



Spiritual Formation @ Home

Leading Edge Churches Driving Family Centered Ministry

Part Two - Pursuing Models of Excellence



November 2007 Executive Summary
The Strong Families Innovation Alliance

written by Kurt Bruner

Building Momentum

In November 2007, leaders from a dozen evangelical churches¹ gathered in Scottsdale, Arizona to continue the momentum launched during their first gathering six months earlier. (See the April 2007 Executive Summary.) The meeting was hosted by *The Center for Strong Families* and jointly sponsored by *Family Life* and *Focus on the Family* ministries.

Participants began by reviewing the scope of innovation as agreed upon in April 2007...

Problem Statement

Evangelical families are failing to win and keep their own children in the Christian faith.

Vision

To create an innovation movement among evangelical churches that seeks to turn the tide by acknowledging the home as central to God's redemptive strategy.

Innovation Categories

1. Strengthening marriage relationships
2. Winning our children to Christ
3. Launching our youth as fully devoted followers of Christ

The goal of this second innovation session was to begin identifying models of excellence for church-driven, family-centered faith transference.

Getting From Here To There

The alliance includes churches in various stages of innovation and individuals in a variety of staff positions including small group, student, children's, spiritual formation, and senior pastors. Prior to gathering, each identified their church as falling into one of the following three categories:



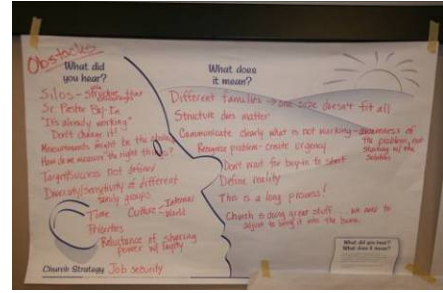
- **Category One:** Just beginning to craft a vision for families with key leaders in order to get these issues on the radar screen.
- **Category Two:** Starting to change existing programs and/or designing new programs that will move "family" from a third-tier to a second- or first-tier emphasis.
- **Category Three:** Have launched a senior leadership team initiative with the goal of developing integrated strategies for family-centered ministry.

Most described themselves as falling into the second category, only two placing themselves in the third. The group began this session describing some of the obstacles and challenges they face in trying to raise the priority and profile of marriage and family in their churches. They also shared some of the strategies being implemented to move forward and momentum building "quick wins" that are in process.

Obstacles and Challenges

Some of the common obstacles and challenges identified include...

- Ignorance of the problem/need among staff and parents
- Senior pastor and staff buy-in
- Understanding what a healthy family looks like
- Spiritual immaturity – parents have very little to pass on
- Clarifying the target (what is success?)
- Measuring success (what do we measure?)
- Current measures exclude “family”
- Church sacred cows
- Existing staff structure (silos)
- Customization for diverse family types and stages
- Lack of concentrated focus from a specific full-time staff member
- Urgent church priorities prevent allocating time/energy
- Finances to fund additional efforts



Key Insights:

1. Customize - One size can't fit all
2. Structure does matter
3. We must create a sense of urgency, clearly defining the problem before offering solutions
4. Don't wait for total buy-in to get started
5. This is a long process, so be diligent
6. The church is doing great stuff – but we need to help families bring it home

Strategies and Quick Wins

Adopting the view that a good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow, several churches shared highlights of early efforts including...

- Early conversations with staff about integration
- Evaluating the present reality (marriage strength, faith transference, etc.)
- Fresh ideas and offerings!
- Offering Intergenerational experiences (family worship services, mission trips, family VBS, etc.)
- Challenging every home to create a spiritual development plan
- Calling leaders to model within their sphere of influence
- Establishing clear goals for families (i.e. date nights, family nights, intergenerational experiences)
- Launching/offering “family small groups”
- Including family initiative in capital fundraising campaign
- Altering middle school discipleship program to include parents 6x per year
- Building a physical center for family materials
- Giving away free materials from *Focus on the Family* and other ministries
- Leveraging marriage/parenting conference to launch ongoing small groups with family emphasis
- Initial “family services” with take-home ideas
- Special needs family support group on Sunday morning

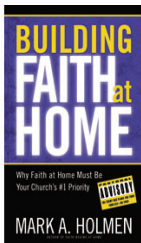


Key Insights:

7. Leverage the existing church vision
8. Don't always come up with a new plan – be consistent
9. Families need to be resourced
10. Create “catalytic” events
11. Work with your existing sphere of influence first
12. Evaluate every ministry through the “family” strategic lens

Building Faith at Home

Mark Holmen gave an executive overview of his church ministry philosophy as detailed in the newly released book *Building Faith at Home*. He shared the story of his own journey from student ministry to a senior pastor who places the home at the top of his church's strategic priorities. He also gave several practical insights from churches that assess every church program through the family lens.



Six Keys for Becoming a Faith-at-Home-Driven Church:

- Recognize the Critical Role of the Senior Pastor
- Language Matters
- Faith at Home Must Be Part of the Strategy of the Church
- “Where Your Treasure Is” Commitment
- Everybody Has a Part to Play
- Long-Term Commitment



Creating A Culture

Steve Stroope and Kurt Bruner gave an update on the Lake Pointe Church initiative through which they are attempting to create a culture of intentional families. They included *HomePointe* in their family initiative in the 2007 capital campaign to generate excitement and funding. A key element of the Lake Pointe strategy is to call every family to create a customized intentionality plan on a trimester basis and to measure church-wide family intentionality annually. (See full PowerPoint overview.)



HomePointe Goals:

- **Cast a Vision for Family Intentionality** (Worship Service)
- **Create a Culture of Family Intentionality** (Small Groups & Media)
- **Coach Family Intentionality** (Physical and Web Resource Center)



Intergenerational Experiences

David Hull and Craig Johnson explained how Lakewood Church is calling parents to pray for their children in a more intentional manner and creating intergenerational experiences co-sponsored by the children's and marriage ministries. Rather than a traditional Vacation Bible School, Lakewood created “A Family Adventure” summer event that brought parents and kids together for faith training and family enrichment.



On Purpose

Todd Olthoff gave an overview of early efforts at Saddleback where they are tying their model for marital health to the “five purposes” which define the overall church structure and strategy. They have aligned the men’s, women’s and small group ministries by changing their success measures and creating a clear pathway for couples who want to build a strong marriage. Because “Purpose Driven” is such a foundational emphasis of the church culture and leadership passion, the team bundled formerly isolated marriage ministries into a sequence of “On Purpose” steps for couples to grow together in faith. They have also launched their first Family Small Groups and Family Worship venue.



Purposeful Marriage Health Measures:

- Surveyed all church couples using www.surveymonkey.com
- Fed results back to small group hosts revealing needs expressed
- Emailed church couples to explain strategy for meeting needs – generating sign-up buzz

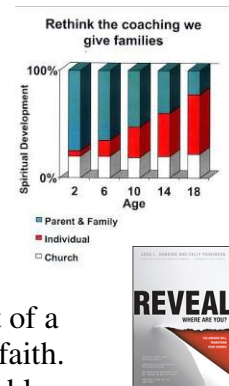
Leveraging Existing Momentum

Jon Vesely and Pat Cimo explained how the Willow Creek team is building upon the existing momentum of the church around results



from the *Reveal* survey to show how faith formation in the home is vital to fulfilling the overall church strategy. Willow has been emphasizing that adult believers should rely less upon the church for spiritual growth as they mature in faith. The family ministry team is

using the same image to help parents understand their role to drive most of a child’s faith formation in the early years in order to nurture the roots of faith. They have also been testing language that seems to work in a culture highly sensitive to inclusion.



Language that seems to work:

- From “family” to “household”
- From “family ministry” to “spiritually growing our congregation”
- From “family service” to “service for all ages”
- From “family resource” to “gather your friends, neighbors, & family members”

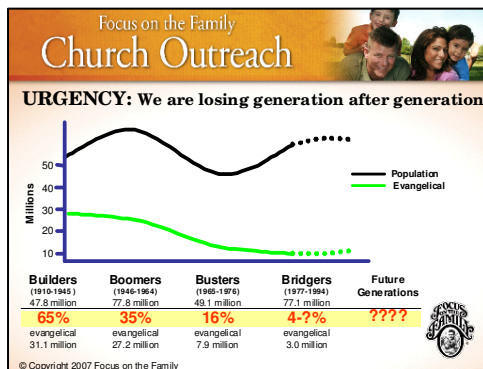
Laying A Strong Foundation

During a visit to TGen (Translational Genomics Research Institute) hosted by Dr. Jeff Trent, the group enjoyed a behind-the-scenes overview of how leading scientists uncover

new treatments and early detection strategies for serious disorders based upon foundational work accomplished through the Human Genome project. Dr. Robert Lewis from Family Life used the occasion to compare church-based family ministry to laying the foundation for a house. While the work is hard and rarely glamorous, everything else depends upon that solid foundation. And while other programs might feel more exciting and glamorous, all of them depend upon strong families.

Research Driven Urgency

Chris Abeyta from *Focus on the Family* gave an overview of what the ministry is learning as they work with churches and families. (See full PowerPoint report.) They find that when leaders understand the trends regarding faith transference it creates a sense of urgency motivating action. Chris described the “illusion” of a successful family that needs to be replaced with a biblical understanding of family health and success.

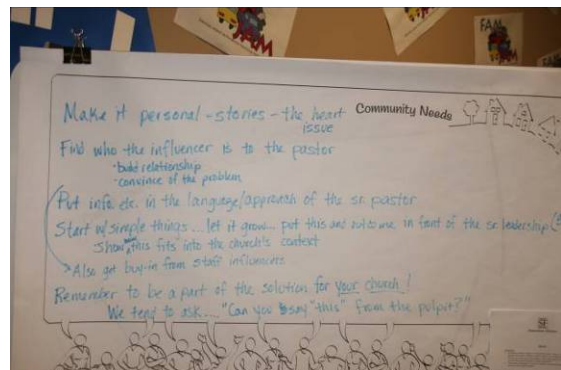


- Income, cars, house
- Marriage is doing OK
- Kids are involved in everything
 - Sports
 - Youth Group
 - School and extra curricular activities
 - Learning Opportunities
 - Good grades
- So busy doing great things!

Creating Leadership Buy-In

The hardest model to change is a model that works. The group discussed why “successful” church ministry models can make it difficult to elevate home-centered faith formation to a senior level priority. Placing themselves in the role of a typical children’s pastor who sees the need when others may not, several ideas for creating buy-in were offered including...

- Pull together data from other churches
- Offer solutions and “quick win” opportunities rather than just problems
- Invite the senior pastor to use his gifts/strengths to help solve a clear need/problem
- Integrate and support the existing leadership vision rather than compete with it
- Use both statistics and real-life stories to paint picture of need
- Give the pastor Mark Holmen’s book to read and discuss with leadership team
- Demonstrate buy-in from other key influencers



Model Components

The group ended their time together by identifying the “Lego piece” components that are essential to building a customized strategy for church-driven, family-centered redemption.



1. Empower a Visionary Champion

If everyone owns it, no one does. Make it clear which senior leader is responsible for keeping family-centered objectives on the team’s radar screen.

2. Establish New Success Measures

What gets measured gets done. Introduce simple measures that will keep family-centered strategies on the radar screen and drive continual improvement.

3. Build Upon Existing Church Vision

Do not compete with or criticize the existing vision. Build upon it to drive family-centered strategies. Don’t call the church to change everything – but to make everything more effective.

4. Build Into Existing Church Calendar

Include experiences that will move people toward greater intentionality on the church calendar rather than try to squeeze them in as exceptions or special events. The more “auto-pilot” your family emphasis gameplan the easier it will be for everyone.

5. Use “Home” Lens for All vs. Creating New Silo

As a priority every area of the church must own, apply “faith at home” lenses to every department and program rather than creating another silo competing for attention and resources.

6. Define Success and Call Families To Commitment

Give families a vision of success and repeatedly call them to commit themselves.

7. Foster A Culture of Family Intentionality

Find ways to communicate the priority and celebrate the practice of families becoming intentional.

8. Customization – One Size Won’t Fit All

Every family is unique due to life-season, ages and number of children, marital health, special circumstances, etc. Create tools that make it easy for families to customize.

9. Invest in Tools for Families

Just like we invest in curriculum for Sunday School, we need to invest in tools that will make it easier for families to do the right thing.

10. Two Degree Strategies

It is better to start small and build momentum than wait until you have a perfect plan with complete buy-in from all sectors.

See the appendix attachments for details on specific church initiatives. For additional information or questions from the Strong Families Innovation Alliance, contact Executive Director Kurt Bruner at kurtb@lakepointe.org

¹ The following churches were represented at the second Innovation Alliance gathering...

- **Lake Pointe Church** in Rockwall, Texas (www.lakepointe.org)
- **Lakewood Church** in Houston, Texas (www.lakewood.cc)
- **Perimeter Church** in Duluth, Georgia (www.perimeterchurch.org)
- **Highlands Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.highlandchurch.org)
- **Willow Creek Community Church** in South Barrington, IL (www.willowcreek.org)
- **Northridge Community Church** in Cave Creek, AZ (www.northridge.org)
- **Saint Peter Lutheran Church** (www.stpeterriley.org)
- **Saddleback Church** in Lake Forest, California (www.saddleback.com)
- **Ventura Missionary Church** in Ventura, California (www.vmc.net)
- **Scottsdale Bible Church** in Scottsdale, Arizona (www.sbcaz.org)
- **Woodmen Valley Chapel** in Colorado Springs, Colorado (www.woodmenvalley.org)