



Family Friendly Churches, part 1 of 2—

Family Friendly Churches

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What is a family? The definition of this important word has shifted over the years. Twenty years ago dictionaries described the family as “the basic unit in society having as its nucleus two or more adults living together and cooperating in the care and rearing of their own or adopted children.” More recently the definition has expressed family as “*traditionally* consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children” and also “any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family” (italics mine). These dictionary changes simply reflect cultural tensions and changes in contemporary family life.

The church faces a myriad of challenges as it seeks to minister to families in the 21st century. Never has the family been more fragmented. Today it seems like the family is being pulled a thousand different directions. The secular media, as a whole, certainly cannot be viewed as family friendly. The values portrayed on television and expressed on the radio and in popular books and magazines generally counter to the family values espoused in the Bible. Divorce, relaxed sexual standards, and homosexual behavior are increasingly accepted as normal by modern culture. More and more parents are facing the challenge of single parenting. These issues and others

impact the Christian family. They raise the stakes for the church in its evangelistic efforts. In a context like this how can the church help strengthen families? What are some of the characteristics of a family friendly church? I would like to suggest the following:



A Family Friendly Church—

•Encourages “family altar”

Family friendly churches recognize the truth of the adage that “families that pray together stay together.” Consequently they emphasize the importance of a daily time of prayer, Bible reading and worship for the families of

their church. They also provide practical help and resources to assist families in making this a meaningful and productive activity.

•Supports a “family night”

At a time when family members struggle with competing schedules and activities that drive them in different directions, family friendly churches often schedule and emphasize a “family night.” These are promoted as enjoyable times to be together, bonding, communicating, laughing, playing and growing together.

Family friendly churches suggest activities for these evenings and do their best to keep the church schedule free of conflicting activities.

•Sponsors family activities

Family friendly churches understand the value of being together as families at church. They also are convinced that many families in their community would appreciate times of family fun and fellowship. Therefore they plan and sponsor special events like film night, barbecues, picnics, outings, and holiday parties designed especially for families. They also feature trans-generational opportunities for worship, service and learning.

(Part 2 continues with more on what makes a “family friendly church.”)

Questions For Further Study—

1. List the different types of families represented in your congregation. (These might include: two parent families, single-parent families, parents with adopted children, parents who have been divorced and remarried, etc.)
2. In what ways does your church minister to the needs of the different types of families in your church?
3. What changes might you implement to better meet the needs of the 21st century family?