is not equipped to deal with such intense personal issues, and is likely to feel anxious, incompetent, or legally liable if the interaction gets out of hand. Third, if the interaction occurs in a group setting, the experience is likely to disturb other participants and drive them away from the group.

Every experienced parent educator, for example, has faced the situation where a mother in a parent education group suddenly reveals her own childhood abuse memories and becomes very emotional. The parent educator knows that the boundaries of parent education are being stretched at such moments. The most obvious way to avoid such incidents—to stay at a cognitive level and not encourage expressions of feelings and personal stories among participants—does not seem an adequate solution.

The challenge is to have both depth and limits in parent and family education. A dichotomous distinction between education and therapy is not especially helpful in meeting this challenge, because such a sharp distinction implies a cognition-emotion split, as if education deals only with the cognitions and therapy only with the emotions—neither of which is true, because cognitions and emotions are thoroughly intertwined in both endeavors. This dichotomy leaves out the middle ground between giving information and working intensively with the most serious family problems. This article argues that only a continuum approach to the distinction between education and therapy holds the possibility of capturing the required nuances. Such an approach shows how therapy and parent and family education occupy different levels of intensity in work with families. It also allows us to conceptualize differences of levels within parent and family education itself.

The Levels of Family Involvement (LFI) model, as adapted for parent and family educators, applies primarily to direct work with parents and other family members who are dealing with children. The term *parent and family education* refers to activities, whether one-to-one or in groups, designed to enhance the competence of parents, couples, or other family members in their parenting or co-parenting roles. These activities include didactic programs, parent support and educational groups, more intensive groups for teen parents and other high-risk parents, and home visitation programs for families who are hard to reach through centers. Although the model can be adapted to classroom settings for children, adolescents, and college students, and to couple and marriage enrichment activities, these contexts are outside of the scope of the present discussion.

Background of the Levels of Family Involvement Model

The model was originally developed for training family physicians who work with families experiencing illness and disability (Doherty & Baird, 1986, 1987). These professionals face a similar dilemma to that of parent and family educators: They inevitably work with family members in emotional distress but are not equipped by mission, training, and scheduling logistics to engage in intensive family therapy. The LFI Model has provided a way to conceptualize a moderate degree of depth or intensity in physicians' work with families, that is, not merely informational but not as intensive as therapy. The model has been adopted widely in family medicine training and has been operationalized in a series of research studies assessing the degree of family-centered skill in academic family physicians and family practice residents (Marvel, 1993; Marvel & Morphew, 1993; Marvel, Schilling, Doherty, & Baird, 1994). The model has also been applied to the work of school psychologists (Doherty & Peskay, 1992).

In 1993, the LFI Model for physicians was adapted to parent and family education and refined in a focus group and a series of workshops with parent and family educators in Minnesota. Model programs are being developed, and training videotapes have been produced. This article provides the first written description of the LFI Model for parent and family educators. (Training tapes on the LFI Model are available for purchase at a modest cost from the Cavanaugh Early Childhood Family Education Center, 5400 Corvallis Ave. N., Crystal, MN 55429).

Levels of Family Involvement for Parent and Family Educators

The five levels of the LFI Model are arranged hierarchically from minimal involvement with families to family therapy, with the higher levels subsuming and going beyond the lower ones (See Appendix). The first and fifth levels are outside the mission of parent and family education; they are included to show what is on the other side of the boundaries of the field. The model refers to both group work with parents and one-to-one work.

Level One: Minimal Emphasis on Family

Level One describes programs or activities in which parents and other family members are included only for practical or legal reasons. At Level One, the educator does not see working with families as a professional skill to be developed. Educational and programmatic policies are created by professionals with little explicit attention to the needs of parents and family members, who are expected to support and cooperate with the professionals. Family conferences for children with difficulties are conducted in a school-focused manner instead of a partnership manner, with parents having relatively little input. Fortunately, Level One programs are increasingly being seen as inadequate ways to work with families and are even contrary to federal law in the case of

children with special educational needs (Christenson & Conoley, 1992).

Level Two: Information and Advice

Level Two involves collaborative educational activities with family members around the content knowledge of child development, parenting, and family life. At Level Two, the parent and family educator has good skills in communicating information clearly, eliciting questions, engaging a group in the learning process, and making pertinent and practical recommendations. Examples of appropriate Level Two activities in parent and family education include speakers' programs and one-time didactic workshops that engage family members in an informative and collaborative way. The principal strength of Level Two is that the parent and family educator can reach a large number of families with important information in a low-risk environment. The principal limitation of Level Two is that, because it avoids the affective and experiential domains and does not involve parents in personal discussion, it lacks sufficient depth to stimulate meaningful change in most cases.

Level Three: Feelings and Support

Level Three embraces the activities, knowledge, and skills of Level Two and adds to them the eliciting of the feelings and experiences of the parents and family members and the use of these personal disclosures as part of the educational process. Parent and family educators involved at Level Three are able to listen empathically, probe gently for feelings and personal stories, create an open and supportive group climate, engage in collaborative problem solving, and tailor recommendations to the specific situation of the parent or family member. Combining as it does the cognitive and affective domains in a nonintrusive manner, Level Three is the optimal level of intensity for most ongoing parent and family education activities.

Level Three interactions in parent and family education generally deal with the normative stresses of family life, rather than traumatic personal memories and experiences. Describing one's feelings about being spanked occasionally as a child is an example of the former; recounting one's sexual abuse history is an example of the latter. Thus, one Level Three skill is the ability to protect a parent or family member from too much self-disclosure, especially in a group setting. At Level Three, the parent and family educator must have a good awareness of, and comfort with, his or her own emotional responses, in order to be able to stay connected with parents without trying to rescue them or flee from them when they express painful feelings. The most common mistakes at Level Three are (a) moving too quickly back to the cognitive level because of personal discomfort; (b) cutting off a parent by turning the issue back to the group too quickly; (c) giving premature advice before the parent has had the chance to tell the story and express feelings; and (d) probing too deeply into the sources of the parent's distress, thereby becoming too intrusive in an effort to help. When done well, however, the Level Three balancing of depth and limits is the hallmark of parent and family education.

The principal limitation of Level Three is that some parents' needs and problems are too intense to be worked with constructively in an educational/supportive approach. In a group setting, these parents may overwhelm other parents with a need for air time, or their problems may go far beyond parenting issues. In these situations, the parent and family educator might meet with the parent alone to discuss a referral to a therapist or might refer the parent to a more intensive Level Four parent education program.

Level Four: Brief Focused Intervention

Level Four subsumes Levels Two and Three and goes beyond by including an assessment

and a planned effort to help the parent change a troublesome parenting problem, a broader family interaction pattern, or larger systems problem. Level Four is primarily suited for work with families with special needs, that is, populations of families who are in high-risk situations. These might include teen parents with family and peer problems, families involved in the mental health or child protective services systems, and parents facing the stress of a chronically ill or disabled child. Problems suitable for Level Four interventions generally go beyond one-to-one parent child issues to involve the parent's interactions with a co-parent, other family members, or professionals who are dealing with the child. Examples might include conflictual co-parenting with a divorced spouse, an interfering grandparent who is allied with one's spouse, or struggles with a child protective services caseworker.

At Level Four, parent and family educators have learned the skills of assessing family problems in their wider context and of developing basic interventions to ameliorate them. They have also done personal work to examine their feelings and relationships with their own family system and community systems, in order to avoid becoming triangulated with the parent against these people or groups in the parent's life.

In the LFI Model, Level Four is considered an elective competency level for parent and family educators, one that requires training beyond that normally provided in nontherapy graduate programs and other training settings. It represents the upper boundary of parent and family education practiced by a minority of professionals who choose to work with special populations of parents and seek special training in family assessment and basic family interventions. Furthermore, Level Four requires a clear contract with the parent or group of parents to engage in more intensive work than in standard Level Three information and support activities.

Experience suggests that the most common mistakes at Level Four are: (a) moving into this depth without realizing it and then getting stuck or overwhelmed, (b) not having an agreement with the parents to engage in this kind of problem solving discussion, (c) not spending sufficient time at Level Three before moving into assessment and intervention, and (d) staying at Level Four when it is not helping. On the last point, a Level Four intervention for a troublesome family interaction should be attempted only for a limited time, say, one discussion and a follow up. If this degree of intervention is not being helpful, and if the problem is serious enough, the educator should refer the family for therapy and return to Level Three involvement. If the family does not accept a therapy referral, the parent and family educator should remain at Level Three so as not to offer problem-solving help that cannot be useful.

Because Level Four is a more intensive involvement than what generally occurs in parent and family education, it is important to specify its limits as well. Level Four deals only with issues of parenting, not marital functioning, psychological disorders, or personality problems of adults. Thus, co-parenting issues are appropriate to address but marital issues are not. Anger management with children is appropriate, but anger management with one's mother-in-law or boss is not. Self-defeating thoughts about oneself as a parent or co-parent are grist for Level Four work, but self-defeating thoughts about one's body image are not. Level Four remains focused on the goals of the parent and family education program.

Given that the LFI Model suggests that Level Three should be the typical level of involvement for parent and family educators, it is reasonable to ask why Level Four is

appropriate at all. Is it too intensive for parent and family education? This article argues that, as parent and family educators increasingly are asked to work with families with special needs and multiple stressors, the boundaries of the field are already being extended beyond informational and supportive services. Teen mothers, for example, may not be helped sufficiently with a strictly Level Three group because the members need a more active problem-solving approach to the complex relationships they are dealing with as teens, co-parents, students, and often as welfare recipients. Another example is a group program for incarcerated fathers, whose needs require a more in-depth involvement by the parent educator than a standard Level Three group. In any case, the parent and family educator working at Level Four is likely to be involved in collaborative professional relationships with family therapists and other professionals who are usually working with the same families. Level Four is inherently collaborative, both with families and with other professionals.

In a group setting, Level Four differs from Level Three in the amount of time allocated to individual parents each session. For example, in a 90-minute group meeting, the parent educator and the group might work with a particular parent for 20-30 minutes to help this parent understand a problem and explore steps to address it. Such intensive focus on an individual parent is not generally part of Level Three groups, and indeed might be inconsistent with the norms for sharing air time in many parent education groups. However, this intensive focus on particular parents is essential for Level Four groups. Experience has indicated no difficulty with group process as long as all the parents have agreed to be in a problem-solving group where they will share time over the course of the group's ongoing meetings. Alternatively, a primarily Level Three group might be able to handle an occasional Level Four discussion with a parent who is facing an acute parenting problem; in that case, the parent educator should obtain the parent's and the group's permission to focus a segment of the group's time on that parent's situation.

The most common misapprehension about Level Four is that, because it is the most intensive level of parent and family education, it must be the preferred level of involvement. This notion is no more true than the assumption that surgery is generally preferable to less invasive treatment. Experience with the LFI Model in Minnesota suggests that Level Four is the exception rather than the rule in parent and family education. It is an approach that requires careful programmatic decision making, staff preparation, acceptance by the parents and family members who participate, and close working relationships with therapists and other professionals in the community. Just like all the other levels, Level Four interventions can be done in groups or in one-to-one interactions. The chief dangers of Level Four occur when the educator is drawn unaware and unprepared into family interventions by dint of the family's serious problems and by a frustration over the limits of informational and supportive efforts to help the family.

Level Five: Family Therapy

Level Five is outside the boundaries of parent and family education. Family therapy generally involves an extended series of family sessions aimed at treating serious psychological and family problems by stimulating significant change in family interaction patterns. Whereas Level Four is confined to parenting related issues, Level Five may move beyond parenting into couple relationship issues, family of origin problems, and mental disorders in individual family members. The skills specific to Level Five are those dealing with the management of intense personal distress or interpersonal conflict and ambivalence or resistance to

change among family members. When family members see a therapist, they know they are in mental health treatment and not in an educational program, although education is also likely to occur.

Each of the levels beyond Level One also has a set of skills used in relating to outside services and service providers. At Level Two the parent and family educator is knowledgeable about community resources such as therapy services and makes information about them available in written form to participants. At Level Three, the parent and family educator adds the ability to detect when a family might require a referral and the ability to tailor the referral to the unique situation of the parent and family. At Level Four, the parent and family educator knows family therapists and other family professionals and services, and is able to orchestrate a referral by educating both the family and the professionals about what to expect from each other.

Use of the LFI Model in Parent and Family Education

The LFI Model can be used in several ways. First, it can be used descriptively to characterize the depth or intensity of a particular group or one-to-one interaction with a parent or other family member. Was the group primarily at Level Two or Level Three? Did the educator move into Level Four for several minutes? Did the actual level fit the parent and family educator's goal for the parent education activity or did the actual interaction undershoot or overshoot the desired level?

Second, the LFI Model can be used to establish goals for the kinds and range of family services offered by a parent and family education program. One program might define its offerings as primarily Level Three parent groups, with an occasional Level Two public lecture. Another program might decide also to offer special Level Four services in addition to its standard Level Three activities; Level Four parent groups, for example, could be created and clearly defined as problem-solving groups for parents whose needs are not being met in Level Three groups.

Third, the model can be used to describe the competency of a parent and family educator in different kinds of work with families. To what extent does this individual possess the knowledge, personal development, and skills required for each level? Some parent and family educators with traditional education backgrounds, for example, might be much more comfortable at Level Two than at Level Three, whereas those with prior counseling training might already have many Level Four skills.

Fourth, the model can be used to define training and professional development goals for programs and for individual parent and family educators. For example, a program staff might want to bolster every educator's Level Three skills, while offering Level Four training to one or two individuals if they are interested in working with high-risk families. One assumption of the model is that each level past Level One involves skills that can be developed and honed over a professional lifetime. It seems particularly important to assist parent and family educators in becoming increasingly more skilled at Level Three work with families, because this work is the heart of parent and family education. The next section deals with the process and content of training.

Implications for Training

Most training programs in human development and family relations, family life education, and child development appear to provide good grounding in Level Two knowledge, personal development, and skills. However, it appears that most of these training programs do not give sufficient attention to the knowledge,

personal development, affective skills, and group process skills required for Level Three. Many students finish with perhaps one course in group process and little in the way of supervised experience in communicating with parents and other family members about emotionally-charged issues. The result is that most parent and family educators enter their first position prepared well at Level Two and not well at Level Three.

How can parent and family educators be trained at Level Three? Level Three knowledge is best developed and maintained through courses on family systems, family stress, and group process. Level Three personal development is best developed and maintained—either in graduate programs or in-service training programs—through support groups and mutual feedback sessions in which parent and family education students and practitioners can process their own emotional reactions to parents, other family members, and groups. Level Three skills require systematic practice and supervision, including techniques such as role playing, co-facilitation of groups, peer observation, teacher observation, and video observation of one's own work. There is no substitute for careful observation, coaching, and feedback on performance if one is to develop good Level Three skills, and no substitute for a trusting support group if one is to process the personal feelings that Level Three work inevitably generates in educators. A strictly content-oriented training program cannot adequately prepare professionals for affective work with families.

Level Four competency requires advanced course work on family systems and basic course work on family assessment and family interventions. The personal development aspect involves sorting out one's own family issues and one's relationships with other professionals and community systems. Level Four personal development and skills can best be learned through an apprenticeship with a Level Four parent and family educator, with consultation from a Level Five family therapist. When there are no Level Four parent and family educators in a program, then a family therapist should do the initial apprenticeship training. The involvement of a family therapist in training and ongoing consultation is essential for the safety and security of Level Four work and for backup for the parent and family educators. It is crucial, moreover, that the family therapist be thoroughly familiar with the mission and scope of parent and family education and be willing to learn from the parent and family educators about the needs of parents in their setting. . . .

Conclusion

This article has proposed a way to address a nagging concern in the field of parent and family education: the distinction between education and therapy. The proposed way out of the century-long impasse is to delineate levels of intensity within parent and family education, and then to distinguish the most intense level of education from therapy. Inevitably, there is some overlap between Level Four Brief Focused Intervention and Level Five Family Therapy, particularly in an era when therapy is becoming briefer and more problem-focused and parent and family education is becoming more expansive in its scope. The way to avoid professional turf struggles at the interface is to make sure that Level Four parent and family educators are well-trained and to establish collaborative links between parent and family educators and family therapists. Family physicians and obstetricians have had these linkages for decades; family physicians manage normal pregnancies and deliveries, consult with obstetricians on borderline cases, and refer high risk cases to obstetricians.

The effort to distinguish parent and family education from therapy requires that distinctions be made among kinds of parent

and family education. Indeed, the failure to distinguish different kinds of intensity in parent and family education may have inhibited the development of a clear distinction from therapy. This article has made a case for Level Three as the ideal degree of intensity for ongoing parent and family education activities, because it combines information and affect; Level Two is appropriate primarily for one-time informational presentations, and Level Four is a specialized kind of work for a subset of families with special needs. There is much more to be done to bring all parent and family educators up to speed in knowledge, personal development, and skills required to practice at Level Three.

The LFI Model awaits further application to the classroom teaching of parent and family education. It would appear that Level Four would be too intensive for these settings but that Level Three would be highly appropriate, given the scope of recommended content for parent and family education for children and adolescents (Arcus, 1987). The model also needs study of its applicability to diverse populations of families, some of whom may prefer programs at different levels of intensity.

The most controversial aspect of the model is its inclusion of Level Four within the scope of parent and family education. However, the case can be made that if the field is to adapt to the growing needs of families, then it will have to face the challenge of preparing some of its practitioners for more in-depth work with families who can benefit from the unique blend of information, support, and nonintrusive problem solving that Level Four can offer. This development in the field will inevitably involve parent and family educators more closely in collaborative relationships with other professionals serving families in the community, thereby increasing the visibility of parent and family education as a valuable service to a broad range of families and a valuable resource for family therapists and other family service professionals. Whatever the eventual consensus about the place of Level Four, however, a clearer definition of the scope of practice for parent and family education is a development long awaited and much needed.

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Appendix

Levels of Family Involvement for Parent and Family Educators

Level 1: Minimal Emphasis on Family

Interactions with parents are institution centered, not family centered. Families are not regarded as important area of focus, but parents are dealt with for practical or legal reasons.

Level 2: Information and Advice

Knowledge Base: Content information about families, parenting, and child development.
Personal Development: Openness to engage parents in collaborative ways.
Skills:

1. Communicating information clearly and interestingly.
2. Eliciting questions.
3. Engaging a group of parents in the learning process.
4. Making pertinent and practical recommendations.
5. Providing information on community resources.

Level 3: Feelings and Support

Knowledge Base: Individual and family reactions to stress, and the emotional aspects of group process.
Personal Development: Awareness of one's own feelings in relation to parents and group process.
Skills:

1. Eliciting expressions of feelings and concerns.
2. Empathetic listening.
3. Normalizing feelings and reactions.
4. Creating an open and supportive climate.
5. Protecting a parent from too much self-disclosure in a group.
6. Engaging parents in collaborative problem-solving discussion.
7. Tailoring recommendations to the unique needs, concerns, and feelings of the parent and family.
8. Identifying individual and family dysfunction.
9. Tailoring a referral to the unique situation of the parent and family.

Level 4: Brief Focused Intervention

Knowledge Base: Family systems theory
Personal Development: Awareness of one's own participation in systems, including one's own family, the parents' systems, and larger community systems.
Skills:

1. Asking a series of questions to elicit a detailed picture of the family dynamics of a parent's problem.
2. Developing a hypothesis about the family systems dynamics involved in the problem.
3. Working with the parent for a short period of time to change a family interaction pattern beyond the one-to-one parent/child relationship.

4. Knowing when to end the intervention effort and either refer the parent or return to level three support.
5. Orchestrating a referral by educating the family and the therapist about what to expect from each other.
6. Working with therapists and community systems to help the parent and family.

Level 5: Family Therapy

This level is outside the scope and mission of parent and family education. The following description is offered to show the boundary between Level 4 parent and family education and Level 5 family therapy.

Knowledge Base: Family systems and patterns whereby distressed families interact with professionals and other community systems.

Personal Development: Ability to handle intense emotions in families and self and to maintain one's balance in the face of strong pressure from family members or other professionals.

Example Skills:

1. Interviewing families or family members who are quite difficult to engage.
2. Efficiently generating and testing hypotheses about the family's difficulties and interaction patterns.
3. Escalating conflict in the family in order to break a family impasse.
4. Working intensively with families during crises.
5. Constructively dealing with a family's strong resistance to change.
6. Negotiating collaborative relationships with other professionals and other systems who are working with the family, even when these groups are at odds with one another.

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Soaring

by Edwin H. Friedman

Mr. and Mrs. Bird had successfully launched nine fledglings. Each had been hatched with no problems and grown to preflight performance with few complications. At the moment of "push-out," each had eagerly walked out on the ledge of the tree hole in which their nest had been sheltered and, as their parents helped them clear the rim, spontaneously fluttered its wings in the most natural way. None seemed to need any special tutoring or coaching. All jumped out without any stalling whatsoever, fell a little, flapped a little, dipped, and flew.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. Bird were ready to the leave the nest themselves. It had been their home a long time. Both were eager to spend their remaining years alone, together, satisfied that they had contributed to the survival and the evolution of their species. As they had done nine times before, therefore, they led Baby-Bird to the entrance of their shelter, and without too much thought about it or concern, they gently pushed him out. Baby-Bird at first fell a few feet just like his siblings before him and then just kept on falling. In fact, he went into an immediate nose dive, tail to the sky.

The Birds were alarmed. Mr. Bird could not believe what he was seeing.

"Flap your wings," cried Mrs. Bird.

"Pick your head up," shouted Mr. Bird.

"Fly! Fly!" They both echoed.

But Baby-Bird, nose to the ground, did not move a muscle, nor did he seem to show fear. He did not call back but just kept on repeating to himself, "I'll be damned if I'm going to flap my wings just 'cause they want me to."

Further and further his little body plummeted straight down like some plumb-line following a lead weight.

"Loosen your feathers," cried his mother.
"Watch out," screamed his father.

Frantically they looked at each another; then, as though they both had the same idea at once, each swooped down on their offspring from opposite sides and caught him before he was halfway down. They gently landed, regained their strength, and flew him back to the nest, chirping soothing noises all the way. "There, there, don't be scared," or "Next time it will be easier," or "You just have to get some confidence," or "We'll try again; tomorrow will be better." But Baby-Bird did not respond; he just kept thinking to himself, even more determinedly than before, "I'll be damned if I'm going to flap my wings just 'cause they want me to."

The next morning Mama and Papa Bird tried it again, this time a bit more anxious as a result of the previous day's experience. They went out of their way to comfort Baby-Bird, pointed out that it would be all right once he learned, and tried to raise his confidence by explaining how easily his brothers and sisters had done it before him. Mrs. Bird explained how to glide if he became tired, and Mr. Bird showed him how to flex his muscles more trimly.

Then, carefully, they set him on the rim of the hole again and, after a moment's hesitation, pushed. Baby-Bird went into a tumble.

"Fly," cried Mrs. Bird with far more anxiety than before. "Move your wings," her mate followed, "your wings, your wings!"

But nothing his parents said had any effect on his "attitude" whatsoever. He just kept plummeting and thinking, "I'll be damned if I'm going to flap my wings just 'cause they want me to."

So, once again, Mr. and Mrs. Bird zoomed down from their perch, gently nestled themselves beneath his fall, decelerated slowly to the ground, and, after a brief rest, carried him back to the nest once more. The next day it was the same, and the day after that the same again. Days became weeks, and weeks became months. Soon the cold weather was approaching and likewise the winter of their lives.

Mama and Papa Bird were totally perplexed. What was wrong? They had never had any trouble with their previous children. What made matters worse was Baby-Bird's refusal to help himself. He would not explain, refused to show any gratitude, and, if anything, became more belligerent in proportion to their concern. The situation was even beginning to affect their own relationship. More than ever before they found that, if chirping at Baby-Bird did not help, the resulting frustration found them chirping at each another.

Then, one morning, Baby-Bird awoke. He heard nothing. Usually he could hear his parents somewhere, even if it was only the ruffling of their feathers. In fact, that is generally what woke him up.

Normally, if he slept long enough, he could count on one of them rushing in angrily, or, the opposite, coaxing him out with a rewarding morsel. But this morning there was a peaceful, silent isolation. He tried to outwait them as usual, but nothing happened. Finally he got himself off his straw and went out of his cubicle.

He chirped. There was no response.

"They have gone out together? Most unusual."

He walked to the edge of the opening to see if he could find them outside. It was a particularly beautiful day, and the sky was seductively calling him. He repressed the urge quickly, however, and ducked back in. They were nowhere to be seen. He decided to go back to bed and wait. But he could not sleep. He found himself anxious, fidgety. In the past he had always found his parents' chirping a bother; he almost longed for it now. Somehow those chirps and pokes had enabled him to avoid his destiny, instead of facing it. He was beginning to realize that much as he was annoyed by their calls, they managed, in some way he could not comprehend, to take the discomfort out of his indolence.

He became angry. "How dare they? Don't they understand that I can't make it alone? Don't they care?" Finally, "I'll show them."

He went to the opening again. The ground was far away. Mama and Papa Bird had always made sure to put their nest high in a tree where it would be so much more secure.

He peered out over the edge of the hole in the bark. A trickle of fear ran through his otherwise cold-blooded body, but he quickly stopped it as he always did, with rage. "All the better. They'll never know what happened, and, if they do find out, maybe even come to see what's left, then they'll know, really know."

He resisted an urge to look around and dove out. He began tumbling as before, end over end, and he felt some loss of control. Then he stopped tumbling and angled straight for the earth below. He had hopes for a rapid descent and began to brace himself, eagerly,

for the triumphal splat! When he was a little more than halfway down, however, further down than he had ever fallen before, something else uncontrollable happened. Both of his wings, simultaneously, and through no fault of his, pulled away from his body. He tried to tuck them back in, but air resistance prevented it. Worse, they proceeded slowly to span out further on both sides until they were fully extended.

The immediate effect, of course, was to pull Baby-Bird out of his nosedive. More, however, occurred than that. As his body gradually inclined upwards, his whole being felt an urge he had never sensed before. Caught in the flow of a gentle air current, he rose rapidly higher toward the clouds, and, for perhaps only the second time in his life, he looked at the sky.

The current carried him gracefully in a soft, elongated, parabolic curve, which, after it had borne him to its zenith, began to descend; and, inadvertently, again as if through no fault of his, he unwittingly, perhaps one could say instinctively, raised and lowered his wings.

Instantly his body stopped its short descent and he glided upwards again. He lowered and raised his wings once more, and once more his young, properly formed body moved effortlessly up in a graceful, inverted arc. The feeling was new, indescribably new. Riding the crest of his own energy now, he moved his head. Generally he was prone to look at his toes. He looked to the right, then to the left, and, as he tilted his head, found that even this movement affected his whole being, as he swooped up and over a flock of another feather.

His parents totally forgotten for the moment, and without their constant chirping to "foul" his functioning, he found, to his surprise, that he was able, almost naturally, to maintain the minimum velocity needed to prevent stalls. He experimented more.

Within no time at all Little-Bird was miles away. Looking around below, he could no longer locate his former home; there were trees everywhere. For a moment he wondered which had been his.

Then, with sudden resolve, he flapped his wings again and again, spurting and gliding upward. Out he went in new directions, diving, looping, turning, banking. One more time he remembered his nest, but with no vestige of his previous attitude. Oblivious, he soared to the sun.

Reprinted from Friedman, E. H. (1990). *Friedman's fables*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 67–72. Used by permission.

A Selected Bibliography for Understanding Families

Balswick, J. O., & Balswick, J. K. (1999). *The family: A Christian perspective on the contemporary home*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

The Balswicks provide an integrated view of the contemporary family based on biblical truths, social-science knowledge, and clinical insights. The authors explore issues vital to a vibrant Christian family including mate selection, the marriage relationship, and the parent-child relationship. They then go beyond the internal analysis of family to an external analysis, probing the relation between the family and the wider social and cultural setting. They investigate the effects modern industrialized society has on contemporary family life and suggest ways in which the family, community, and social structures need to be changed in order to create a healthier family environment.

Blevins, W. (1993). *Your family your self*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

This is a self-help book for exploring your personal family system, uncovering along the way some of the powerful secrets of systemic family therapy. The author, believing as a systems therapist that a person discovers who he is when he knows his own people, helps the reader to claim his real identity by reconnecting with his family heritage. He then moves to helping the reader understand his destiny—the script he is now living—by identifying the themes and issues ingrained in his original family system. The exercises provided to assist the reader are rooted in the systems perspective that the quality of your present life is fashioned by the interplay of conscious and unconscious forces generated in your family of origin.

Carter, E. A., & McGoldrick, M. (Eds.). (1980). *The family life cycle: A framework for family therapy*. New York: Gardner Press, Inc.

This book charts the developmental progress of the entire three-generational family system, proposing that problems are often the result of derailments in the family life cycle. The book offers a conceptual overview of the life cycle of the middle class American family, followed by chapters defining the tasks required of family members at each stage of the life cycle. Suggestions for working with families who are having problems negotiating these tasks are included in each chapter. The important variable of cultural differences in life cycle patterns is also discussed.

Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (1998). *Boundaries with kids*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

A book about raising kids to take responsibility for their actions, attitudes, and emotions. The authors offer help to establish family boundaries and instill the kind of character in children that will help them lead balanced, productive, and fulfilling lives. An application of the systems concept of boundaries to parent-child relationships.

Friedman, E. H. (1985). *Generation to generation: Family process in church and synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press.

A book in which the author applies systems concepts, along with his unique experience as both a rabbi and a practicing therapist, to the emotional life of congregations and their leaders. In doing so, he challenges many of the conventions of pastoral counseling, and points the way to an integrative and less stressful approach to the full range of the clergy's responsibilities. Viewing the congregation as a "family," Friedman compares the emotional processes at work within individual families to those in church and synagogue, and suggests that clergy can often do more to heal families by the way they work with the congregation than through separate counseling sessions. He suggests the metaphor of "coach" for pastoral ministry to people through the transitions of personal and family life.

Napier, A. Y., & Whitaker, C. (1978). *The family crucible*. New York: Harper Perennial.

A book about family systems which brings fresh insights to the understanding of family interactions, the forces that contribute to marital failure, and how family therapy can aid in revitalizing interpersonal relationships. Presents scenarios of one family's therapy experience and explains what underlies each encounter.

Osterhaus, J. (1994). *Family ties don't have to bind*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

A guide to reading and interpreting the stories of our family of origin in order to better understand ourselves, our dreams and our struggles. The author also shows us how we can more effectively and faithfully write the stories of our lives and our current families. Underlying all is Osterhaus's grace-filled sense that we can "rewrite" past stories of hurt and pain, since God uses all the mistakes, abuses and poor judgments that befall us in our family stories to shape us into the persons He wants us to be.

Satir, V. (1992). *Peoplemaking*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc.

A book for families that deals with family process. A hopeful book based on the belief that all of the ingredients in a family that count are changeable and correctable—individual self-worth, communication, system, and rules—at any point in time. A family systems book based on the author's belief that any piece of behavior at a moment in time is the outcome of the four-way interplay of the person's self-worth and body condition of that moment, his interaction with another, his system, and his place in time and space and situation.

Steinke, P. L. (1993). *How your church family works: Understanding congregations as emotional systems*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, Inc.

The author's insights from the theory of family systems sheds light on the puzzle presented by troubled congregations and leads clergy and laity to deeper understanding and discernment rather than to easy answers and quick fixes. A better way to think about how congregations work, or we should say *relate*, especially in crisis.

Appendix Background and Contents

Background

Issues surrounding divorce and remarriage in the church were a special focus of attention for the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the 1995-2000 quinquennium. In response to a motion made from the floor at the General Conference Session in Utrecht in 1995, a 20-member world commission—the Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission—was established to:

- Review biblical principles related to marriage and divorce and reaffirm the commitment of the Church to the biblical ideals for marriage.
- Study the incidence, nature, and effects of marital breakup among church members.
- Identify ways in which the Church can minister appropriately to those members and families experiencing marital and family breakup.
- Examine the issues related to remarriage after divorce among church members.
- Outline a process for providing resources and a network of help and support to those who are contemplating marriage or remarriage, to those who are married, and to those who are separated, divorced, or going through marital breakdown.

In June, 1999, the report of the Commission was presented to the General Conference Administrative Committee and used as a basis for their making recommendations to the Church Manual Committee for revisions to Chapter 15 in the *Church Manual*. The Church Manual Committee brought modifications of Chapter 15 to the October, 1999 Annual Council. This body approved revision of Chapter 15 for recommendation to the General Conference Session delegation to meet in Toronto. The report of the Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission was also circulated among delegates to the Annual Council. At the General Conference Session in Toronto in 2000, the proposed Church Manual Chapter, with some slight editing, was voted. The report of the Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission was circulated among the wider circle of delegates to the Session. The report was at that time declared in the public domain.

Contents

What the Divorce Statistics Say

An overview of divorce statistics in the Church, with comparisons where available to the general population.

The Impact of Divorce on SDA Couples

A paper which examines the effects of divorce on individuals and families and reports on a qualitative study among Adventists who had gone through a divorce as a member of the Church.

A Review of ***The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*** *by Judith Wallerstein, et al.*

A review of a new book just off the press reporting the results of a 25-year landmark study of divorced families.

Seventh-day Adventist Policy on Divorce and Remarriage: A Brief Outline of Historical Developments

A paper prepared for a symposium at the World Minister's Council in Toronto outlining the history and development of discussion and policy regarding divorce and remarriage in the Seventh-day Adventist Church prior to the discussions at the General Conference Session in Toronto.

Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission—Report

The report of the Commission as presented to the General Conference Administrative Committee.

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: ***Church Manual*** *(2000)*

The chapter as rewritten and approved for the 2000 edition of the *Church Manual*.

What the Divorce Statistics Say

by Karen and Ron Flowers

World Divorce Rates—General Population
For a collection of world divorce statistics, visit this website: http://www.divorcereform.org/nonus.html. Statistics compiled at this website appear to be less documented than those available from official government sources.

World Divisions—Seventh-day Adventists
Adventist Family Study
General Conference Department of Family Ministries
1994 International Year of the Family
8,000+ respondents representing parts of 7 world divisions (results reported below do not include NAD)

Respondents were asked to report personal experience, if any, in 13 areas of at-risk life experience (i.e. marital conflict, parent-teen conflict, depression, divorce, premarital and extramarital sex, abuse, abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation).

Marital conflict was the most common at-risk experience reported. Subjects indicating that marital conflict had been an issue in their lives during the last 3 years ranged from 23-58% (low-high across world divisions).

Subjects reporting having experienced divorce from their spouse ranged from 10-28% (low-high across world divisions).

Subjects reporting the divorce of their parents ranged from 10-32% (low-high across world divisions).

North America—General Population
United States
Statistics as of June 1999, reported in *National Vital Statistics Reports*, June 8, 2000
Divorce rates are generally calculated by comparing the number of divorces with the number of marriages in a given time period. In the United States in 1999 there were 8.4 marriages and 4.2 divorces per 1,000 total population. Thus it can be seen that in 1999 there was one divorce for every two marriages in the United States, a “crude” divorce rate of 50%. The Rutgers National Marriage Project (http://marriage.rutgers.edu) bases their review of divorce trends on the number of marriages per 1000 unmarried women 15 years of age or older, and the number of divorces per 1000 married women in the same age bracket. This look at divorce in relation to the population of marriageable age rather than the population as a whole produces a slightly lower divorce rate. However they note, “Overall, the chances remain very high—close to 50 percent—that a marriage started today will end in either divorce or permanent separation.”

1999 The State of Our Unions, The National Marriage Project, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (http://marriage.rutgers.edu)
Key finding: The American divorce rate today is more than twice that of 1960, but has declined slightly since hitting the highest point in our history in the early 1980s.

The Barna Update, December 20, 1999
- One-quarter of all Americans have experienced at least one divorce.
- Born-again Christians continue to have a higher likelihood of getting divorced than do non-Christians (27% and 24% respectively, a statistically significant difference)

Canada
Statistics Canada, Online figures provided through 1997
In Canada in 1997 there were a total of 154,750 marriages and 67,408 divorces—a divorce rate of 42%.

Tim Rotheisler, *Alberta Report*, August 4, 1997
Since the introduction of "no-fault divorce" in Canada 30 years ago, the rate of marital break-up has soared 600%. A third of marriages fail, and over a third of those break-ups involve children. One-fifth of Canadian children have lost a parent to divorce, with an effect that some sociologists now say can be "worse than a parent's death." Divorce is consistently associated with juvenile emotional disorders, crime, suicide, promiscuity and later marital break-up.

North America—Seventh-day Adventists
North American Division data which follows was reported in Monte and Norma Sahlin (1997). *A New Generation of Adventist Families.* Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministries.

Results were compiled from data collected in 1993-1994 in the Pacific Union (996 respondents), Columbia Union (676 respondents), and across the North American Division through the NAD Adventist Family Study instrument (1,350 respondents).

1:4 respondents reported having been divorced at some point in their life.
At least 272 per 1,000 Adventist marriages ended in divorce.

More than 1:3 respondents who had experienced divorce did so before they joined the Adventist church.

The percentage of divorced members, particularly women, was higher among Adventists (9%) than among Lutherans and Nazarenes (6%) as reported in Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman (1993). *One Nation Under God.* New York: Harmony Books.

Among divorced members, 1:3 joined the church after a marriage breakup. This data may reflect the tendency for people to turn to the church in a time of need. It may also reflect a period of receptivity to the gospel in time of transition. This raises the question, "Does the higher percentage of divorced persons among Adventists (as compared with Lutherans and Nazarenes above) give evidence of effective outreach or ineffective nurture?" Probably both.

The largest number of respondents (43%) were under 30 years of age at the time of their divorce. Another third were under 40, and less than 1:4 were 40 or older.

2:3 divorced respondents had minor children in the home at the time of their divorce.

Low income respondents were more likely to have gone through a divorce than higher-income respondents.

The percentages of wives employed part- or full-time among divorced respondents was not significantly different from the work-force participation of married women who had never divorced.

Blacks and Whites were more likely to have experienced divorce than were Asians and Hispanics.

1:5 who had experienced divorce had also gone through a second, third, or subsequent marriage dissolution. Nearly all had had only two divorces. Only a handful indicated they had been divorced three or more times.

It is clear from this data set that the rate of divorce among Adventists in NAD increased significantly for three decades—the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s. It is equally clear that it declined in the 1990s.

The Impact of Divorce on SDA Couples

by Bryan Craig

Divorce is almost always a disaster! It affects all those involved for the rest of their lives in ways we can hardly imagine. It is fair to say that no one ever emerges from a divorce unscathed or unaffected.

Divorce is an exceedingly stressful event that tends to impact women more so than it does men. The stress involved affects the one who is “left” more than the one who “leaves”. Divorce can impair an individual’s emotional wellbeing for at least five years after the event, producing a greater variety of long lasting negative feelings that even the death of the partner does not produce.

Legally, divorce is a single event, but socially, emotionally, and psychologically it is a chain of events, relocations, and radically changed relationships that result in broken families, changed lifestyles, economic hardships and a series of transitions that challenge, disrupt and modify the lives of individuals, promoting growth for some, and exposing personal vulnerability’s for others. While the word divorce implies finality, it needs to be recognized that divorce is a *process* that begins with a failing marital relationship and lasts long after what is probably the greatest emotional pain an individual will experience in life - the decision to separate and divorce.

Long Term Consequences of Divorce
The post-divorce period with its emphasis on coping, survival, and recovery leads individuals into a radically altered lifestyle and the development of a significantly revised sense of personal identity. Research shows that the long term consequences of divorce are:

1. Altered Family Structures
Divorce radically alters the structure of the family. It creates tense conflicts and divided loyalties. It forces parents to drastically adjust their parenting roles and embroils extended family members in a battle to reaffirm loyalties and realign alliances.

2. Psychological and Emotional Trauma
The emotional trauma that occurs during the crisis of separation and divorce is enormously disruptive and debilitating. The sense of failure and loss that accompanies the marital breakdown frequently results in feelings of intense disappointment, bitterness, loneliness, dislocation and depression. The feelings of inadequacy and abandonment can be overwhelming.

Bryan Craig is the Director of Family Ministries for the South Pacific Division.

Research suggests that people who divorce constitute much higher risks for both psychiatric and physical disease. The experience of high levels of stress can lower the immune system's ability to protect the individual from infection and disease. The ongoing conflict and anger between the couple may lead to higher levels of stress and frustration and contribute to a loss of self confidence, lower self esteem and feelings of hurt, resentment, remorse and depression.

Judith Wallerstein's research highlighted the fact that men and women tend to remain intensely angry with the former spouse for many years after the break up (50 per cent of men, and 33 per cent of women were still angry 5-10 years after the divorce). Other research shows that family members continue to engage in escalating cycles of conflict and coercion long after the marriage is over and the family has split up.

3. Social Dislocation and Diminished Financial Resources
The breakdown of the marriage relationship inevitably leads to the disintegration and relocation of the family and a "downward mobility" of the family lifestyle with individuals being impacted by the change of economic and social conditions. The parent who has custody of the children (usually the mother) more often than not ends up as a struggling single parent with drastically diminished financial and material resources. The economic degradation that accompanies divorce is frustrating and humiliating for both parties. The re-location of family members also means a change in their social networks of support, and a loss of contact with family and friends which serves only to isolate individuals more, resulting in further hurt, jealousy and anger.

4. Distressed and Confused Children
Children are the innocent victims of divorce - the real losers (they lose their family, their security, their identity, and their protection). They have no say in a decision that profoundly affects the rest of their lives. As psychiatrist Carl Whittaker says, "When children are involved, there is no such thing as a divorce. The battles over parenting, access, maintenance and custody, don't end with the legal granting of a divorce. Children end up being innocent bystanders who secretly hope that one day Mom and Dad will reunite and the emptiness they feel will go away."

According to Californian psychologist Judith Wallerstein, children continue to suffer the emotional repercussions 25 years after their parents divorce. She claims that the effect of the divorce is played and replayed throughout the first three decades of the child's life and that its impact is both long lasting and cumulative. Wallerstein found that the biggest factor affecting the adjustment of children was not the divorce itself, but the psychological health of the parents and their involvement with the children.

Plenty of evidence exists to suggest that children from divorced families are put at greater risk for a variety of emotional and behavioral problems including, oppositional or avoidant behaviors, acting out behaviors, aggression, and symptoms of depression, anxiety and low self esteem.

Fifty per cent of children enter adulthood as worried, angry, and self depreciating. Both boys and girls have trouble establishing and maintaining love relationships, with close to 40 per cent needing relationship therapy. Daughters of divorce are likely to develop attention-seeking behaviors, be sexually unhappy, anxious and depressed, and feel a profound lack of control over their lives. Sons of divorce take longer to adjust and tend to become more sexually aggressive, exhibit antisocial behaviors, and have more learning difficulties at school.

The Impact of Divorce on Spiritual Life

A recent study reported in the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* (Volume 22, 1995) shows that, of those surveyed, only 17 per cent reported a decrease in their spiritual lives due to their divorce. Eighty-three per cent said that the divorce experience had ultimately strengthened their spirituality. This suggests that a significant spiritual vacuum and openness to God exists for those who experience divorce.

The study, which included people from a wide range of Protestant and Catholic Churches in the United States, also showed that 42 per cent of people changed their religious affiliation as a result of their divorce, and that the majority of those who had made a change seem to be doing the best spiritually. Thirty-three per cent of women surveyed indicated that their divorce was a catalyst for changing their religious understandings.

The Impact of the Church's Response

The way in which the church responds to individuals and couples during the time of their separation and divorce appears to have a significant impact on them and their view of the church as a supportive community. Two separate studies conducted in the South Pacific Division (SPD), and in the North American Division (NAD) have found that 50 per cent of those surveyed dropped out of the church after their divorce. In the SPD study it was found that all these people had left the church within three years of their divorce. In the NAD study, 17 per cent had already quit attending prior to the time of their divorce, and another 17 per cent had stopped attending either at the time of the divorce or during its aftermath.

Frequently the local church and its ministry leaders find it difficult to know how they might respond to people who are experiencing marital distress and the break up of their family. Congregations appear to be quickly drawn into "taking sides" or, on the other hand, to see intervention and support as an intrusion into the private lives of the couple and the family. Several studies have shown that one of the most significant factors that seems to influence positive adjustment in divorce is whether or not the church is perceived to be an accepting, supportive and healing community.

In 1997, the Adventist Institute of Family Relations in Australia was involved in conducting a qualitative research project among divorced members of the church to understand the nature of their experience in divorce, to assess their attitude towards the church's policy on divorce and remarriage, and to discover how they felt the church responded to their marital crises. The following responses give some indication of the way in which many individuals surveyed felt about the church's response to them during their marital crisis. Many of them said they felt unsupported, misunderstood and betrayed, at a time when they were looking to the church for help.

> "The church responded poorly. I received no help and no support. The pastor never even raised the issue with me. No one spoke to me. No one knew what to say or how to handle the issue. I have been so distraught for so long, yet I've never talked to anyone. I've just bottled up my feelings. I am too embarrassed and scared to risk opening up. I feel lonely, betrayed, rejected, and even a bit resentful. . . I was forced to change churches because I couldn't face going

there. I felt so vulnerable. I guess I've roamed for years trying to find a spiritual home."

"I felt shame, rejection, and inadequacy, but the church was happy to pretend the crisis wasn't happening. But there was no response. The first response I got was a letter forbidding me to form another relationship. It said I was unfortunate to be divorced, but I was in no way free to remarry and remain a member of the church. If I hadn't have had incredible support from my family and friends I would have left the church then and there."

"I felt judged by the church - without a hearing! No one wanted to hear my story. No one wanted to hear the truth. They had taken sides without knowing anything about our story. So, I left - "guilty". I felt totally negated as a person. The sense of failure and disapproval was pretty tough to handle. I felt like I hadn't "tried hard enough". That I was so sinful in their eyes. I felt the total hypocrisy of their hospitality. My church, that claims to care about people, the place where you bring strangers to love - had violated my trust and failed to offer me any compassion."

"The response from the church to my marital crisis was negligible. The minister, when he did visit me, was decidedly uncomfortable and said very little about being separated. When I became a single parent I was isolated from the church as if I was diseased. When I came as a divorcee to seek permission to remarry, I got the distinct impression that the church was more concerned about its image than it was about my welfare. I guess I didn't realize just how Calvinistic the church is - so puritanical, rule bound, predetermined in the way that it deals with people."

The emotional reactions of those surveyed include a variety of feelings that range from rejection and misunderstanding to dismay, disgust and outrage. Several individuals felt a sense of shame that they had let their extended family down, and that they were an embarrassment to the "good name" of the church. Some were obviously distressed at still being able to access their pain and anger when they recalled how they "cried for help," but no one was there for them. A majority of respondents indicated that this was the first time anyone from the church had bothered to ask them how they had dealt with their divorce.

While there are a number of factors that influence the way in which individuals go about resolving the social dislocation and emotional trauma created by separation and divorce, e.g., personality, social skills, level of self esteem and self confidence, ways of handling conflict and stress, ways of perceiving the church, one theme was dominant in the responses of those surveyed. Nearly everyone felt bewildered by the reactions of embarrassment, disapproval, and non-acceptance from church members towards their marital crisis. There was an almost universal sense of profound sadness over what had happened and feelings of disappointment and abandonment that no one seemed to know what to do or how to respond.

The way in which the church so often responds to marital crisis seems to have a deep and lasting effect on the individuals involved. When asked to describe what their relationship to the

church has been like since their separation and divorce, many indicated that their view of the church had undergone radical change. They typically felt angry about the way people had treated them, cynical and skeptical about the church as an organization, and unsure that they could see themselves continuing to make a substantial contribution to an organization that had essentially shunned them. Some expressed the fact that this treatment felt like a “second injury” - first they had been rejected by their partner, now by their church family.

Of further concern is the way in which most described the impact that the church’s response has had on their children. Many found it difficult to express the magnitude of their grief over the way in which their children had become so bitter about and estranged from Christianity - an estrangement that has taken more than a decade for most of them to work through.

Interestingly enough, while individuals’ attitudes towards the church may have changed dramatically, so too had their relationship to God. Almost all those interviewed expressed that their relationship to God had become stronger, and that their ability to appreciate and embrace the grace of God had deepened. Some said that they felt more committed, loyal, and willing to trust God because they had discovered that He was always there for them, even though their church family wasn’t. Some had felt pushed towards a more interdenominational stance in their personal spiritual journey, while others clearly found it easier to worship with another congregation, either inside or outside the Adventist community. One of the points of great anguish for several of the people interviewed was that even a decade or more after their divorce and their subsequent remarriage, they had still not been offered a single church office in their local congregation. This had further contributed to their feelings of exclusion, low self-esteem and non-acceptance.

Reactions to Requests for Permission to Remarry

A variety of responses were received from individuals when asked the question, “What reaction did you get from the church when you requested permission to remarry and maintain your membership within the church”. Most were highly offended by the process to which they were subjected the church. Some were still clearly upset over the sense of intrusiveness and the invasion of their privacy by the church board or conference committee that sought to reopen all the issues surrounding the breakdown of the marriage, and their separation and divorce in order to come to a decision. This process was described as “humiliating”, “intimidating”, “impersonal”. Many felt that doubt and suspicion was once again cast upon them as an individual as the church sought to establish “guilt” and assign “blame”. Individuals said they felt “pressured and grilled” to come up with the evidence. One person said he was reluctant to embarrass his ex-wife and felt himself embarrassed and humiliated by the whole process. He felt that the whole situation was handled and resolved politically rather then personally. Others were angry over the fact that it took so long (in one case two years) for a “verdict” to be handed down. Still others were frustrated and incensed over the fact the path to resolution was “so foggy and unclear”.

It was acknowledged by quite a number of respondents that the conference administration seemed quite awkward and embarrassed over the whole process and that they were relieved when they could find clear evidence that a “guilty partner” provided the biblical grounds to approve remarriage.

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Book Review

The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce
A 25-Year Landmark Study of Divorced Families
by Judith S. Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis, Sandra Blakeslee, New York: Hyperion (2000)

Reviewed by Karen and Ron Flowers

From the flyleaf—
"Twenty-five years ago, Judith Wallerstein began talking to a group of 131 children whose parents were all going through a divorce. She asked them to tell her about the intimate details of the lives, which they did with remarkable candor. Having earned their trust, Wallerstein was rewarded with a deeply moving portrait of each of their lives as she followed them from childhood, through their adolescent struggles, and into adulthood. In her book *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (2000), Wallerstein offers us the only close-up study of divorce ever conducted—a unique report that will change our fundamental beliefs about divorce and offer new hope for the future.

"Wallerstein chooses seven children who most embody the common life experiences of the larger group and follows their lives in vivid detail through adolescence and into their love affairs, their marriage successes and failures, and parenting their own children. In Wallerstein's hands, the experiences and anxieties of this generation of children, now in their late twenties to early forties, come to life. We watch as they struggle with the fear that their relationships will fail like those of their parents. Lacking an internal template of what a successful relationship looks like, they must invent their own code of behavior in a culture that offers many models and few guidelines. Wallerstein shows how many overcame their dread of betrayal to find loving partners and to become successful, protective parents—and how others are still struggling to find their heart's desire without knowing why they feel so frightened. She also demonstrates their great strengths and accomplishments, as a generation of survivors who often had to raise themselves and help their parents through difficult times.

"For the first time, using a comparison group of adults who grew up in the same communities, Wallerstein shows how adult children of divorce essentially view life differently from their peers raised in intact homes where parents also confronted marital difficulties but decided on balance to stay together. In this way she sheds light on the question so many parents confront—whether to stay unhappily married or to divorce.

The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce should be essential reading for all adult children of divorce, their lovers, their partners, divorced parents or those considering divorce, judges, attorneys, and mental health professionals. Challenging some of our most cherished beliefs, this is a book that will forever alter how we think about divorce and its long-term impact.

A summary of findings—
- For children, the impact of divorce is cumulative. The first upheaval is felt when the divorce

occurs. But the impact of the experience "increases over time and rises to a crescendo in adulthood" (p. 298). Through each of life's stages the divorce is experienced in new and different ways. In their adult experience, the divorce affects "personality, the ability to trust, expectations about relationships, and ability to cope with change" (p. 298).

- From the disruption of their lives at the time of the divorce, children draw the conclusion, sadly, that adult relationships are fragile and that they can come apart suddenly, without warning. It follows in their minds that if their parents' marriage could end so capriciously, so parent-child ties may be broken at any time, leaving them abandoned and alone.

- The immediate aftermath of the divorce does little to allay their fears. They are lonely. Routines are disrupted and households are in disarray for years. As adults they remember the difficulties of moving between two dwellings, missing important events and contact with their friends, and the loss of their parents' time and attention as they focus on rebuilding their own lives. Many were forced to take up adult responsibilities to care for themselves and their siblings, even their parents, long before they were ready. For many this was compounded by the added stress of relating to their parents' new partnerships. Most felt that no one is listening to them. Nothing insured that their changing needs and feelings would be considered. For the most part, they did not understand why the divorce had occurred, despite what may have seemed obvious to the parents. Those who had a wide network of support in the extended family, school, church and community, or who could muster more inner resources, did better than those who did not have such resources on which to draw.

- In adolescence, girls from divorced families were more likely to engage in sexual activity, and both boys and girls from divorced families used alcohol and drugs more frequently than adolescents from intact homes.

- "It's in adulthood that children of divorce suffer the most" (p. 299). They have no inner sense of how a healthy marriage works. "Anxiety about relationships was at the bedrock of their personalities" (p. 300). Even those who eventually marry happily fear that their happiness and even their marriage could evaporate at the first sign of conflict. Fears of loss and betrayal may eventually be overcome with persistent effort, but a residue remains for most that leaves them "terrified by the mundane differences and inevitable conflict found in close relationships" (p. 301).

- Many remain very angry with their parents for having been "selfish and faithless" (p. 300). Many said they have no intention of helping their parents in old age. Others feel more compassion and pity. Some remained in close relationships with one or both of their parents, others were estranged. Some young women in particular struggled to separate from their mothers for whom they had been a source of strength and encouragement.

- There are many survivors, who despite the traumas of their childhoods, have built successful careers and meaningful relationships with family and friends. Their resilience is the mark of their courage and hard effort to recreate a better template for intimacy within themselves.

What we can and cannot do—

- We cannot turn back the clock to a time when divorce was not among the real options.

- Wallerstein would begin with an effort to strengthen marriages, with new marriages a special target group since 80 percent of divorces in America occur within the first nine years of marriage. Couples need help "to fully understand the nature of contemporary man-woman relationships . . . [and] to appreciate the difficulties modern couples confront in balancing work and family, separateness and togetherness, conflict and cooperation" (p. 303).

- We can build on efforts toward effective premarital preparation by intervening with teens in mid-adolescence, when "attitudes toward oneself and relationships with the opposite sex are beginning to gel. . . . [and] worries about sex, love, betrayal, and morality take center stage. Wallerstein suggests beginning with the deceptively simple question: "How do you choose a friend?" Teens could then be drawn into discussion probing such topics as "differences between boys and girls, cultural subgroups, and how people resolve tensions" (p. 304). Family life courses which are true-to-life could be offered at both the high school and college levels. creating a setting for open, honest dialogue that is respectful of the life experience of both student and teacher.

- We can support social programs which buffer couple and family stress by making it possible for parents to spend more time with each other and their children and to be available for one another when needed—programs such as paid family leave, flex time, more opportunities for part-time work and job-sharing, protection on the corporate ladder from loss of position because of family leave.

- We can help adult children of divorce understand how their "fears and feelings were forged in the crucible of [their] parent's divorce . . . [and how] these emotions, which are often hidden from consciousness, have the power to affect [their] marriages, [their] parenting, indeed the quality of their entire lives" (p. 306). We can help them be about the most important task of their generation—achieving better relationships—by encouraging them to delay marriage until they better understand themselves and what they want from a partner. We can model for them relationships that are working and encourage them to seek counseling help to "close the door on [their] parents' divorce, to separate the now from the then" (p. 306).

- We can make parents considering divorce aware that what their children need from them is nurturing care despite their adult difficulties. If parents can separate these two arenas of their lives and provide quality parenting, they should consider making their own expectations and desires in marriage secondary to staying together in order to provide a stable, nurturing home for their children. Children are not as negatively affected by conflict in the marriage relationship as they are by divorce. It must be added however, that parents considering the decision to stay together for the good of their children should be parents who can "with grace and without anger . . . make the sacrifice required to maintain the benefits of the marriage for their children." This is not a consideration for those whose marriages are "so explosive or chaotic or unsafe that husband and wife [feel] living together [is] intolerable" (p. 307).

- We can educate parents considering divorce about what parenting will realistically be like after divorce. They will need to know that to be a good parent they will have to spend much more time with their children, leaving very little time to pursue a new relationship. Their children are likely to be more demanding, angry and difficult to handle than before. They need to know that no matter what the custody arrangements are, they will, for the most part, be working as a

single parent when it comes to making decisions and taking responsibility for their child. And if the child is to get through the experience with the least amount of trauma possible, someone will have to make the sacrifice to maintain household structure and routine as well as to offer comfort, a listening ear, and practical help. Hands-on responsibility does not end with childhood, either. It extends through early adulthood, and includes help with tuition through college where the parent is financially able.

- We can provide better services for families in the throes of breaking up, focusing on "what needs to be done to protect each child in each household" (p. 309). We can better provide the education, counseling and mediation needed by divorced and re-married families. Parents need adult support for themselves. They need help to anticipate the changes that lie ahead and to develop "co-parenting" skills to protect their children as they negotiate them. Children need play opportunities to convey their feelings and worries, and caring adults who can impart information to them about the divorce calmly and slowly, again and again. Adolescent groups provide an "excellent vehicle for clarifying divorce, ventilating anger at parents, dealing with issues of morality, and discussing the adolescents' fears that their own future relationships might fail" (p. 311). We can provide a place where parents can come for many years ahead to discuss the changing needs of their children and plan how to best respond to them. We can give children of divorce the "voice" in what happens to them for which so many have been crying out.

- We can work toward better laws which give children voice and protect them in their most vulnerable years.

Seventh-day Adventist Policy on Divorce and Remarriage: A Brief Outline of Historical Developments

by Gerald Winslow

Introduction

When the General Conference Session in Toronto considers proposed changes in our *Church Manual's* statements on divorce and remarriage, the delegates will be continuing a process that began many decades ago. From the middle of the 19th century until the present, Seventh-day Adventists have sought to apply the principles of Scripture to heart-rending problems encountered when marriages fail. Gradually, we have enunciated and revised policies with the goal of being true to the Gospel and guided by God's Spirit. Pastors seeking to minister to divorced persons in the church may benefit from a brief sketch of the major steps that have led our church to its current policy.

Early Steps

From the earliest beginnings of our organized work, Seventh-day Adventists have found it necessary to consider our response to divorce and remarriage. For example, one of the first questions raised at the 1862 Michigan State Conference was this: "How shall we treat divorced marriages?"[1] The questioner was a Brother Sanborn who needed an answer to a practical question. Should we accept into fellowship individuals who had become divorced without "biblical justification" and were later remarried? The difficult query was referred to the Conference committee for further consideration. There exists, however, no record of any subsequent action. So we cannot be certain what answer Brother Sanborn received during these early years.

Eventually, however, the church's response to marital status of new believers did become settled. In 1887, for example, Uriah Smith, referring to remarried people who desired church membership, wrote: "Take them as they are found, leaving these things that cannot be undone to the past. . . ."[2] Smith noted that such couples have long-standing relationships that include children. The best they could hope to do, upon finding the truth of the Gospel, would be to live faithful lives in the future. This approach to new believers, though seldom mentioned in official policies of the church, has continued to hold sway. For example, the 1976 Autumn Council

[1] Joseph Bates, "Business Proceedings of the Michigan State Conference," *Review and Herald*, October 14, 1862, p. 157.

[2] Uriah Smith, "Divorce and Marriage," *Review and Herald,* Feb. 8, 1887, p. 89.

action on divorce and church membership says: "When a new believer is to be admitted to membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he stands, in relation to the church as a 'new creature,' (2 Cor. 5:17) not subject to church discipline for his past conduct. He shall be eligible for church membership if his current marriage is legally certificated."[3]

Thus, from early years onward, *new* members have generally been welcomed without blame for past marital difficulties. However, discipline for those who are already church members when their marriages falter has been the occasion for far more difficulty. The concern of the church has been to maintain the highest possible standards of marital permanence and fidelity for its members, while also acting with grace and forgiveness toward those who stumble. What, then, should be the church's response to members whose marriages end in divorce? Should they be permitted to continue church membership even if the reasons for the divorce are not considered to be biblical? If such individuals marry again, should they be removed from membership? And, if so, may they ever be readmitted to membership while the second marriage continues? Official answers to such questions have emerged gradually.

One early attempt to generate an official policy arrived at the General Conference Session of 1879.[4] A committee had been asked to address the "subject of unhappy marriages." In its report, the committee noted that there was an "alarming tendency" in the general public toward lax views of marriage; legal divorces were being granted by courts for flimsy reasons; and the church had the responsibility to "stay the tide of corruption" that was sweeping the country. The committee proposed three resolutions to accomplish its goals. The first stated that the only biblical cause for divorce is the commission of adultery "by one or the other of the parties to the marriage contract." The second proposed a rule that would forbid churches from accepting into membership *anyone* who had been divorced for reasons other than adultery and subsequently remarried. This refusal of membership was to remain "during the lifetime of the person from whom such individual was improperly divorced." (It is noteworthy that this second resolution would have had the effect of nullifying the already established practice of allowing such new members into the church.) The third resolution proposed that the cases of all current members, living in questionable second marriages, be "dealt with" only after the local church sought advice from the General Conference Committee or at least the local conference committee.
The first of these resolutions passed unanimously. But the second and third resolutions created dissent, and the leaders withheld a decision "till after the most mature deliberation." The record

[3] The Annual Council of the General Conference Committee, General Actions, October 13-21, 1976, Washington, D.C.

[4] The record of the 1879 meeting, at which divorce and remarriage was discussed, was never published. The quotations given here are from the handwritten minutes of the 1879 General Conference Session. These minutes are in the General Conference Archives. A fuller quotation of the relevant portion of the minutes can be found in the unpublished manuscript of Bert Haloviak, "Law or Compassion: SDA Approaches to Divorce, Remarriage and Church Fellowship," presented to the General Conference Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission, meeting in Hoddeston, England, September 14-16, 1997 (available on the General Conference Archives and Statistics website: www.adventist.org/ast). The most comprehensive historical, ethical, and sociological account of Adventists' treatment of divorce and remarriage is in Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 182-228.

indicates that both James and Ellen White participated in the discussions. And on the third day, all three resolutions, including the first one that had already passed, were tabled permanently. Although we have no record of what the various participants said, it is clear that our leaders did not come to agreement on the proposed resolutions.

There is only one other record of official action on divorce and remarriage during the 19th century. At the General Conference Session in 1887, the following resolution was passed:

> WHEREAS, Our Saviour has laid down the one sole ground on which parties once married can be divorced; and,
> WHEREAS, the practices of society have become most deplorable in this respect, as seen in the prevalence of unscriptural divorces; therefore,
> RESOLVED, That we express our deprecation of this great evil, and instruct our ministers not to unite in marriage any parties so divorced.

This resolution made official what was surely the consensus of Adventists at the time: only adultery was "grounds" for divorce and remarriage. To this was added one of the first official rules regarding second marriages, namely, that Seventh-day Adventist ministers should not perform weddings for people entering second marriages without biblical justification.

During her lifetime, Ellen White offered counsel to people with troubled marriages. Occasionally, she also participated in discussions of church policy. But she resisted serving as the authority to resolve cases for which she had no specific light. At one point she said, "I do not think it is my work to deal with any such things unless the case has been plainly opened before me. . . . I cannot take responsibility in such matters. Let those appointed of God to bear the responsibility deal with it in accordance with Christian principles."[5] Later, reflecting on his mother's work, W.C. White wrote: "It was Sister White's intention that there should not go forth from her pen anything that could be used as a law or a rule in dealing with these questions of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and adultery."[6]

Still, through her books, articles, and letters to individuals, Ellen White did influence the general direction of the church's practices regarding divorce and remarriage.[7] While consistently calling

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[5]Ellen White, Manuscript 2, 1913.

[6] W.C. White, Jan. 6, 1931 quoted in Elbio Pereyra, "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Writings of Ellen G. White," unpublished manuscript, Ellen G. White Estate, Feb., 1987.

[7] In addition to the compilations of Ellen White statements in *Adventist Home, Selected Messages*, vol. 2, and *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce*, the following manuscript releases from the Ellen White Estate have aided the church in continuing to experience the influence of Ellen White's ministry:

> "The Spirit of Prophecy and Adultery, Divorce, Remarriage, and Church Membership," Manuscript release 448, August, 1975.
> "Dealing with Ministers and Workers Who Have Violated the Seventh Commandment," Manuscript release 449, August, 1975.
> "Ellen G. White Counsels Relating to Adultery, Divorce and Remarriage," a compilation by Robert Olson, June, 1976.

for high moral standards in marriage, and while condemning the sin of adultery, Ellen White often worked to rehabilitate those who had erred.[8] She saw no light in breaking up a second marriage, even though the circumstances that led to the marriage were not exemplary.[9] She expressed grace and compassion for those injured by divorce.

Solidifying Official Policy

A decade after Ellen White's death, Seventh-day Adventists still had very little in the way of official policy on divorce and remarriage. As the church grew both in size and complexity of organization, there was greater need felt for such policy.

In 1925, the church adopted a brief statement of general policy on divorce. The Autumn Council that year approved of a statement that deplored divorce and placed "emphatic disapproval upon any legal action for the separation of those once married, on any ground other than that given in Matthew 5:32."[10] The church had not yet developed a church manual, so such resolutions like this were considered advisory.[11]

In 1932, the church developed the first *Church Manual*. Among its provisions was a section on divorce.[12] It repeated the action of the 1925 Autumn Council, and added a number of other elements, most of which have continued in subsequent statements of policy. The 1932 statement called for efforts to effect reconciliation when marriages were under threat. But sin must not be glossed over, and the "church must administer discipline in the maintenance of a high standard of moral purity and integrity." Adventist ministers were forbidden to perform marriage ceremonies for persons who had been divorced without "Scriptural grounds." Following Ellen White's comments on the words of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the policy interpreted biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage in terms of "fornication." The policy stated that members should not be permitted to continue in church fellowship if they remarried while their former spouses, whom they divorced without biblical reasons, were still alive. However, the "innocent party" to a divorce did have the "right" to remarry. It was the responsibility of the

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"Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Writings of Ellen G. White," by Elbie Pereyra, Feb., 1987. "Summary of Biblical and E.G. White References to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," by Teofilo Ferreira, 1997.

[8] See, for example, the accounts in Elbio Pereyra, "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Writings of Ellen G. White." Cited above.

[9] Ellen White, Letter 175, 1901 quoted in *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, pp. 341-42.

[10] "Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee," Meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, Oct., 1925.

[11] On this point see B. Haloviak, p. 7 of manuscript cited above.

[12] General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 1932, pp. 175-77.

officiating minister to determine whether or not a person had the right to remarry, based on "satisfactory evidence of the facts of the case." If in doubt, the minister was to seek counsel from the local conference officers.

So, for the first time in 1932, Seventh-day Adventists adopted a policy that was considered binding on all church members. And in broad outline, the 1932 policy, with its distinction between guilty and innocent parties, its emphasis on rights to remarriage for the innocent but not the guilty, and its provision for excluding guilty remarried persons from membership, has served as the template for subsequent church policy.

Ten years after the first *Church Manual*, the church looked again at its divorce and remarriage policy. Some leaders believed that the 1932 policy needed to be clarified and expanded. A special study commission was appointed, and it reported to the 1942 Autumn Council. The result was the adoption of a six-point policy that solidified the provisions of the 1932 policy and generally made them stricter.[13] For example, all members found guilty of adultery *must* be disfellowshipped, and could only be readmitted to the church by way of rebaptism even if they had reconciled with their spouse. People who were disfellowshipped because of wrongful second marriages could "not be readmitted to church membership so long as the unscriptural relationship continues." And the pastor was responsible for investigating "all the circumstances," and for requiring any member seeking to remarry to "produce satisfactory evidence in support of his or her claim."

Moving Toward Balance

The 1942 statement stands at summit of stringency. For the most part, subsequent revisions have had a moderating effect.

Already in 1946, for example, the delegates to the General Conference Session revised the *Church Manual*. No longer would it be required to disfellowship all adulterers. Those who confessed their misdeeds and were deeply repentant could be placed under censure for a stipulated period of time. Nor would rebaptism be required for all such erring ones.

More significant revisions occurred at the 1950 General Conference Session and were incorporated in the 1951 *Church Manual*. In the introduction to the revised policies, the *Manual* stated: "The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God's holy standards."[14]

The 1950 changes left most of the earlier elements of Adventist policy intact. Only "unfaithfulness to the marriage vow" could lead to the dissolution of marriage. If it did, then only the innocent spouse could remarry with impunity. If the church's reputation had been sullied by the flagrant actions of a transgressor, the church might elect to disfellowship him or her even if

[13] General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 1942, pp. 187-89.

[14] General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church Manual*, 1951, p. 240.

there was evidence of genuine repentance. For the first time, this policy also called for disfellowshipping the person who married someone who had been divorced without biblical grounds. Members who divorced without biblical reasons, and remained single, were to be censured. But, if they later remarried, they and the one they married were both to be disfellowshipped. The policy did recognize, however, that some members might, for reasons of safety, need to seek a legal separation or even a divorce. If such persons did this and remain chaste and single, they "would not be condemned."

In all these provisions, the 1950 changes and additions served primarily to clarify and extend previous policies. But the most noteworthy change in 1950 was the new provision for *readmitting* members who had been disfellowshipped for errant remarriages. The *Manual* notes that circumstances of such second marriages may be complicated in many ways. For example, the welfare of children might be at stake. Then the *Manual* stated: "In a case where any endeavor by a genuinely repentant offender to bring his marital status into line with the divine ideal presents apparently insuperable problems, his (or her) plea for readmittance shall before final action is taken be brought by the church through the pastor or district leader to the conference for counsel and recommendation as to any possible steps that the repentant one, or ones, may take to secure readmittance." If such a one was readmitted to the church, the policy insisted on rebaptism. And the policy said that the readmitted member should not hold leadership positions in the church, especially positions requiring ordination.

This provision for readmission to membership was the source of considerable discussion in subsequent years. What, for example, would it mean for a remarried person to "bring his marital status into line with the divine ideal"? Is the implication that he or she should divorce a second time? And what should be counted as "insuperable problems" which would lead the church to grant mercy to those in second marriages? How long must such people wait before being readmitted to membership? Once readmitted, what positions of leadership, if any, should be open to such people?

These and many similar questions have continued to provide opportunities to think about relevant biblical principles and their practical outworking in policy. While the main provisions of the 1950 statements have remained in force to the present time, efforts have been made to answer some of the perplexing questions. For example, the 1976 Autumn Council established both local conference and union conference committees to review difficult cases and make recommendations about how they should be treated.[15] A number of criteria were also outlined for readmitting formerly disfellowshipped members. These criteria included evidence of sincere repentance, the establishment of wholesome family life and a "praiseworthy reputation," and fulfillment of financial obligations to one's children or former spouse. The guidelines did not say exactly how long a person must wait to be readmitted, but they indicated that "a period of years shall be required."

The 1976 statement also contained another significant development. In one of the appendices, the meaning of adultery and fornication, as grounds for divorce, were discussed. For the first time, the church officially acknowledged that "fornication" (from the Greek *porneia*) which Jesus

[15] General Actions of the 1976 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee, pp. 25-33.

mentions as a reason for divorce (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9) may have broader meaning than the act of physical adultery. The statement went on to list examples, such as sexual perversions, homosexual practices, and "persistent indulgence in intimate relationships with a partner of the opposite sex other than the spouse, even though falling short of coitus."[16]

The most recent revisions of church policy occurred at the 1995 General Conference Session. At that time, the broadened definition of "fornication" was approved for inclusion in the *Church Manual*.[17] The wording of the *Manual* was also clarified regarding those, who for reasons of safety, find it necessary to seek legal separation or divorce. The revised language makes it clearer that such members need not be censured for their actions.

Finally, the 1995 General Conference Session voted to establish a study commission to give thorough reconsideration to the subject of divorce and remarriage and to make appropriate recommendations for changes in the *Church Manual*. The prescribed commission completed its work in 1999. Its final report to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference, which was later circulated among members of the General Conference Committee at the Annual Council of 1999, called for fuller statement of biblical principles regarding marriage and care of members who experience divorce and remarriage. Some of the commission's work has been incorporated in the proposed changes in the *Church Manual* that will receive consideration at the 2000 General Conference Session in Toronto.

Conclusion

The ongoing discussion of how our church should best treat the matter of divorce and remarriage is evidence that we desire to take seriously the principles of the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We should not be surprised that the church has struggled with these matters from its inception. When we consider the complexities of marital relationships, the potential for harm when things go wrong, the desire of the church to protect high standards of moral conduct, and the conviction that we should treat our erring members with grace, we should expect to need God's ongoing guidance. Let us hope and pray that the meetings in Toronto will represent a further step toward maturity of understanding God's will and God's grace.

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[16] It should be noted that the 1977 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee voted to amend Appendix C of the 1976 statement, resulting in a shorter list of examples of "fornication." The 1977 statement reads, in part, "Gross sexual perversion, including homosexual practices, are recognized as a misuse of sexual powers and a violation of the divine intention in marriage. As such they are just cause for divorce." General Actions of the Annual Council, Oct., 1977.

[17] Following the 1977 Autumn Council's revised statement on the matter, the *Church Manual* of 1995 reads: "Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow has generally been seen to be adultery and/or fornication. However, the New Testament word for fornication includes certain other sexual irregularities. (I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:9, 10; Rom. 1:24-27) Therefore, sexual perversions, including homosexual practices, are also recognized as a misuse of sexual powers and a violation of the divine intention in marriage. As such they are just cause for divorce." *Church Manual,* 1995, p. 182.

Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission—Report

Introduction

Throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, various committees, commissions, and councils have studied the topic of marriage and the issues of divorce and remarriage in a continuing effort to clarify the Church's understanding of God's will and to provide instruction for church members and direction for those who minister to them. The current commission, with members from throughout the world field, continues the endeavor of studying the issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage and offering guidance to the Church.

Over the course of three meetings—Hoddesdon, England, September 14 to 16, 1997; Montemorelos, Mexico, January 25 to 29, 1998; Cohutta Springs, Georgia, May 30 to June 3, 1998—the General Conference Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission has given attention to biblical, theological, and historical studies, and to the writings of Ellen G White, current situational reports from world regions, and research reports. The Commission presented an interim report to the General Conference and division officers on September 25, 1998. During its fourth meeting on April 4 to 6, 1999, the Commission prepared this report taking into consideration the comments of the meeting of General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO) at Iguassu Falls, Brazil, on September 25, 1998.

This report consists of the following sections:

- Biblical Principles Regarding Marriage
- Biblical Principles Regarding Divorce and Remarriage
- Role of the Church in Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage
- Recommendations

Biblical Principles Regarding Marriage

1. God's Original Plan for Marriage

a. The Origin of Marriage. Marriage is divinely instituted. God Himself performed the first marriage on the sixth day of creation when He brought together Adam and Eve as husband and wife (Gen 2:18-25). In declaring their marital union God said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen 2:24). God intended this marriage to be the pattern for all future marriage relationships. Christ endorsed the original concept of marriage (Matt 19:3-6). Thus marriage was blessed by God as the closest human relationship.

b. The Covenant of Marriage. Marriage is a covenant which husband and wife make with each other and with God. In marriage the couple pledge their love, loyalty, and devotion to each other as long as they are both alive (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14). The marriage covenant is built upon love (Eph 5:28, 29; Titus 2:4). Such love enables husband and wife to accept each other unconditionally, to share in each other's pain and failures, to rejoice in each other's victories and accomplishments. Paul describes the kind of love which is necessary for the marriage covenant to succeed: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor 13:4-7, NIV).

c. The Permanence of Marriage. Marriage is a life-long commitment of both partners to each other (Mark 10:2-9; Rom 7:2). Paul indicates that the commitment which Christ has for the church is a model of the relationship between husband and wife (Eph 5:31, 32). God intended this relationship to be as permanent as Christ's relationship with the church.

d. The Priority of Marriage. Paul recognized the husband-wife relationship as the primary relationship in the family (Eph 5:22-33). Marriage takes precedence over all other human relationships, even those between the spouses and their parents (Gen 2:24). No other human relationship should interfere in an inappropriate way with the marriage relationship.

e. Sexual Intimacy in Marriage. Sexual intimacy within marriage is a sacred gift from God to the human family. It is an integral part of marriage, reserved for marriage only (Gen 2:24; Prov 5:15-20). Such intimacy, designed to be shared exclusively between husband and wife, promotes ever-increasing closeness, happiness, and security, and provides for the perpetuation of the human race. In addition to being monogamous, marriage, as instituted by God, is a heterosexual relationship (Matt 19:4, 5).

f. Spiritual Compatibility in Marriage. Spiritual compatibility is vital if marriage is to be fully in harmony with God's plan (Amos 3:3; 2 Cor 6:14). God desires that, through their union, husband and wife experience His love, exalt His name, and witness to His power. Throughout Scripture, marriage is used as a figure of the relationship between God and His people (Isa 54:5-7; Hos 2:19, 20; Eph 5:25-28; Rev 21:2).

g. Marriage as Partnership. As partners in marriage, husband and wife bear equal responsibility for the success of the marriage (Gen 1:26-28). While their responsibilities may differ, neither is more important than the other and neither is to dominate the other. Their relationship is one of mutuality and companionship (Gen 2:18). As husband and wife mutually submit to one another (Eph 5:21), they seek to encourage and build each other up in love (1 Thess 5:11). Commenting on this partnership, Ellen G White wrote: "Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him" (PP 46).

2. The Effects of the Fall on Marriage

The entrance of sin adversely affected marriage. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost

the oneness which they had known with God and with one another (Gen 3:6-24). Their relationship became marked with guilt, shame, blame, and pain. As a part of the curse of sin, rulership was given to the husband (Gen 3:16; see also PP 58, 59). Wherever sin reigns, its sad effects on marriage include alienation, desertion, unfaithfulness, neglect, abuse, violence, separation, divorce, domination of one partner by the other, and sexual perversion. Non-monogamous marriages are also an expression of the effects of sin on the institution of marriage. Such marriages, although practiced in Old Testament times, were not in harmony with the divine design. God's plan for marriage requires His people to transcend the mores of popular culture which are in conflict with the biblical view.

3. Restoration and Healing

a. Divine Ideal to be Restored in Christ. In redeeming the world from sin and its consequences, God also seeks to restore marriage to its original ideal. This is envisioned for the lives of those who have been born again into the kingdom of Christ, those whose hearts are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and who have as their primary purpose in life the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ (see also 1 Peter 3:7; MB 64).

b. Oneness and Equality Restored in Christ. The gospel emphasizes the love and submission of husband and wife to one another (1 Cor 7:3, 4; Eph 5:21). The model for the husband's leadership is the self-sacrificial love and service that Christ gives to the church (Eph 5:24, 25). Peter enjoins husbands to respect their wives and treat them with consideration (1 Peter 3:7), while Paul instructs wives to respect their husbands (Eph 5:23). Commenting on Eph 5:22-28, Ellen G White says, "Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. . . . The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate a spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other" (7T 47). In Christ, oneness, equality, and mutuality in marriage are to be restored.

c. Grace Available for All. God seeks to restore to wholeness and reconcile to Himself all who have failed to attain the divine standard (2 Cor 5:19). This includes those who have experienced broken marriage relationships.

d The Role of the Church. Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament dealt with the problems caused by broken marriages (Deut 24:1-5, 1 Cor 7:10-16). Both, while recognizing the ideal, attempted to work constructively and redemptively with those who had fallen short of the divine standard. Similarly, the church today is called to uphold God's ideal for marriage and, at the same time, to be a reconciling, forgiving, healing community, showing understanding and compassion when brokenness occurs.

Biblical Principles Regarding Divorce and Remarriage

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's treatment of divorce and remarriage must be divinely guided. In addition to directives and specific examples, the Bible provides broad principles that enable the Church to be faithful to the divine intent and gracious in caring for its members who experience divorce.

1. Divorce is contrary to God's original purpose in creating marriage (Matt 19:3-8; Mark 10:2-9), but the Bible is not silent about it. Because divorce occurred as part of the fallen human experience, biblical legislation was given to limit the damage it caused (Deut 24:1-4). The Bible consistently seeks to elevate marriage and to discourage divorce by describing the joys of married love and faithfulness (Prov 5:18-20; Song of Sol 2:16; 4:9-5:1), by referring to the marriage-like relationship of God with His people (Isa 54:5; Jer 3:1), by focusing on the possibilities of forgiveness and marital renewal (Jer 3:1; Hos 3:1-3; 11:8, 9), and by indicating God's hatred of divorce and the misery it causes (Mal 2:15, 16; Hos 2; 3). Jesus restored the creation view of marriage as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman (Matt 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). Much biblical instruction affirms marriage and seeks to correct problems which tend to weaken or destroy the marriage covenant (Eph 5:21-33; Heb 13:4; 1 Peter 3:7).

2. The covenant of marriage rests on principles of love, loyalty, exclusiveness, trust, and support upheld by both partners in obedience to God (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:6; 1 Corinthians 13; Eph 5:21-29; 1 Thess 4:1-7). When these principles are violated, the essence of the marriage covenant is endangered. Scripture acknowledges that tragic circumstances can destroy the marriage covenant. Jesus taught that the marriage covenant may be irreparably broken through sexual immorality (Matt 5:32; 19:9), which includes a range of improper sexual behaviors. Paul indicated that death brings the marriage covenant to an end (Rom 7:2, 3), as does desertion by an unbelieving partner no longer willing to be married (1 Cor 7:15). The above do not exhaust the destructive factors that may lead to brokenness and divorce.

3. God's Word condemns violence in personal relationships (Gen 6:11, 13; Ps 11:5; Isa 58:4, 5; Rom 13:10; Gal 5:19-21). It is the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or demean them (Rom 12:10; 14:19; Eph 4:26; 5:28, 29; Col 3:8-14; 1 Thess 5:11). There is no room among Christ's followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power or authority (Matt 20:25-28; Eph 6:4). Violence in the setting of marriage and family is especially abhorrent, destroying the marriage covenant (Mal 2:14-16; see also AH 343).

4. When a couple's marriage is in danger of breaking down, every effort should be made by the partners and those in the church or family who minister to them to bring about their reconciliation in harmony with divine principles for restoring wounded relationships (Hos 3:1-3; 1 Cor 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal 6:1).

5. For the brokenness of divorce, divine grace is the only remedy. When marriage fails, despite efforts toward reconciliation, former partners should be encouraged to examine their experience and to embrace the mercy and compassion of God. God is willing to comfort those who have been wounded. God also accepts the repentance of individuals who commit the most destructive sins, even those that carry with them irremediable consequences (2 Samuel 11, 12; Ps 34:18; 86:5; Joel 2:12, 13; John 8:2-11; 1 John 1:9).

6. Church members are called to forgive and accept those who have failed as God has forgiven them (Isa 54:5-8; Matt 6:14, 15; Eph 4:32). The Bible urges patience, compassion, and forgiveness in the Christian care of those who have erred (Matt 18:10-20; Gal 6:1, 2).

7. Implicit in God's forgiving grace and healing is the possibility of a new beginning (Ps 34:22; Jer 3:22; 31:17; Mark 5:1-20; John 8:11; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 1:9; see also 2SM 339, 340[1]).

8. Marriage is an important part of the social fabric of the community of believers and involves responsibilities of the couple to the church and of the church to the couple. In their marriage, the couple bears witness to their Adventist faith and accepts the moral authority of the church (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). The church, as the body of Christ in which His Spirit dwells, is called upon to affirm, bless, nurture, preserve, and uphold marriage. The church has the responsibility to provide guidance and the authority to apply the principles of God's Word in difficult and complex cases of divorce and remarriage (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 20:22, 23; 1 Cor 5:3-5; 6:1-6). Further, through the exercise of redemptive discipline and pastoral care and nurture, the church has the obligation to help erring members return to discipleship (Matt 18:15-20; Gal 6:1; Heb 12:7-12).

Role of the Church in Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

Because marriage is part of the fabric of the community of believers, the Seventh-day Adventist Church upholds, affirms, and supports this primary human relationship. It recognizes the challenges that characterize marriage in our age and is committed to biblical principles in its ministry to families. The local church is primarily responsible for administering the policies and standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with reference to marriage, divorce and remarriage. When the church ministers to marriages and families, it should manifest its belief in biblical principles in the following practical ways.

1. Facilitating Marital Growth

The church provides a variety of ministries to help couples prepare for and experience marriage. The Sabbath School, worship services, various church activities at every age level, and the Seventh-day Adventist school system afford opportunities for education regarding marriage and family living.

a. Premarital Guidance. All couples who seek the services of a Seventh-day Adventist minister to conduct their wedding are provided with premarital guidance. Effective premarital guidance is a process involving at least 12 hours of interaction between the pastor/counselor and the couple. Together they explore a broad range of relational issues in which the pastor/counselor assumes the role of coach. If, during this process, issues arise that create concern, the couple may be encouraged to postpone their wedding or reconsider their decision to marry. If the pastor is uncomfortable with their decision to marry, the pastor may choose not to officiate at the wedding.

b. Marriage Education and Enrichment. The church helps couples grow

[1]Ellen G. White utilized this principle in her ministry with some difficult cases of divorce and remarriage. For further study, see Elbio Pereyra, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Writings of Ellen G. White,* Ellen G. White Estate, February, 1987.

together, enjoy marriage and achieve God's design for marriage. Marriage education and enrichment facilitate growth by providing opportunities for couples to develop intimacy and the skills to resolve differences and handle crises.

c. Counseling Referral. The church cares for couples in need by encouraging them to use support resources. The church cultivates appropriate spiritual gifts that provide support and healing. It also identifies professional resources in the community and makes referrals as needed.

d. Enrichment for Pastoral Couples. The church encourages pastors to devote time to their families, creates opportunities for enrichment of pastoral marriages, provides for anonymous counseling as needed, and offers in-service programs to enable them to develop skills for ministry to families.

2. Encouraging Marital Reconciliation

The church encourages individuals in marital crisis to resolve differences and build healthy marriages. It provides appropriate spiritual nurture and support. When violence and abuse are involved, special care is taken to protect the vulnerable, stop the abuse, and hold the abuser accountable for the abuse. In some cases of abuse and violence, reconciliation may not be possible.

3. Ministering After Marital Breakdown

Despite their own efforts and the pro-active ministry of the Church, some couples fail to sustain their marital relationship. Such breakdown calls for God's grace to be demonstrated by the church. It fosters a healing ministry which provides divorce recovery for adults and children, referrals for abusers and for victims of abuse and violence, and assistance with everyday needs.

4. Ministering to Remarried Couples

The church provides specialized premarital guidance for individuals considering remarriage. It also offers marriage enrichment experiences adapted to the unique issues confronting remarried couples and parent education designed for families with children joined together through remarriage.

5. Maintaining Church Integrity and Discipline

In carrying out its responsibility to reflect to the world the justice and grace of God, the church cares for the well-being of its members and thereby protects its reputation. The behavior of each member affects the entire community. Likewise, the demeanor of the church affects each member**.** As a worshiping and witnessing body, the church has a responsibility to teach and apply the principles of the Word of God. Thus, it builds up and supports; it comforts, teaches, and corrects. With respect to the individual, the church understands the ultimate purpose of discipline to be the restoration of the person to faithful discipleship and fellowship within the church. Discipline is also an opportunity for the church to reaffirm and demonstrate its

commitment to biblical standards.

a. When Divorce Occurs. In order to protect its members when divorce occurs, the church guards the reputation and privacy of the spouses and all those impacted directly by the divorce. It reaches out to those going through the divorce process, encouraging them to remain within the fellowship of the community of faith. The church also makes the security and welfare of children a priority. It encourages the parents to put their children's needs above their own interests and desires. It holds parents accountable for their responsibilities to their children, including financial obligations. Divorced individuals are encouraged to take sufficient time, usually a period of years, to address the reasons for the failure of their marriage, to accept responsibility for their part in the breakdown of the marriage, to work through the process of healing and forgiveness, and to experience a sense of closure.

In order to protect the community of faith when divorce occurs, the church endeavors to minimize divisive and disruptive behavior often associated with divorce. In the interest of pastoral care, the church may decide that those in divorce recovery will not function in leadership roles. If, in the judgment of the church, individuals demonstrate no repentance, make little or no effort to support their families, bring the church into disrepute, or otherwise refuse to accept the above guidelines, the congregation may regretfully discipline them. Such discipline may include a period of removal from church office, censure, or disfellowshipping.

b. Considerations Regarding Remarriage. Before individuals become involved in another serious relationship, they should be encouraged to complete the above recovery process. If remarriage is contemplated, the local church offers counsel. It supports their decision when it is in harmony with biblical principles. Those whose remarriage is out of harmony with biblical principles are subject to church discipline.

Recommendations

The following recommendations arise out of the biblical principles section of the report of the General Conference Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission. (They represent a practical response to very real situations in the lives of many members and challenges facing congregations.)

Bringing together the related Scriptural passages and principles undergirding a Christian response to divorce and remarriage is not a simple task. More study is needed. However, the urgency of the circumstances call for the Church's best response at this time. Based on the study by the Divorce and Remarriage Study Commission of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White, it was

RECOMMENDED, 1. To retitle the *Church Manual* chapter "Divorce and Remarriage" to read "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," and to include the biblical principles regarding marriage.

2. To include in the *Church Manual* guidelines for local church ministry which support couples prior to marriage, in marriage, when marital breakdown occurs, and in remarriage.

3. To reflect in the *Church Manual* reference to divorce and remarriage, that the dual purpose of church discipline is to redeem and correct. Appropriate discipline is not punitive.

4. To give emphasis in the *Church Manual* to the use of redemptive language in matters relating to divorce and remarriage. Because in many cases it is not possible to readily or accurately determine what or whose behavior is responsible for the marital breakdown, redemptive language is more appropriate than language which judges, condemns, or labels individuals as "guilty and innocent parties." These terms often create obstacles that prevent individuals from resolving the differences between themselves and with the community of faith. Redemptive language does not preclude holding individuals and couples to accountability and disciplining those whose behavior clearly violates the marriage covenant and destroys the marital relationship.

5. To precisely rewrite the second sentence of the *Church Manual*, section 8, page 183 to avoid any inference of the concept of perpetual adultery for which the Commission found no biblical or Ellen G White support.

6. To use the term "church discipline" as the more inclusive term in all references in Chapter 15 of the *Church Manual* which prescribe "disfellowshipping." The term "church discipline" allows for the possibility of disfellowshipping, censure, and/or a period of removal from office.

7. To replace the phrase "the guilty party" (*Church Manual,* "Our Position," page 182, number 2., end of second paragraph) with "all involved," i.e., "The church is urged to relate lovingly and redemptively toward all involved."

8. To add a paragraph as a second paragraph for *Church Manual,* "Our Position," page 182, number 3., to the effect that pastors and church leaders handling sensitive information should exercise discretion in its disclosure.

9. To add the following sentence as a second sentence for *Church Manual,* "Our Position," page 183, number 8.: "Hence, the options available to the repentant may be severely limited. His/Her plea for readmittance to regular church membership shall be considered after appropriate counsel involving the local pastor, the church board, and, if necessary, such committees as may have been set up by the local conference for these purposes."

10. To replace the *Church Manual,* "Our Position," pages 182, 183, number 4. with the following paragraph: "The spouse whose acknowledged act of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow led to the breakdown of the marriage shall be subject to church discipline. The local church shall determine the nature of the discipline and shall explain to the individual the reason and purpose of the discipline. At the discretion of the local church, that discipline may be for a stated period of time. During the time when the individual is under discipline the church, as an instrument of God's mission, shall make every effort to maintain caring and spiritually nurturing contact with the individual."

11. To include sexual abuse in the Church's understanding of *porneia* (*Church Manual*, page 182, number 2. on "fornication" and "sexual irregularities"). (See "Biblical Principles Regarding Divorce and Remarriage," number 2.)

12. To consider physical violence within marriage as unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. (See "Biblical Principles Regarding Divorce and Remarriage," number 3.)

13. To recognize abandonment of a marriage partner as unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. (See "Biblical Principles Regarding Divorce and Remarriage," number 2.)

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*

Biblical Teachings on Marriage

The Origin of Marriage—Marriage is a divine institution established by God Himself before the fall when everything, including marriage, was "very good." (Gen. 1:31). "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). "God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. 'Marriage is honourable'; it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise."—*The Adventist Home*, pp. 25, 26.

The Oneness of Marriage—God intended the marriage of Adam and Eve to be the pattern for all future marriages, and Christ endorsed this original concept saying: "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:4-6).

The Permanence of Marriage—Marriage is a lifelong commitment of husband and wife to each other and between the couple and God (Mark 10:2-9; Rom. 7:2). Paul indicates that the commitment which Christ has for the church is a model of the relationship between husband and wife (Eph. 5:31, 32). God intended the marriage relationship to be as permanent as Christ's relationship with the church.

Sexual Intimacy in Marriage—Sexual intimacy within marriage is a sacred gift from God to the human family. It is an integral part of marriage, reserved for marriage only (Gen. 2:24; Prov. 5:5-20). Such intimacy, designed to be shared exclusively between husband and wife, promotes ever-increasing closeness, happiness, and security, and provides for the perpetuation of the human race. In addition to being monogamous, marriage, as instituted by God, is a heterosexual relationship (Matt. 19:4, 5).

Partnership in Marriage—Unity in marriage is achieved by mutual respect and love. No one is superior (Eph. 5:21-28). "Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward the church is the spirit that husband and wife are to manifest toward each other."—*Testimonies,* vol. 7, p. 46. God's Word condemns violence in personal relationships (Gen. 6:11, 13; Ps. 11:5; Isa. 58:4, 5; Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:19-21). It is the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or demean them (Rom. 12:10; 14:19; Eph. 4:26; 5:28, 29; Col. 3:8-14;

**This document was voted at the 57th Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, August, 2000 as a revision of chapter 15 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 1995 edition.

1 Thess. 5:11). There is no room among Christ's followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power (Matt. 20:25-28; Eph. 6:4). Violence in the setting of marriage and family is abhorrent (see *Adventist Home*, p. 343).

"Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other."—*Testimonies,* vol. 7, p. 47.

The Effects of the Fall on Marriage—The entrance of sin adversely affected marriage. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost the oneness which they had known with God and with one another (Gen. 3:6-24). Their relationship became marked with guilt, shame, blame, and pain. Wherever sin reigns, its sad effects on marriage include alienation, desertion, unfaithfulness, neglect, abuse, violence, separation, divorce, domination of one partner by the other, and sexual perversion. Marriages involving more than one spouse are also an expression of the effects of sin on the institution of marriage. Such marriages, although practiced in Old Testament times, are not in harmony with the divine design. God's plan for marriage requires His people to transcend the mores of popular culture which are in conflict with the biblical view.

Restoration and Healing—1. Divine Ideal to be Restored in Christ—In redeeming the world from sin and its consequences, God also seeks to restore marriage to its original ideal. This is envisioned for the lives of those who have been born again into the kingdom of Christ, those whose hearts are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and who have as their primary purpose in life the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See also 1 Peter 3:7; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.)

2. Oneness and Equality to be Restored in Christ—The gospel emphasizes the love and submission of husband and wife to one another (1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Eph. 5:21). The model for the husband's leadership is the self-sacrificial love and service that Christ gives to the church (Eph. 5:24, 25). Both Peter and Paul speak about the need for respect in the marriage relationship (1 Peter 3:7; Eph. 5:22, 23).

3. Grace Available for All—God seeks to restore to wholeness and reconcile to Himself all who have failed to attain the divine standard (2 Cor. 5:19). This includes those who have experienced broken marriage relationships.

4. The Role of the Church—Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament dealt with the problems caused by broken marriages (Deut. 24:1-5; 1 Cor. 7:11). Both, while upholding and affirming the ideal, worked constructively and redemptively with those who had fallen short of the divine standard. Similarly, the church today is called to uphold and affirm God's ideal for marriage and, at the same time, to be a reconciling, forgiving, healing community, showing understanding and compassion when brokenness occurs.

Biblical Teachings on Divorce

God's Original Purpose—Divorce is contrary to God's original purpose in creating marriage (Matt. 19:3-8; Mark 10:2-9), but the Bible is not silent about it. Because divorce occurred as part of the fallen human experience, biblical legislation was given to limit the

damage it caused (Deut. 24:1-4). The Bible consistently seeks to elevate marriage and to discourage divorce by describing the joys of married love and faithfulness (Prov. 5:18-20; Song of Sol. 2:16; 4:9-5:1), by referring to the marriage-like relationship of God with His people (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:1), by focusing on the possibilities of forgiveness and marital renewal (Hosea 3:1-3), and by indicating God's abhorrence of divorce and the misery it causes (Mal. 2:15, 16). Jesus restored the creation view of marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and between the couple and God (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). Much biblical instruction affirms marriage and seeks to correct problems which tend to weaken or destroy the foundation of marriage (Eph. 5:21-33; Heb. 13:4; 1 Peter 3:7).

Marriages Can Be Destroyed—Marriage rests on principles of love, loyalty, exclusiveness, trust, and support upheld by both partners in obedience to God (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 5:21-29; 1 Thess. 4:1-7). When these principles are violated, the marriage is endangered. Scripture acknowledges that tragic circumstances can destroy marriage.

Divine Grace—Divine grace is the only remedy for the brokenness of divorce. When marriage fails, former partners should be encouraged to examine their experience and to seek God's will for their lives. God provides comfort to those who have been wounded. God also accepts the repentance of individuals who commit the most destructive sins, even those that carry with them irreparable consequences (2 Sam. 11; 12; Ps. 34:18; 86:5; Joel 2:12, 13; John 8:2-11; 1 John 1:9).

Grounds for Divorce—Scripture recognizes adultery and/or fornication (Matt. 5:32) as well as abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor. 7:10-15) as grounds for divorce.

Biblical Teachings on Remarriage

There is no direct teaching in Scripture regarding remarriage after divorce. However, there is a strong implication in Jesus' words in Matthew 19:9 that would allow the remarriage of one who has remained faithful, but whose spouse has been unfaithful to the marriage vow.

The Church's Position on Divorce and Remarriage

Acknowledging the teachings of the Bible on marriage, the church is aware that marriage relationships are less than ideal in many cases. The problem of divorce and remarriage can be seen in its true light only as it is viewed from Heaven's viewpoint and against the background of the Garden of Eden. Central to God's holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution, God the officiator at the first marriage. After the Lord had revealed to Adam that Eve was verily bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, there could never arise a doubt in his mind that they twain were one flesh. Nor could ever a doubt arise in the mind of either of the holy pair that God intended that their home should endure forever.

The church adheres to this view of marriage and home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and

reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God's holy standards. Nothing presented here is intended to minimize the mercy of God or the forgiveness of God. In the fear of the Lord, the church here sets forth the principles and practices that should apply in this matter of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Though marriage was first performed by God alone, it is recognized that people now live under civil governments on this earth; therefore, marriage has both a divine and a civil aspect. The divine aspect is governed by the laws of God, the civil by the laws of the state.

In harmony with these teachings, the following statements set forth the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

1. When Jesus said, "Let not man put asunder," He established a rule of conduct for the church under the dispensation of grace which must transcend all civil enactments which would go beyond His interpretation of the divine law governing the marriage relation. Here He gives a rule to His followers who should adhere to it whether or not the state or prevailing custom allows larger liberty. "In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63. (Matt. 5:32; 19:9.)

2. Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow has generally been seen to mean adultery and/or fornication. However, the New Testament word for fornication includes certain other sexual irregularities. (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Rom. 1:24-27.) Therefore, sexual perversions, including incest, child sexual abuse, and homosexual practices, are also recognized as a misuse of sexual powers and a violation of the divine intention in marriage. As such they are just cause for separation or divorce.

Even though the Scriptures allow divorce for the reasons mentioned above, as well as for abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-15), earnest endeavors should be made by the church and those concerned to effect a reconciliation, urging the spouses to manifest toward each other a Christ-like spirit of forgiveness and restoration. The church is urged to relate lovingly and redemptively toward the couple in order to assist in the reconciliation process.

3. In the event that reconciliation is not effected, the spouse who has remained faithful to the spouse who violated the marriage vow has the biblical right to secure a divorce and also to remarry.

4. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow (see sections 1. and 2. above) shall be subject to discipline by the local church. (See Chapter 13, Church Discipline, pp. 167-174.) If genuinely repentant, the spouse may be placed under censure for a stated period of time rather than removed from church membership. A spouse who gives no evidence of full and sincere repentance, shall be removed from church membership. In case the violation has brought public

reproach on the cause of God, the church, in order to maintain its high standards and good name, may remove the individual from church membership even though there is evidence of repentance.

Any of these forms of discipline shall be applied by the local church in a manner that would seek to attain the two objectives of church discipline—to correct and redeem. In the gospel of Christ, the redemptive side of discipline is always tied to an authentic transformation of the sinner into a new creature in Jesus Christ.

5. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow and who is divorced does not have the moral right to marry another while the spouse who has been faithful to the marriage vow still lives and remains unmarried and chaste. The person who does so shall be removed from church membership. The person whom he/she marries, if a member, shall also be removed from church membership.

6. It is recognized that sometimes marriage relations deteriorate to the point where it is better for a husband and wife to separate. “To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10, 11, RSV). In many such cases the custody of the children, the adjustment of property rights, or even personal protection may make necessary a change in marital status. In such cases it may be permissible to secure what is known in some countries as a legal separation. However, in some civil jurisdictions such a separation can be secured only by divorce.

A separation or divorce which results from factors such as physical violence or in which “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow” (see sections 1. and 2. above) is not involved, does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried; committed adultery or fornication; or died. Should a member who has been thus divorced remarry without these biblical grounds, he/she shall be removed from church membership; and the one whom he/she marries, if a member, shall also be removed from church membership. (See pp. 168-170.)

7. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow and has been divorced and removed from church membership and who has remarried, or a person who has been divorced on other than the grounds set forth in sections 1. and 2. above and has remarried, and who has been removed from church membership, shall be considered ineligible for membership except as hereinafter provided.

8. The marriage contract is not only sacred but also infinitely more complex than ordinary contracts in its possible involvements; for example, with children. Hence, in a request for readmittance to church membership, the options available to the repentant may be severely limited. Before final action is taken by the local church, the request for readmittance shall be brought by the church through the pastor or district leader to the conference/mission/field committee for counsel and recommendation as to any possible steps that the repentant one, or ones, may take to secure such readmittance.

9. Readmittance to membership of those who have been removed from church

membership for reasons given in the foregoing sections shall normally be on the basis of rebaptism. (See p. 173.)

10. When a person who has been removed from membership is readmitted to church membership, as provided in section 8., every care should be exercised to safeguard the unity and harmony of the church by not giving such a person responsibility as a leader; especially in an office which requires the rite of ordination, unless by very careful counsel with the conference/mission/field administration.

11. No Seventh-day Adventist minister has the right to officiate at the remarriage of any person who, under the stipulation of the preceding paragraphs, has no scriptural right to remarry.

Local Church Ministry for Families

The church as a redemptive agency of Christ is to minister to its members in all of their needs and to nurture every one so that all may grow into a mature Christian experience. This is particularly true when members face lifelong decisions such as marriage and distressful experiences such as divorce. When a couple's marriage is in danger of breaking down, every effort should be made by the partners and those in the church or family who minister to them to bring about their reconciliation in harmony with divine principles for restoring wounded relationships (Hosea 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal. 6:1).

Resources are available through the local church or other church organizations which can be of assistance to members in the development of a strong Christian home. These resources include: (1) programs of orientation for couples engaged to be married, (2) programs of instruction for married couples with their families, and (3) programs of support for broken families and divorced individuals.

Pastoral support is vital in the area of instruction and orientation in the case of marriage, and healing and restoration in the case of divorce. The pastoral function in the latter case is both disciplinary and supportive. That function includes the sharing of information relevant to the case; however, the disclosure of sensitive information should be done with great discretion. This ethical concern alone should not be the grounds for avoiding disciplinary actions established in sections 1. to 11. above.

Church members are called to forgive and accept those who have failed as God has forgiven them (Isa. 54:5-8; Matt. 6:14, 15; Eph. 4:32). The Bible urges patience, compassion, and forgiveness in the Christian care of those who have erred (Matt. 18:10-20; Gal. 6:1, 2). During the time when individuals are under discipline, either by censure or by being removed from membership, the church, as an instrument of God's mission, shall make every effort to maintain caring and spiritually nurturing contact with them. #