



Greater Sydney SDA Conference

Family-Equipping Ministry Church and Home as Co-champions

**Joy Strother in
Three Perspectives on Family Ministry
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What does it take to be a family-equipping church?

What stops churches growing young people to have a biblical worldview?

Moral Therapeutic Deism

Despite strong interest in religion and even active participation in vibrant churches, millions of students in our ministries were unable to articulate even the most basic tenets of Christian faith.
(2005 report from sociologist Christian Smith)

- Young people are emerging from our children's ministries and youth programs with the belief that religion is all about doing better and becoming happier; for the most part they perceive God as a distant and benign Creator whose purpose is largely to help us feel better about ourselves.
- Despite all the investments and supposed advances in age-organized ministries over the past thirty years, churched children and youth are growing up less likely than ever before to have a biblical perspective on life.
- In our well-intentioned efforts to reach students for Jesus Christ we have developed ministry models failing to call parents to embrace their role as primary disciple-makers in their children's lives. The church has tacitly encouraged this parental abdication by relentlessly promoting benefits and life changes that would accompany increased participation in ministry activities. As a result, the church and families are being split spiritually along too many key fault lines.

Home and Church Collide

The home has the greatest impact on your lives; with few exceptions, if we fail to impact the home, we will never make a lasting impact on students.

- The ministries having the greatest success at seeing young people emerge into mature Christians, rather than contented churchgoers, are those that facilitated a parent-church partnership focused on instilling specific spiritual beliefs and practices in a child's life from a very early age. (Barna Research)
- Family-equipping churches retain some age-organized ministries but restructure the congregation to partner with parents at every level of ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped and held accountable for the discipleship of their children.

Two Central Actions:

1. Engaging and equipping parents as their children's primary disciplers
2. Partnering with parents to develop a definite plan for their children's Christian formation.

Parents

- Most parents did have a purpose for their children's lives, but this purpose was not maturity in Jesus Christ. Their purpose was for their children to be 'happy'.
- Most parents, even Christian, would default to the world's definitions of happiness and success in parenting unless we consistently placed a biblical understanding of their responsibilities on front of them.
- Because most parents in our churches were never disciplined by their own parents, these parents did not naturally arrive at biblical conclusions about their responsibilities.

"We had to guide parents to a simple but critical conclusion about our ministry, that our ultimate goal is to bring the home and the church together in a biblical partnership to raise up a generation that loves God and loves others. Our goal became discipleship through partnership."

Objectives

- Our goal as a church is to partner with parents to see God raise up generations of children and students who love God with all their hearts, soul and strength. We hope that our students and children will:
 1. Love God as a way of life (worship) Rom 12:1-2
 2. Love others as a way of life (service) Mark 10:45
 3. Love the church and understand their roles in the body of Christ (community) Eph 4:4-7
 4. Love the Bible and can handle it properly as the authority and foundation for life (scripture) 2 Tim 3:15-17
 5. Love to tell others about Christ (the gospel) and share their stories (testimony) Rom 10:14-15
 6. Love to grow closer to God through personal spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible study (discipleship) 1 Tim 4:7-12

Ministry Strategy

1. Synchronize all ministry efforts around the recognition that two partnered influences – church and home – have the greatest potential to impact young lives. Everything must be planned and viewed with families as a priority. In every planning and evaluation meeting, we challenge ourselves with this question: Is this God's best for families?
2. Clearly communicate expectations and plans to parents.
3. Develop a resource guide to recommend resources for family devotions and family issues.
4. Connect the church's teaching ministries to the home. Group leaders contact parents to talk and pray through their child's growth.
5. Provide catalytic venues to introduce parents to expectations.
6. Provide family-equipping mission opportunities. The spiritual activity that leave the most significant lifelong impression on children and students is serving alongside their parents.
7. Partner with the worship team to develop intergenerational and family worship gatherings. Have a process called 'Big Enough for

Big Church' that teaches children and their parents why we worship in the way that we do. Connect the message shared in the worship with children's lives.

8. Equipping caring adult leaders. This is especially important where family systems have broken down. We are to care for our 'spiritual orphans' by surrounding them with caring adult believers who will share the hope of Christ while modelling what a Christian family ought to look like.

Foundations:

- Shared Priority Presented to Parents
- Shared Practices Promoted through Proclamation
- Shared Perspective Prioritized among Staff Members
- The family-equipping model requires years to take root and permeate every level of church life. Churches have not arrived at their current positions overnight and they will not recover overnight either.
- The purpose of family-equipping ministry is to change the way parents perceive parenting and to transform the entire discipleship process. That cannot be accomplished by adding one more program. It is only accomplished by carefully restructuring and redirecting the entire church.