

Partnering With Parents

Empowering, Equipping, Encouraging

Parents are primary spiritual mentors of children and it is essential to extend ministry into the home and partner with them.

God intends the home to be the primary context for growing children's faith. No one knows children better than parents. No one has the same amount of time to build relationships and trust, than parents. Research shows that when teens choose their most significant spiritual influences in their lives they put mum at number one and dad at number two. (*Mereton Strommen, p.6*) Valuegenesis 2 study reports that the faith of the family the child grew up in is one of the highest factors (82%) influencing faith development.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Moses outlined the necessity of Israelite families passing faith to their children through daily rituals and storytelling. Parental responsibility is a biblical mandate. Unfortunately parents have abdicated this role to the church and churches have embraced this responsibility without ensuring that they in turn equip and empower parents to be the primary spiritual nurturers.

“There are two powerful influences on the planet – the church and the home. They both exist because God initiated them. If they work together they can potentially make a greater impact than if they work alone.” *Reggie Joiner, p.20*

“For all their specialized training, church professionals realize that if a child is not receiving basic Christian nurture in the home, even the best teachers and curriculum will have minimal impact. *Majorie Thompson*

“When a church - intentionally or not – assumes a family's responsibilities in the arena of spiritually nurturing children, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to relieve the family of its biblical responsibility.” *George Barna, p.81*

“We best serve the next generation when church and parents work together as a team, celebrating the crucial role of parents and the essential role of the faith community.” *Children Matter, p.165*

Strategies for Partnership

1. Believe in your parents

Your attitude to parents will determine your approach to the family as a whole. Do you believe that most parents really want to be good parents and that they can become better parents? Do you believe that God has called them for this important job?

Sit with them and ask: what are your needs, frustrations, struggles and hopes for your kids?

2. Spiritually nurture them

Disciple them – help them have a passion for God and show them how to put God first in their lives. Nurture them in their own bible study and prayer life.

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”
Deuteronomy 6:4-6

3. Give them the vision of spiritual mentoring

Show them the blessings that they will receive when they build spiritual relationships with their children and make spiritual development a priority.

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah . . . He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts for the children to their fathers .”
Malachi 4:5, 6

4. Equip them

George Barna found that many parents believed that they were responsible for the spiritual development of their children, but gave this responsibility to the church.p.78. They either felt incapable, or scared that they wouldn't do it right. Help parents make small simple changes in the rhythm of the family's time together. Give them a plan, and show them how to have simple but intentional spiritual routines at home at times such as:

Getting up in the morning
Eating meals together
Walking or travelling together
Going to bed

TO: Pray together, read the Bible together, memorise scripture together, have faith conversations, play and have fun together.

Provide parents with activities /resources from worship and children's programs that they can do at home.

Provide resources that facilitate faith conversations and discussion in the home. Offer classes that will teach them how to lead their kids to Christ or that will teach them how to study the Bible with their kids.

Encourage them to visit and be involved in church children's ministry to see what their kids are learning. Experiencing what happens at church will also give parents ideas for what they can do at home.

5. Encourage and support

Parents need to know that you will help them. Frustrated as we may be as leaders, we need to encourage and not brow-beat. Thank them for what they are doing, and the changes that they have made. Encourage them to do more. Be available as a listener.

6. Help them connect with other parents

Create opportunities for them to be involved in small groups, social activities, parenting events, worship events and service projects.

Family mission and faith experiences link family members to each other and also to other families.

Ensure that your church is a true community. Show them that you as a church care about each other and that you pray for each other and plan to hold each other accountable.

7. Evaluate church strategies and ensure the church is family-friendly

Evaluate current programs. Are they hindering parent participation?

Be careful of creating programs for the sake of programs but look for ways of using existing church programs to equip, support and empower.

Find meaningful ways to include families with their children in every aspect of church life, including worship services.

Allow and welcome parents to be involved in children's discipleship activities such as Sabbath School, VBS and Adventurers.

Create places where families can pray together at church.

Celebrate Milestones – child and family events such as the birth of babies, baby dedication, starting school, commitment ceremony, baptism, leaving for University and graduation.

Organise events that provide opportunities for families to connect with their children. Let families minister together. Family members will be blessed as they share their talents together and strengthen their relationships.

8. Communicate well

Parents love to know what is happening and what is coming up in their kids' ministries. They would dialogue more with their kids about faith if they knew what to talk about. Use a variety of techniques. Speak one-on-one with interested parents. Use print sometimes, but also send e-mails, snail mail, messages on crafts, notice boards, information booths and parent newsletters www.parentlink.org

9. Be positive

Act like every parent that you meet is coming to your church this week. Every parent needs you as a partner. Start acting like it. Reggie Joiner p.183

10. Be Intentional

Equipping and empowering parents is achievable if the church believes and values families and the discipleship of children. All ministries need to think through their strategies for partnerships so that churches can build strong families that are equipped and empowered as disciple makers of their children.

“The church is in a unique position to give the family hope and direction because most parents would love to know that people other than themselves think about their families. The magic of the home is that it is the place where the family can start over with the same people every day.”

Reggie Joiner pg. 18

www.buildingchildrensministries.com Connecting with Parents

Mark Holman, *Faith Begins At Home*

Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange*

Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, Linda Cannell, *Children Matter*

Merton Strommen, in Majorie Thompson, *Family: The Forming Centre*