

HOW TO DO FAMILY MINISTRY

ESTABLISHING A FAMILY
DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE
at Your Church

The home is a strategic part of God's plan in shaping the life of every follower of Jesus.

Yet, for many churches, the home is often overlooked in the disciple-making process. As our God leads us to declare 2020 to 2030 as a decade of holistic disciple-making, we want to see more and more families and homes of all shapes and sizes equipped to make disciples of Christ.

There is an urgent need in our world today to expand the capacity of the Church to equip the home in disciple-making.

To this end, I commend Family Challenge for recently launching the global DO Home Church-wide Initiative. A key part of the Initiative is a three-booklet series that facilitates this process of deepening connections between the Church and the home. The first booklet explains WHY a church should invest in discipleship at home. The second booklet expands on WHAT discipleship at home looks like. This is now the last of the three booklets and focuses on HOW a church might implement a plan for cultivating a family discipleship culture in the homes of its members.

I invite you to join us in giving priority to building each home into an effective disciple-making centre of the church.



Bishop Efraim Tendero, Secretary General
World Evangelical Alliance



INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

Dear Church and Family Ministry Leaders,

The purpose of this booklet is to encourage you to join us and other church leaders around the world as we develop and engage in strategic, biblical ministry to families.

Ministry to families puts us on the frontlines of a great spiritual battle for the eternal souls of our children and grand-children. From the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), Satan and his demons have been battling against God's institution of the family. The Christian family threatens their evil plans to keep people far from God and headed towards Hell. The family has always been, and continues to be, a focal point of Satan's most concerted efforts.

But families are not alone. The local church has been set right in the middle of this battle to bring hope to families and equip them to build God's Kingdom and advance the Gospel for generations to come. Put simply, when churches engage in family ministry they help Christian families to:

- ▶ Stay centered in Christ and in His Word.
- ▶ Grow in health and godliness.
- ▶ Build guardrails against spiritually, emotionally, and physically destructive patterns.

- ▶ Be intentional about discipling members of the family.
- ▶ Pass faith in Jesus to future generations.
- ▶ Become more effective in reaching their neighbors for Christ.

In our first booklet, “The Family in Crisis: An Urgent Appeal to the Global Church,” we cast a vision that each local church has a biblical responsibility to strengthen, support, and equip families to live for Christ.

In our second booklet, we explored what family ministry might look like in your church. We looked at biblical models for the family and shared some essential ways in which the church can begin thinking about equipping families.

In this third and final booklet, we will look at how family ministry might begin to take root in your church. We hope that this resource will help lead your team through the change process as you begin to implement new structures in your church.

Thank you for taking this journey with us!

With God’s Love,



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Dr. P.C. Mathew serves as the National Director of Urban India Ministries, India's National Director for Transform World, and as an adjunct faculty member at Southern Asia Bible College and the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies.



Dr. Rob Rienow serves as the founder of Visionary Family Ministries, and is an international conference speaker, author, church planter.



Dr. Scott Turansky is the co-founder of the National Center for Biblical Parenting. He serves as adjunct professor at Concordia University Wisconsin and pastor of Calvary Chapel Living Hope.



Jonathan Ziman (MDiv) serves as President of the Board of Directors for Visionary Family Ministries, and is also a full-time pastor at Gospel Fellowship Church in Wheaton, IL.



CONSIDER THE CULTURE

Like a builder getting ready to build a house, the first step in implementing family ministry in your church is assessing the lay of the land. In other words, before “doing” anything, you first have to consider the existing culture of the church. Taking the time to reflect on the specific culture of your church environment will help you determine the best strategy for implementing change.

Whether we are aware of it or not, every church has its own culture. Some expressions of this culture may be more visible than others. For example, whereas one church may have a formal worship style with priests who wear robes, other churches may be more relaxed and have leaders who dress more casually. Music styles can also vary significantly from church to church, as can building size or architecture. But there are also less visible elements to the church culture that can be just as significant, and sometimes exert even more influence.

For example, even across similar style churches in the same country, the underlying values of the people in the congregation can vary quite significantly. How people choose to prioritize their time and money outside of church can sometimes be more

influential than what they hear from the pastor in the church. A family's values drive their schedule and choices. Core beliefs can vary depending on social class and level of income. Just as traditions can be a powerful force in shaping families, so, too, can traditions be a powerful force in shaping churches. Sometimes churches do things a certain way simply because that's the way they've always done it.

All of these factors make every church environment unique and different. As such, before embarking on a project to change the church culture, you have to make a careful assessment of what your existing culture looks like. What drives your church? What are the core beliefs of your congregation about marriage and family? Who are the key influencers? How are decisions made? What potential challenges lie ahead?

Integrating family ministry into the life of the church is about far more than simply adding a marriage or parenting course to the existing ministry options. The changes that need to take place in the church and the home in order to establish a culture of family discipleship are significant. As such, we cannot dream of succeeding in this endeavor without careful planning.

A photograph of three people, two men and one woman, sitting at a dark table. They are looking at a document or book held by the person in the middle. There are several open books on the table. The image is slightly faded and serves as a background for the title.

CULTIVATE A SENSE OF URGENCY

In America, there is a saying, *“If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.”* In other words, if there isn’t a problem, then there is no reason to try and change anything.

The same is true when it comes to developing a culture of family discipleship at your church. If everything appears to be fine, and nobody thinks there is anything missing or broken, then it will be hard to ever motivate people to change. Therefore, a critical first step in the change process is creating a sense of urgency. Both the congregation and the church leadership have to feel that something is indeed broken and needs to be fixed.

As we noted in our first booklet, *“The Family in Crisis,”* families are under attack all around the world. Marriage relationships are stretched thin, parents and grand-parents struggle to connect with and lead their children, relationships between siblings are challenging, addictions wreak havoc, generational ties are frayed and often completely severed, and young people walk away from the faith in every church and across every denomination. There is a spiritual battle waging all around us, and church leaders and pastors have to be ready to engage in this fight.

A simple first step to begin cultivating a sense of urgency might be to gather a group of like-minded people together in the

church to read the booklet, “The Family in Crisis” and work through the discussion questions together. As a group, you might commit to pray regularly for the families in your church and try to cultivate a sense of openness and transparency about the issues and struggles every family is facing.

If the pastors or church leaders are willing, an excellent second step would be to launch the DO Home Churchwide Conversations Initiative (<https://globalfamilychallenge.com>). This is a two-part process that begins with a survey and is followed by a series of next steps any church can take.

The Survey

This brief anonymous survey is intended to help surface issues in the church that might otherwise go un-noticed. It has been carefully designed with input from family ministry leaders and experts and should only take 3-4 minutes to complete.

The survey touches on five key areas:

- Passing on the faith to the next generation
- Marriage
- Parenting
- Sexuality
- Care for the elderly

After taking the survey, church leaders will be presented with two reports:

1. A Congregational Report, detailing the real conditions of life at home for the families in your church.
2. A Leadership Report, highlighting any areas where there may be a gap between perceived family health and the reality of what is actually happening in the families in your church.

When considered as part of an overall strategy for implementing family ministry in a church, the survey should spark good conversations and help church leaders move the congregation in a new direction.



BUILD A BIBLICAL BASE

Without a solid foundation, even the best looking building will eventually collapse and fall. The same is true with our ministry at church. Unless we set a firm foundation, even the best looking programs will eventually fail.

Good intentions are great for starting a ministry, but not enough to sustain it over the long haul. Decisions made for purely pragmatic reasons may help solve problems in the short-term, but are quickly changed when a new person joins the team, or a new book or conference promises a “better” or “more effective” way to do ministry. In order to avoid being blown this way and that by the winds of change, we have to firmly ground all our ministry convictions in God’s Word, the Bible.

So, although you may be eager to jump in and start changing things at your church, a better course of action would be to develop a solid theological base first. Do not rush this process. If the biblical foundation for your ministry is weak, you will never achieve the kinds of deep, lasting change you are looking for. So take your time and make sure you can clearly defend your theological convictions from Scripture alone. You could do this individually or as part of a team, but some key questions to consider would be the following:

1. What is a biblical vision for manhood and womanhood?
2. What does the Bible say about marriage? (Why get married?)
3. What is God's role for husbands? What is God's role for wives?
4. What does the Bible say about parenting? (Why have children?)
5. Who does God say should be the primary teachers of faith for the next generation?
6. What role should the church play in supporting faith development in families?
7. What does the Bible say about gender and sexuality?
8. What role does God have for grand-parents? What does it look like to "honor" our parents?
9. What role does the home play in making disciples?

This process may take several months to work through successfully, but it cannot be skipped. True, lasting change can only come about when our ministry decisions and methodology are built on God's Word and God's Word alone.



PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

The stresses of ministry are enormous, and the statistics about burn-out and failure among pastors and church leaders are terrible.

Sadly many pastors have found themselves so over-committed to their church that their families suffer as a result. Marriages teeter on the brink of collapse. Many pastor's kids get lost in the shuffle, and often leave the church when they leave the home. This should never be the case. One of the primary qualifications for being a pastor is an ability to lead well at home. Which means that if God has given you a wife and children, your primary ministry is to your family at home. Your first and most important mission field is not the congregation, it's your family.

Whether you are the senior pastor or a lay leader, the first place to implement family ministry is in your own home. So, for example:

1. If you are married, do you pray and read the Bible together? Even for those who are in full-time ministry, this seemingly simple first step can be overlooked or ignored in amongst the busyness of life. If this has been a challenging area for you as a couple, commit to praying and reading the Bible together on a regular basis.

2. If you have children, do you read the Bible and pray together with them as a family? Do you sing hymns or songs together? The commands of Scripture are clear that parents should take the primary role in discipling their children (Deut. 6, Psalm 78). What are some simple first steps you can take as a family to impress the hearts of your children (or grand-children) with a love for God?
3. If you are single, how is your personal relationship with God? What are you doing to keep your own faith active and vibrant? How has God called you to minister to your family members (parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, etc.)?

In all these areas, we need accountability and encouragement from close friends and trusted brothers and sisters in Christ. If you work in a church, take time at the beginning of every meeting to ask each other about how family ministry is going in each other's homes. Then spend time praying for each other's marriages and children.

Because the family is at the center of God's plan for the Church, the family is also a key target for the attacks of Satan. So, be prepared for significant spiritual attack as you begin to engage in this process. Investing in your own marriages and families is a vital first step towards implementing a solid family discipleship ministry in your church. Don't overlook this step!



TAKE SMALL STEPS

Although some changes in a church or ministry can be made quickly, integrating something as significant as family ministry into the life of a church will take time. But do not give up! Giant canyons are formed over time as small amounts of water slowly erode the ground.

In a similar way, slow and steady progress in advancing the vision for family ministry in your church will eventually bring about significant generational changes in the Kingdom of God. Every time you pray together as a married couple matters. Every time you lead worship at home together as a family is significant. Every conversation you have encouraging families in the church makes a difference. It's possible to walk incredibly large distances across the country simply by consistently taking small steps. And the same is true in ministry, whether it's in your own home or in the church.

So, if praying together is an area you want to grow in as a couple or as a family, don't rush to set impossible goals. Start small and focus on small gains. For example, if you never pray together, then praying once a week is a significant improvement! If you only read the Bible together as a family once a month, doing it twice a month doubles your impact! Little steps help to build momentum

because they are easy to achieve and easy to repeat.

The same is true for changes in your church. Although you may be tempted to rush in and turn everything upside down, it would be better to move slowly and steadily instead. What are some small steps you can take to begin moving your church in a new direction?

1. If your goal is to cast vision for generational worship, consider inviting all the children into the main worship service of the church four times a year. This gives everyone a taste for what it might look and feel like to worship together as a family, but doesn't overwhelm anyone in the process.
2. If your goal is to equip parents to be the primary disciplers in the church, look for ways to help parents take the lead at home. For example, if you have a children's Sunday school program, let parents know ahead of time what you will be teaching the kids on Sunday. Send a sheet home with the parents detailing what Bible passage they should be reading and discussing together at home before they come to church on Sunday. This gently encourages parents to take the lead in discipling their kids, without requiring any huge changes to the structure of the church.
3. If you already have a children and youth ministry at your church, leverage that ministry to support and encourage parents throughout the year. Offer equipping classes during the youth group time. Encourage your youth pastor to meet parents for coffee or a meal or visit homes to connect with parents. Offer classes on communicating with teenagers, or how to do family worship.
4. Look for ways to address family issues as a church—in your sermon illustrations and applications, or as part of your Sunday school curriculum. Offer a Preparing for Marriage class, or a Marriage Enrichment course.

There are many little steps you can take to begin moving your church in this direction. You don't have to change everything all at once. Even small changes can add up to make a big impact over time. Work together with your existing ministry teams and get creative!



BE PATIENT AND KEEP PRAYING

Shepherding is hard work. The blessings can be enormous, but the challenges along the way can be significant. The obstacles may at times seem overwhelming.

Satan will throw everything he can against you. In those moments, you may be tempted to give up or turn away in frustration. You may want to skip steps or settle for second best. But be encouraged! The fight is not yours, it is the Lord's.

In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul says:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In our own strength we are powerless to accomplish anything significant. But God didn't leave us alone. God doesn't want us to struggle along under our own power. God wants us to turn to Him for the strength to persevere. God wants us to look to Him for the power to live lives that are holy and pleasing in his sight.

It is so important as you walk down this road of family discipleship

to do so in prayer and in community with others. Imagine seeing the Gospel advance in your community as the church and families partner together for Christ. God has given us the Church as a blessing, to be our spiritual family as we seek to live for Christ.

Keep praying and do not give up! Followers of Jesus must be willing to take up their crosses and daily die to self (Matt. 16:24). But you don't have to do that alone. Pray for brothers and sisters in Christ to walk this road with you. And take heart, because even though in this world we will have trouble, Jesus Christ our Lord has overcome this world! (John 16:33)

A photograph showing a person's hand writing in a spiral-bound notebook on a wooden table. A coffee cup with a latte is also on the table. The text "DISCUSSION QUESTIONS" is overlaid in white capital letters.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please consider and discuss these questions within your church or leadership team:

1. Look at the section on pp.7–8. How would you describe the culture at your church? What are the core beliefs of your congregation about marriage and family?
2. What are some simple ways you might begin to cultivate a sense of urgency at your church? Who might be available and ready to implement the “DO Home Survey ” (<https://globalfamilychallenge.com>)?
3. Look through the questions on p. 13. How would you answer these questions as a leadership team?
4. Look at the questions on p.14-15 and take time to reflect on your responses to these questions. How are you “practicing what you preach” at home? What are some practical steps you and your spouse can take as you lead the home?
5. Spend some time together as a team in prayer over the next few weeks. What are some very concrete, specific next steps you can take towards implementing family ministry at your church?



NEXT STEP: YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED

This booklet was prepared with the deep conviction that God would use it to speak to many hearts and strengthen the resolve of church leaders in our nation to take bold steps to build healthy families as an integral part of the church's mission.

The Holy Spirit may have impressed on your heart to join others in this nation to pray, study God's Word, and share your hearts with one another on this vital issue of family ministry.

Your voice in this initiative can make a difference. Be a part of this historic moment! What a dream it would be to see the Christian community in this nation come together with a dynamic plan to strengthen families!

Join others to partner together to strengthen God's church, equip families, and advance the Gospel.

We want to invite you to join our global DO Home Churchwide Conversations Initiative. Our website is at **<https://globalfamilychallenge.com>**.

This booklet is the last of a three-part series to accelerate a national family ministry initiative. The first booklet focuses on the “Why” of family ministry, the second is on what it means by such ministry in the church, and this booklet is on the “How” of building and equipping families in our churches. Thank you in advance for your partnership in the Gospel.

With God’s Love,

Ben Freudenburg
Matthew Ling
P.C. Mathew
Rob Rienow
Scott Turansky
Jonathan Ziman

P.S. Additional resources that can help you in the “how” of family ministry may be found at <http://bit.ly/2PnMqHR>.

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