

## **Activity 6.1**

### **A Family Faith Interview**

This assignment is based on Chapter 15 of Garland (1999), *Family Ministry* (InterVarsity).

Each student should conduct an audiotaped family faith interview, using the Interview Guidelines Handout and the Family Faith Interviews Guide. Come prepared to share highlights of the interview with the class, using verbatim quotes that point to a significant aspect of this family's identity, faith, and/or strengths. Ideally, interview a family unit. If no family units are available to you, then interview a member of a family. (it can be someone in the class).

#### **Guidelines for Interviewing**

1. Ask open-ended, nonjudgmental questions that are easily understood.
2. Keep background and demographic questions to a minimum. These are boring and de-energizing. Some of this will come out in the interview. Save the rest until the end.
3. Ask one question at a time.
4. To help create rapport and a reference point for future questions, encourage the interviewee to describe present experiences or activities of a noncontroversial nature.
5. Remember you are there as a learner, not an agent of change. (This is hard for clinically-trained persons.) Be clear with the family about why you are there., and what you will and will not be doing.
6. Listen. Try to put yourself in the place of the person and imagine what the world is like from inside him or her, based on what you are hearing. Put your own thoughts and opinions away for now; there will be time after the interview to think about whether you agree or disagree with what you are hearing.
7. Be encouraging, but do not voice your evaluation of the informant's ideas and conclusions. Even if your evaluation is positive, that assumes that you know more than the informant, or you are just listening to see if the informant agrees with your pre-formed position. It is appropriate to express appreciation for new insights and information ("Wow, I had no idea!" "I've learned so much from you." "You have been really helpful"), but not to express agreement or disagreement ("You are so right; I'm glad you agree with us," or "That just can't be true; you must be biased from working with these folks all the time.") It goes without saying that you are

there to listen to the informant rather than share your own ideas and thoughts, with the unspoken expectation that the informant will agree and support your already-formed conclusions.

8. Give the interviewee time to organize thoughts and respond. Some questions, such as "What do you think our church could do that would really be helpful to families in this community?" require some time for thought. Refrain from making suggestions or leading the person to say what you hope to hear.
9. Take notes during the interview, even if you are audiotaping, just in case the recorder malfunctions. After the interview, flesh out your notes with your observations and thoughts and feelings about what you have experienced.
10. Reflect on the interview--record your analysis, thoughts, emerging ideas about patterns, and ideas about connection to other issues. Without reflection and analysis while you collect data, you may become unfocused, and the amount of data can be overwhelming.
1. Send the person a thank-you note and perhaps share something of what you learned, if appropriate.

### **Family Faith: Suggested Interview Questions**

1. Who is in your family--the inner circle, that is? If there were a tornado that destroyed the area, who would you be absolutely desperate to find? Who could you count on to take care of you if developed a terrible longterm illness, or who would be responsible for seeing that you were taken care of?
2. Children: What are your first memories of this family? What happened after that?
3. Tell me about a typical day in your family now. A typical week.
4. Tell me about something that happened in your family's life--big or small--that pictures your family at its best.
5. What is most important for your family currently? What do you give a lot of attention to?
6. What gives your life together purpose and meaning? Tell me a story about that.
7. What does the word "faith" mean to you? (ask each family member)
8. When have you felt God especially close to your family? (ask for illustration)

9. When have you experienced God's absence in your family's life? (ask for illustration)
10. In what ways has your faith been influenced by living in this family? (Ask for both ways it has been strengthened and ways it may have been challenged or diminished.) Is there a story you can tell about that?
11. Are there things you do together regularly--rituals or habits you share--that express your values as a family?
12. How has the role of faith in your life together changed over time, or has it?
13. Do you ever talk or share in other ways about these things with one another? Tell me about one of the best times you were able to share these things with one another.
14. Are there ways you nurture your faith together, or does it just happen as a part of living?
15. What help do you get from outside your family in living out your commitments and faith? How does the church help?
16. What interferes with your family's ability to live out its commitments and faith? Are these different for different family members? In what ways does the church interfere?
17. What might help you as a family to live your faith together?
18. Tell me a favorite Bible story and what about it speaks to you.
19. Is there anything I should have asked about but didn't?
20. Is there anything you would like to ask me?