



Family Life of Baptists

Using the Church Census questionnaire, 15 Baptist congregations surveyed their attenders to learn how they could minister more effectively with families. Altogether, 3,393 attenders participated in the surveys. This article reports what these congregation attenders said about their families' strengths, stressors, faith behaviors, and felt needs for support from their congregations. The findings suggest approaches for ministry with families. More particularly, the findings indicate that recognizing and equipping families for service in the community and world may be the heart of effective family ministry across all types of families and developmental stages.

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In 1994, the Birmingham (AL) Baptist Association commissioned the first author to design an assessment tool to help congregation leaders understand and minister more effectively with families in their congregations.¹ That initial tool, after many revisions and refinements based on feedback from congregation leaders across the country, became the Church Census (CC). The CC identifies the (1) demographic characteristics of congregation families, (2) the stresses they experience, (3) what makes them strong, (4) how they practice their faith, and (5) what they say they want from their congregations to help their family and other families (Garland & Yankeelov, 1998, 2001; Yankeelov & Garland, 1998, 2004).

The CC is based on a “functional” definition of family; that is, a person’s family consists of those persons who act like family to one another, whether or not those functional roles are congruent with the structural roles of the nuclear family (i.e., parent, child, spouse) (Garland, 1999, 2003). To function as family means to attempt to (1) have one’s needs for belonging and attachment met; (2) meet those needs in others; and (3) share life purposes, help, and resources (Garland, 1999). The word “attempt” in this definition is important; families are not able to meet one another’s needs perfectly in

all these ways, but these are the individuals with whom they are trying. This functional definition of family builds on Bowlby's psychological theory of attachment, which argues that families consist of those persons who are "attached" to one another, who function as secure bases for one another (Bowlby, 1969, 1975, 1988). Often, attachment figures are parents or spouses or siblings, but not always. Attachment figures can include grandparents, aunts or uncles as well as parents, siblings, and spouses. They also can include friends and others who function as kin even though they may not be related biologically. To say that persons function as family for one another is not the same as defining them as "functional" or "dysfunctional," which in popular parlance is a diagnosis of the relative health of family relationships. In the same way, to say that persons are attached to one another does not presume that attachments are entirely healthy, as evidenced by children who are emotionally attached to parents who abuse them.

This sociological definition of family based on function rather than role structures is congruent with a reading of biblical accounts of Jesus' teachings and of the life of the early church, and it serves as the premise for the approach to family ministry that the CC supports. This approach to family ministry posits that Jesus taught that family relationships for his followers are no longer limited to legal and biological relationships, but rather, that adoption is the model of family formation (Garland, 1999, 2002c, 2002d).

MARRIAGE AS ADOPTION

Marriage, for instance, is the penultimate form of adoption. Adam spoke about physiological reality when he greeted Eve with the exclamation, "At last, here is one of my own kind – Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh" (Genesis 2:23, GNB). Now that phrase is used to describe marriage as a symbol of adoption of the spouse as family, as the Apostle Paul notes in Ephesians, "Men ought to love their wives just as they love their own bodies" (5:28). Adoption is to treat another

as one's own flesh and blood, i.e., as kinfolk. Marriage is only one example of adoption in the New Testament, however; Jesus talked about the adoption of mothers and brothers and sisters (Matthew 12:46-50). Many ethnic groups have language for these kin relationships formed by adoption. For a full discussion of biblical and sociological definitions of family, see Garland (1999).

FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION

A functional definition of family creates a more complex challenge than simply asking about marital and parenting status in assessment. In other words, somehow we must learn from respondents who those persons are who function as family for them. The CC has attempted to address this research challenge in various ways through numerous

revisions, now in version 24 and last modified in 2004. Currently, the survey instructions ask respondents to think of "family" as their innermost circle. The survey introduction states that this innermost circle may be:

Relatives, spouses, or children, or they may also be people who feel like family to you and act like family, even though you are not really related to one another. Sometimes people who are part of our closest family are not living in the same household with us. They might be away at school, or working somewhere else, or

there are other reasons they are not living with you, at least for now.

The survey instructs respondents to answer questions with this "closest circle" in mind as the family they are describing.

When asking who the family of each respondent is, the survey first asks respondents to describe the "central adults" in their households, with the following possible choices: (1) married couple (first marriage for both); (2) separated married couple; (3) remarried couple (at least one partner has been married before); (4) unmarried couple; (5) never-married single adult; (6) divorced single adult; (7) roommates/friends; and (8) widowed/single adult. A second question asks respondents to identify oth-

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er adults who live in their household more than half the time and how they are related to the central adults. A third question asks respondents to identify the children in the household by the way they are related to the central adults, with these choices and checking all that apply: (1) biological child(ren); (2) adopted child(ren); (3) step-child(ren); (4) foster child(ren); (5) niece(s), nephew(s); (6) grandchild(ren) living with parent(s) and grandparent(s); and (7) grandchild(ren) living with grandparent(s) (no parent in home). Finally, a fourth question asks respondents to identify persons they consider to be members of their close family (not including the bigger, extended family) that are not living in their household. Checking all that apply, responses include: (1) parents or grandparents; (2) children and teenagers (ages 0-21); (3) adult children (over 21); (4) spouse; (5) ex-spouse; (6) in-laws or former in-laws; (7) brothers and sisters; (8) cousins or other relatives; (9) friends; or (10) all of my close family lives with me. Combining the responses to all four of these questions, the computer analysis identifies respondents' family type. It is a cumbersome definition and results in a wide variety of family types, but this approach identifies the diversity of families in the congregation.

Congregation leaders conduct the CC during a time that most of the attenders are gathered, often during or immediately following weekly gatherings for worship. The instrument is eight pages long and takes 15 to 30 minutes to complete, depending on reading skills and comfort with a survey format. Using such a captive group provides the most comprehensive sample and a greater number of completed instruments. Initially, the CC research team used random samples of the congregation membership, but the team learned quickly that including everyone present at the time was important. Many members expressed dissatisfaction at not being included in the survey; it did not fit the culture of most congregations to limit participation to those with "special" invitations. Second, the random sample of the membership excluded long-term attenders who had not joined the congregation. Third, congregation leaders thought that members

might not be willing to support work based on a survey that did not include all who were present. And finally, many congregation leaders themselves expressed doubt that a survey that did not include everyone could really be "representative" (Yankeelov & Garland, 2004).

DEFINING MEMBERS

The survey does not make the usual distinction between "members" and "visitors," because these categories vary so widely in meaning from congregation to congregation. In some traditions, persons may be actively involved in the life of the congregation for years and yet never seek membership. Some congregations have stringent membership processes and requirements; others simply ask persons to say publicly that they desire membership – and they are voted in by the congregation literally on the spot. Further, most church leaders do not really distinguish between members and attenders in their ministry with congregation families.

Surveys are completely anonymous in distribution and collection. They are seen by no one in the congregation, nor are any names attached. Congregation leaders mail the completed surveys to the School of Social Work's Center for Family and

Community Ministries at Baylor University, home to the Church Census project.² There, the instruments are computer scanned and analyzed. The completed analysis becomes the foundation for a detailed report of findings sent to congregation leaders to serve as a foundation for family ministry planning.

Although not designed as a research tool, the Church Census, nevertheless, has provided a rich mine of data for understanding the lives of families who attend congregations. Garland and Yankeelov reported an initial study conducted in the years 1997-1998 of 32 congregations located in four regions of the country and involving 1,977 respondents and four denominations: National Baptists, Presbyterian Church (USA), Southern Baptists (SBC), and United Methodists (Yankeelov & Garland, 1998). That study of families 10 years ago provided provocative information about congrega-

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tions' families. For example, it found that the most significant challenge to families – to their cohesion, companionship, ability to avoid conflict dominating the family's communication, and adaptability – was the presence of dependent children. That finding held whether the parents were in a first, second or later marriage, or single. The researchers suggested that the challenges of raising children may be the most significant stressor for families, regardless of the nature of the adult relationships in the family. This finding was congruent with David Olson's (1989) earlier research with nuclear families that suggested that intra-family strains, such as husband-wife conflict and chores not getting done, are most apparent during the years of family life when there are school-age and adolescent children in the home. The study also found that remarried families and single-parent families have more stress than first-marriage families.

The 1997-1998 study discovered striking similarities in families across types. Families were more alike than different in the proportion of those who struggled with communication, decision-making, and conflict management. Family conflict created some of the most common stressors for families, and that conflict was more often between parent-child or other family relationships than between spouses. Interestingly, systems outside the family were the most frequent stressors families reported, as indicated by these items: difficulty on the job for a family member (55%) and tasks and chores that don't get done (presumably because of time pressures) (44%). Finances created stress for 35% of the families. Conflict also appeared to be a common stressor, as indicated in these items: "parent-child conflict" (33%), "a number of unsolved problems" (32%), "conflict in another family relationship" (30%), and "disagreement about friends or activities" (27%). Serious illness or disability (37%), and death in a close relationship (33%) also were frequent stressors. These families also reported that they had experienced a natural disaster such as flood or fire (6%) more frequently than a sexual affair (5%) or a difficult pregnancy (5%). Physical harm of one family member by another created stress for 7% of

these families. Families reporting the most stressors scored significantly lower on the family strengths dimensions of ability to handle conflict, cohesion, adaptability, and companionship, than families that experienced fewer stressors.

FAITH MATURITY SCALE

The 1997 version of the Church Census included the Faith Maturity Scale (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1993). The study found that seeking spiritual support was significantly more important for single-parent families than it was for other types of families. Single-parent families were joined by single, senior adults in the importance they gave to life in the faith community and advocating for social change. The Baptist families, more so than families in other denominations, emphasized and anchored their faith in what the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) refers to as the vertical dimension of faith, or the relationship between persons and God.



This vertical dimension is defined as connecting one's beliefs to daily life and commitments, engaging in spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, Bible study), and being involved in the faith community. The FMS defines the horizontal dimension of faith as holding life-affirming values (expressed in items that address such concerns as valuing diversity, speaking out for equality, and a commitment to reducing pain and suffering in others) and being involved in social justice activities. This horizontal dimension was much more descriptive of the faith of Presbyterians, Methodists, and National Baptists than of Southern Baptists in the 1997-1998 sample. Social justice was a particularly significant focus of the faith of National Baptists in this sample. That is, although Southern Baptists and National Baptists share an emphasis on the vertical dimension of faith, National Baptists emphasize the horizontal dimension significantly more and Southern

Baptists significantly less than Presbyterians and United Methodists.

Based on the earlier study, the research team revised the CC and has since used it with a diversity of congregations across denominations and throughout regions of the country. The current study examines in more depth the relationships between family structures and demographics, strengths, and stressors, plus a new area of inquiry about the faith behaviors of respondents and their families. In addition, it explores the most common areas of need that respondents think their congregations can address to help families. The next section describes in more detail the current data that the Church Census gathers and the sample of congregations on which this new study is based.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The CC obtains five kinds of information about the families of respondents: (1) demographic data; (2) family interaction processes; (3) stressors families have experienced in the past year; (4) faith practices; and (5) perceived needs for congregational support.

Demographic Data

Several of the demographic questions relate to defining the families of respondents, as described in the previous section. Two categories of information are thus obtained: individual data and family data. Individual data include every survey completed. In determining the range and prevalence of family types in a given congregation, however, it is important to count each family unit only once. Families vary dramatically in the number of members present for the survey; a family of six, for example, will submit six surveys. In order to avoid distortion of the findings, the team uses only the oldest family member's survey as an index or, if the individual was the only family member present, the "only" family member. In order to determine who belongs to the same family, the team uses a household code that each respondent provides, which consists of the last four digits of the main household phone number and the digits of the street address. When those codes match, the team

assumes that those respondents live in the same household and so their surveys are counted as one family unit. This method creates distortions of its own, because some families may live in multiple households (e.g., college students away at school, elderly parents in assisted living, commuting spouses). No method of determining from individual, anonymous surveys who belongs to which family group is flawless, however, and this method seems to create fewer distortions than others that were tried (Garland & Yankeelov, 1998). In addition to these questions about family type, the CC asks typical demographic questions concerning income, gender, and ethnicity. It also includes items of particular interest to church leaders, such as how many hours other than sleeping that respondents have with their families during a "typical" weekday, how far they live from the church facility, and whether or not all the members of their household attend the same church.

Family Interaction Processes

The 1997 version of the CC included a list of 50 "Family Strengths and Challenges" based on



the pioneering research of David Olson (1989) and Nick Stinnett and his colleagues (Stinnett, Sanders, DeFrain, & Parkhurst, 1982; Stinnett & Stinnett, 1995; Stinnett, Stinnett, Beam, & Alice, 1999). Example items included: "We listen to one another," "We manage our money well," and "We shift chores and jobs when we need to." Respondents indicated the extent to which each item describes their family using a four-point Likert scale. The 1997-1998 study conducted a principal axis factor analysis on the responses to these items and identified four factors: cohesion and commitment, handling family conflict constructively, companionship, and flexibility. Based on factor loadings and reliabilities in this earlier study, items

were revised and the number reduced in the current version to the 17 items that best predict the four factors. Examples include: “We support each other during hard times” and “We are proud of our family” (cohesion and commitment); “We avoid blaming one another” and “When we are angry, we talk it out rather than grabbing, slapping, hitting, or throwing things at one another” (handling family conflict constructively); “We like one another’s friends” and “We are involved in serving and caring for others beyond our own family” (companionship); and “We compromise when we need to” and “We try new solutions when old ones no longer work” (flexibility).

Stressors

The Families Stressors Checklist in the 1997 version of the instrument contained 28 items. Based on focus groups of respondents who gave feedback on the survey and responses written on surveys, that listing has been expanded to 39 items, grouped in five categories: physical and emotional health (e.g., “serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend, or relative”; “infertility”; “abuse of alcohol or drugs”); interpersonal relationships (e.g., “too much marriage conflict,” “physically hurting one another,” “sexual affair”); work, school, and other outside activities (e.g., “a parent away from home a lot,” “adults don’t like children’s friends”); home, community, and neighborhood (e.g., “a move from one home to another,” “natural disaster,” “dangerous neighborhood”); and money (e.g., “financial strain,” “unemployment”).

Faith Practices

The Faith Maturity Scale used in the earlier versions has been eliminated. Although it provided interesting research data, it focused more on the faith of individuals than on the faith of families, and thus did not have the direct practical application for family ministry. Recent research has identified a faith dimension in family life that takes expression in the ways families talk and act together (Garland, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b). Therefore, a section titled “Living Our Faith” replaced the FMS beginning in the 2002 version of the Church Census. The lists of faith practices developed by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra from their work in the fields of Christian education and theology served as the foundation for this section

(Bass, 1997; Bass & Dykstra, 1997; Dykstra, 1986, 1991, 1999). This list has been revised for the current version, based on feedback of consultants and congregations using the CC. It now consists of 18 faith practices and asks respondents to indicate how often (“daily,” “weekly,” “monthly,” “less often,” “never”) they engage in each of these behaviors individually and as a family. Two remaining activities were limited to family behaviors: “eat together” and “do chores together.”

Perceived Needs for Congregational Support

Based on the request of congregation leaders, the team added the final section of the survey, “How the Church Can Help.” This section asks respondents to indicate from a list of 47 items “up to six with which you would like your church to help your family and other families.” These 47 items are grouped into four sections: family home life (e.g., “communication skills,” “handling conflict and anger”); specific challenges (e.g., “building friendships as a family,” “depression/mental illness”); family ministry (e.g., “serving others outside our family,” “working as a family for more justice in the world”); and family stages (e.g., “dating and romantic relationships,” “grandparents raising children”).

SAMPLE

The earlier study involved 32 congregations representing four denominations. Frequent revisions of the instrument in response to the feedback of church leaders have made it virtually impossible to compare congregational data across these different revisions. Also, the research team has not sought congregations for study since the 1997-1998 study. Rather, the team has worked with those who have asked to use the Church Census for planning purposes. The largest group of congregations using the 2004 (latest) version of the survey is Baptists. Therefore, this study reports data from 15 Baptist congregations. Although there are a number of congregations from other denominations that have used the CC, the research team decided to limit this study to one denominational group so that any possible differences due to denomination would be controlled. Some of the participating congregations were affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, some with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and some with both. In total, 3,393 individuals completed surveys, ranging from

n = 38 to n = 1005, with an average of n = 226 surveys per congregation. The churches are located in 12 states: Alabama, California, Colorado (n = 2), Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas (n = 3), and Virginia. The congregations volunteered to complete the survey and so are in no way a representative sample of all Baptist congregations. Nevertheless, they do provide opportunity to compare different kinds of families within these congregations on the several dimensions of the Church Census. The descriptions of these Baptist families can suggest interesting hypotheses for ministry with families in other congregational contexts.

FINDINGS

Based on family data (counting only “oldest” or “only” family members present), married couples (with and without children) represent 70% of the families in these congregations (n = 1070); of these, 25% are in a second marriage (n = 354). In the general U.S. population, only 19% of households consist of married couples. Moreover, an additional 9.1% of families in the congregations are “remnants” (Marler, 1995) of married couple families; they are widowed single adults (n = 183). This is almost double the percentage of widows in the larger population (.06%). Another 10.2% are divorced single adult families (n = 201), mirroring the 10.2% of those divorced in the adult U.S. population. Less than 1% of families are unmarried couples or separated couples (n = 27); 7% are single never-married adult families (n = 145); and an additional 3% report friends or roommates as family (n = 52). There are not enough unmarried or separated couples or friends/roommates families to include a more detailed analysis.

Based on individual data (i.e., counting all surveys), 36% of respondents are 60 or older (n = 1227); and 13% are teenagers (n = 423). These congregations thus over-represent older adults; in the general population, 16.3% are 65 or older. The population of pre-teens and teens appears to mirror the general population, in which 14% are ages 10 to 19. The survey was limited to those 12 and older. Therefore, it appears that teenagers also are over-represented in these congregations when compared to the general U.S. population. The smallest group of respondents are those in their 20s (7%, n = 235), a finding that corresponds to

the anecdotal data that young adults are dropping out of congregational life. Although data categories do not correspond exactly, the U.S. Census records that 20% of the population is age 20 to 34. In this CC study, 12% are in their 30s (n = 383); 17% in their 40s (n = 555); and 17% in their 50s (n = 558).⁴ Based on family data, almost half (49%, n = 1028) of these congregation families report no children in the household under 22 years of age. Nevertheless, there are still far more families with children in these congregations than in the general U.S. population, in which only 12% have children age 18 or younger. Children in these congregation families span the ages; 11% have preschoolers (n = 231); 16% have elementary age children (n = 343); and 17% have teenagers (n = 370). Of course, some families have children in two or more age groups. In short, these congregations have a greater proportion of both younger families and older adults, and fewer young adults, than the general population.

This sample was predominantly White/Euro-American (92%, n = 1965); only 5% are Black/African-American (n = 43), and only 1% or less are Native-American/Indian, or Asian/Pacific Islander or Hispanic (n = 121).

Based on family data, family incomes range from less than \$15,000 to more than \$90,000, with a median income in the range of \$45,000 to \$89,000. The 2004 median income in the United States was \$44,684. In this sample, 63% of adults have college degrees, compared with 17% of the U.S. population, and 27% have graduate degrees, compared with 10% of the U.S. population. For 10%, a high school degree is their highest level of education; 2% have obtained vocational training. Only 2% have not completed high school. Therefore, these congregations are more highly educated than the general U.S. population.

Some of these families have less than an hour per day together on an “average day of the week” (10%). Nevertheless, almost 70% have three or more hours per day together, and 36% have more than five hours together per day. In other words, although these families may be busy, they have a good portion of their time together, even if it is “busy” time.

Families and Stress

Respondents were instructed to mark all items in a list of 37 possible causes of family stress, grouped in

five categories: (1) physical and emotional health; (2) interpersonal relationships; (3) work, school, and other outside activities; (4) home, community, and neighborhood; and (5) money.

The predominant stressors in their lives.

Four of the top five stressors reported by all respondents are in the physical and mental health category: 33% named serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend or relative as a stress for their family in the past year; 26% named death of a family member, close friend or relative; and 24% cited depression or other serious emotional problems. In addition, 27% named financial strain as a stress for their family. We looked at various subgroups of respondents and the five stressors they reported most commonly.

BY AGE GROUP

Teenagers

Teenagers feel the stressors their families report: 34% of them also named death of a family member, close friend or relative; 28% named serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend or relative; and 27% marked depression or other serious emotional problems. Unique to their age group, 25% reported school problems and 24% too much parent-child conflict.

Twenties

Among those in their 20s, 61% reported financial strain; 38% named problems balancing work and family; and 30% listed moving from one home to another. Even for this group, 31% reported stress from serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend or relative; and 31% cited depression or other serious emotional problems.

Thirties

Those in their 30s look very much like those in their 20s, although financial strain is somewhat less common (47%). They continue to report stress from trying to balance work and family (38%) and from moving from one home to another (30%). A new issue in this age group is stress from difficulty on the job for a family member (30%). They con-

tinue to be stressed by serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend or relative (31%) and by depression or other serious emotional problems (29%).

Forties

Those respondents in their 40s are experiencing growing problems in balancing work and family (40%). Financial strain is back in the picture for this age group (39%). As with other age groups, stress from serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend or relative (35%) and from depression or other serious emotional problems (32%) continue to be prevalent. In addition, death of a family member, close friend or relative (28%) has entered the list of the top five most prevalent stressors.

Fifties

Those respondents in their 50s carry the dominant stressors of younger groups, with those in the physical and emotional health category more prevalent. That category will continue to dominate the list of top stressors for senior adults. Adults in their 50s report stress from serious illness or disability of a family member, close friend or relative (46%); caring for a sick or disabled family member (38%); the death of a family member,

close friend or relative (36%); and depression or other serious emotional problems (34%). Financial strain is still present for more than a third (36%) of this age group.

Sixties - plus

For those respondents age 60 and older, fewer report financial strain (19%). Those stressors in the physical and emotional health category are most common, although they are not much more so than in younger groups: 49% report stress from the serious illness or disability of a family member, close relative or friend; 36% from the death of a family member, close friend or relative; 27% from caring for a sick or disabled family member; and 24% from depression or other serious emotional problems.

SUMMARY OF AGE STRESSORS

Several stressors are inherent in all age groups,



such as depression or other serious emotional problems and caring for the seriously ill or dealing with the death of a family member, close friend or relative. For those under the age of 20, conflict with a parent and problems with school are major sources of stress. Financial strain becomes a stressor for those in their 20s, decreasing slowly through the adult years. Stress from trying to balance work and family is prevalent even for those in their 20s, increasing through the 30s and 40s, presumably when there are dependent children in the home for many, and then dropping during the 50s and later decades. Those in their 20s and 30s often are stressed by mobility – moving from one home to another; and those in their 30s by difficulty on the job.

By family type

We also looked at stressors that are characteristic of different types of families across the age groups, as characterized by the marital status of the adults: married couples, remarried couples, never-married adults, single divorced adults, and widowed single adults. The most common stressors for all family types are dealing with the illness or disability of a family member, ranging from 36% for widowed singles to 40% for married couples and divorced singles; and death, ranging from 29% for married couples to, as one might expect, 56% for widowed singles. Depression or other serious emotional problems also appeared in the list of the top five stressors across all family types, ranging from 27% for married couples and widowed singles to 37% for divorced singles. Financial strain also was common across family types, ranging from 25% for widowed singles to 50% for divorced singles.

There also were some stressors that were uniquely reported as most common for each type of family. Married couples reported problems balancing work and family (25%). Caring for a sick or disabled family member stresses remarried couples (28%), never-married adults (26%), and widowed single adults (21%).

Using a univariate analysis of variance, we found significant differences in the numbers of stressors

reported by individuals classified by family type ($F [7,3265] = 17.007, p < 0.001$), and Bonferroni's multiple comparison procedure found several differences among the family types: individuals in divorced families reported a significantly higher number of stressors on average when compared to married (mean diff = 0.6744, $p = 0.001$), never-married (mean diff = 0.8586, $p = 0.053$), and widowed families (mean diff = 1.57, $p < 0.001$). Widowed families reported lower numbers of stressors on average. Significant differences also were found between married and remarried families (mean diff = 0.6393, $p < 0.001$), with remarried families reporting significantly more stressors. No significant difference was found between separated families, remarried families, and divorced families.

These families need congregations to be communities that support them in practical ways with the tasks of child rearing.

Families with children

Teenagers across all family types reported stress in their families from depression or other serious emotional problems (26% to 31%) and too much parent-child conflict (21% married couple families, 35% remarried couples, and 31% divorced single families). They reported difficulty in stepfamily relationships for remarried couple families (35%) and divorced single families (38%). Children of divorced single families have greater numbers of stressors than other families and report financial strain (63%), divorce or separation (42%), disagreement about friends or activities (37%), and too much other conflict or strain (38%).

Lack of gender differences

No gender differences for sources of stress were found in the sample as a whole or by age groups or different types of households.

Other family characteristics associated with stress

A number of characteristics of families are associated with greater numbers of stressors, including family members not attending the same church, brevity of marriage, age, and to a lesser extent, the presence of children in the home, distance from church, and level of education. Those families in

which all members attend the same church report 3.35 stressors, compared to only 3.13 for those individuals who live alone, and 5.27 and 5.65 for those who have members attending other congregations or not at all. The longer the marriage, the less the number of stressors: those married five years or less report 4.74 stressors, 4.53 for those married five to 13 years, 3.59 for those married 14 to 22 years, and 2.89 for those married 23 or more years. Unmarried respondents report an average of 3.61 stressors. Teenagers ($X = 4.18$) and those ages 30 to 54 years ($X = 4.10$) report more stressors than those in their 20s ($X = 3.86$), 55 to 64 year olds ($X = 3.77$), and those 65 years and older ($X = 2.18$).

Adults with children in the home report an average of 3.39 stressors, compared to 2.82 for those without children. Respondents in a marital separation report an average of 5.32 stressors, compared to 4.11 for single divorced persons, 3.75 for remarried persons, 3.23 for never-married single persons, 2.94 for married persons, and 1.87 for single widowed persons.

The farther respondents live from church, the greater numbers of stressors they report: those less than 15 minutes from church report an average of 3.09 stressors compared to 3.31 for those 15 to 30 minutes from church and 4.15 for those more than 30 minutes from church. This finding probably speaks to the difference in lifestyles of those who live in geographically defined communities versus those who commute to life activities (work, church, shopping, schools, etc.) across a larger region.

Those respondents with graduate school educations report 3.50 stressors, compared to 2.87 for those with less than a high school education, 3.27 for those with college educations, and 3.03 for those with high school or vocational education degrees.

The relationship between family strength and family stress

We used a multivariate analysis of variance to explore the ratings of the five categories of family strength across the three most common types of families – married, remarried, and divorced. Significant differences were found among

the categories for the family types ($\lambda^5 = .972$, $F [10, 4904] = 7.111$, $p < 0.001$). There are differences among the family types for Family Cohesion ($F = 21.846$, $p < 0.001$), Adaptability and Flexibility ($F = 13.311$, $p < 0.001$), Companionship ($F = 25.753$, $p < 0.001$), and Community Connections ($F = 6.975$, $p = 0.001$), but not for Conflictual Communications. Contrasts between the types reveals the difference exists in the divorced families in Family Cohesion ($\psi = -0.214$, $p < 0.001$), Conflictual Communications ($\psi = -0.117$, $p = 0.033$), Adaptability and

Flexibility ($\psi = -0.284$, $p < 0.001$), Companionship ($\psi = -0.357$, $p < 0.001$), and Community Connections ($\psi = -0.197$, $p = 0.001$), with divorced singles having significantly

lower mean ratings overall.

Using Pearson's correlation, a significant negative relationship was found among all five categories of family strength and the numbers of family stressors respondents named. The number of stressors an individual acknowledged is inversely related to their commitment to Family Cohesion ($r = -.263$, $p < 0.001$), the Conflictual Communications within their family ($r = -.319$, $p < 0.001$), and Companionship ($r = -.238$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the stronger the family, the fewer stressors they acknowledge. This study corroborates the findings of the 1997-1998 study.

MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS ABOUT FAMILIES AND STRESS

Many families in these congregations are stressed by physical and mental illness, disability, and the death of those they cherish. In addition, financial strain creates stress for many families. These problems span the age groups and family types, and although they may be more or less a struggle at different life stages, and certainly for divorced and remarried families, congregations can offer help in managing these kinds of life stressors in ways that follow from and use the beliefs and values of Christian faith. Congregations may find the issues of responding to mental illness and financial strain less familiar than dealing with physical illness and



death, but for that reason these issues are important to address in supportive and practical ways. Those families with children have more stress than those who do not, corroborating findings from the earlier study. These families need congregations to be communities that support them in practical ways with the tasks of child rearing. The findings by age group suggest areas of possible focus for those ministry programs that target by age group.

Those attenders who have family members in other congregations or not attending any congregation have much higher numbers of stressors in their lives, indicating that this group could benefit from support and practical guidance in addressing the stressors that may be created or exacerbated by a faith-divided family. Family ministry programs that do not recognize the circumstances of these families actually may create more stress if they emphasize the differences between faith-divided families from those families who are “all in.”

**HOW FAMILIES ARE
LIVING THEIR FAITH**

Overall, the four most common activities these respondents engage in on a daily basis by themselves were: pray (86%), forgive others (56%), encourage others (51%), and act in caring ways for the world (43%). The four most common activities engaged in on a daily basis *with family* were: eat (74%), pray (54%), forgive others (42%), and encourage others (41%). The four most common activities engaged in on a weekly basis *for families* were: worship (78%), give money to church or charity (48%), observe the Sabbath (56%), and do chores (31%). The four most common activities engaged in on a weekly basis *for individuals* were: worship (79%), observe the Sabbath (59%), give money to church or charity (48%), and study the Bible (35%).

The fourth most frequent weekly activity was study the Bible for individuals (38%; 30% for families), and talk and listen to one another about deepest thoughts for families (32%; 37% for individuals). The four activities that individuals are most likely never to do are: study church doctrine (36%), provide hospitality to others (18%), share

the Christian story (18%), and discuss how Christians should respond to current issues (11%). The four activities that families are most likely never to do together are: study Christian doctrine (48%), share the Christian story (29%), study the Bible (26%), and confess sins (24%).

For each respondent, each variable was coded as “1” if the activity was done on a daily basis, “2” on a weekly basis, down to “5,” which indicated that activity was never done. In order to determine if any particular activity was done more individually than as a family, 18 new variables were created, each reflecting the difference in the “personal” score and the “with family” score. For example, if a respondent indicated that he studied the Bible on his own on a daily basis (original score = 1) but as a family on a monthly basis (original score = 3), the value for his new variable would be 1 – 3 = -2. Negative values indicate the activity is done more so as an individual than as a family; positive values

indicate the activity is done more as a family than as an individual. Only the 1,002 respondents with an answer for both questions (“on my own” and “with family”) were assigned a new value for this variable.

As Graph 1 illustrates, respondents say that they engage in every faith behavior more individually than they do as families. Those items toward the top are engaged in far more often as individuals than are those toward the bottom of the scale. For example, respondents say that they engage in activities such as confessing

sins, studying the Bible, and praying much more often as individuals than as families. They say that they are only somewhat more likely to provide hospitality, give money, and accept gifts and care from others gratefully as individuals; they engage in these activities almost as often as families.

**MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS
ABOUT FAMILY FAITH PRACTICES**

These findings can be viewed as a glass half empty or half full. Bible study and prayer historically have been considered important daily practices of Baptists. Although most respondents (86%) pray

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on a daily basis, only a slim majority (55%) pray together as families on a daily basis. For a tradition that prides itself on biblical foundations, less than one-fourth of individuals study their Bibles on a daily basis, although that rises to 62% weekly, which is probably a result of Sunday School and weekly Bible study groups. Studying the Bible daily together as families is clearly not a family activity (5%). Families are far

more likely to be engaged in caring for the created world as families – 30% daily and more than 50% weekly; caring for others in need – 11% daily and 41% weekly; providing hospitality – 5% daily and 22% weekly; and helping their community be a better place – 14% daily and 30% weekly. These examples suggest that families are more likely to be engaged in the world around them as expressions of their faith than to be engaged in studying the Bible together. A majority also reports forgiving and encouraging others and talking and listening to one another's deepest thoughts on at least a weekly basis. Of course, a minority does not. These findings take on ministry implications when we look at the areas in which these respondents suggest they could use help from their congregations.

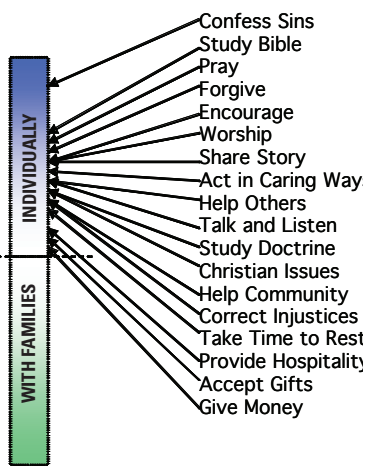
HOW THE CONGREGATION CAN HELP

Respondents marked up to six items in a list of 47 to indicate ways in which they would like to see their church help families. Overall, respondents most commonly reported that they would like to see their church help in the areas of:

1. Serving others outside our family (26.8%);
2. Family prayer and devotional time (21.8%);
3. Communication skills (20.6%);
4. Developing healthy habits – eating, exercise, rest, and recreation (19.9%);
5. Developing a strong marriage (19.6%); and
6. Talking about our faith together (18.5%)

By age

Help in serving others outside our family was the most commonly named need across all age groups except those in their 20s and 30s, for whom de-



Graph 1. Relative frequency with which respondents engage in faith behaviors as individuals and as families.

veloping a strong marriage was the most commonly named need (40% and 39%, respectively), followed by help in serving others. The second most commonly named need for teenagers through those in their 40s was family prayer and devotional time, ranging from 22% of teens to 34% of those in their 30s. In addition, those in their 20s and 30s ask for help with family Bible study (27% and 30%, respectively). Teenagers (23%), those in their 50s (23%), and those age 60 and older (25%)

named developing healthy habits – eating exercise, rest, and recreation – as a need.

Other needs that individuals look for the church to meet reflect stage of life. Teens are interested in help with dating and romantic issues (25%), communication skills (25%), and with handling conflict and anger (24%). Individuals in their 20s need help managing money (28%). In the 30s and 40s, an added need is help in parenting children and teenagers (29% and 27%, respectively). Those in their 40s also ask for help guiding their teenagers around the subject of sexuality (23%). For those in their 50s, a major need from the church is guidance and help in caring for aging family members such as parents or other close relatives (27% and 28%, respectively).

By family type

Similarly, help with “serving others outside our family” ranked first or second for every different kind of family in the sample, with the exception of never-married adult families, for whom it ranked fourth. Nevertheless, never-married adult families ranked it above items like dating, preparing for marriage, and romance and sexuality in single life. Handling conflict and anger and needs dealing with reconciliation and forgiving are important to 22% of individuals in situations of divorce. As indicated, more than 20% of never-married families are looking for guidance from the church in the areas of dating and sexuality, as well as in money management. Widowed families need help from the church in the areas of death and grief (28%) and coping with crises (21%). Table 1 lists those items that 20% or more respondents in each family type indicated was a need.

Needs cited by teenagers

For teenagers in these families, serving others outside our family once again is named as a need across the parenting types of divorced single (33%), remarried couple (34%), and married couple (26%) families. Children of married couples also ask for help in handling conflict and anger (25%), an item not named by the parents; dating and romantic relationships (24%); and communication skills (23%). Children of remarried couples also ask for help in the areas of communication skills (28%) and handling conflict and anger (28%). In addition, they also include developing healthy habits (26%) and family prayer and devotional time (23%). Children of divorced single parents named a greater number of needs: coping with crises (42%); single parenting (33%); divorce — before, during, and after (33%); family prayer and devotional time (33%); and understanding personality differences (25%).

There were some significant differences in cited needs between teenage boys and girls. Girls named as needs: serving others outside our family (30.5%); handling conflict and anger (27.5%); and developing healthy habits — eating, exercise, rest, and recreation (28.1%). In contrast, boys named: communication skills (33.8%); understanding personality differences (23.8%); and dating and romantic relationships (27.5%).

The relationship of requests for help and number of stressors

The number of stressors is positively related to the number of needs respondents expressed in categories such as Home Life ($r = .185, p < 0.001$), Specific Challenges ($r = .140, p < 0.001$), Family Ministry ($r = .035, p = 0.04$), and Family Stages ($r = .192, p < 0.001$). The direction of this relationship is not clear. It may be that stress undermines the perceived strengths of families, as indicated by the strength scales, and so they are asking for more support from their congregation. On the other hand, it may be that family strengths protect families from experiencing some stressors.

It is interesting that although the relationship between items checked in the family ministry



area and number of stressors is significant, this relationship nevertheless is not as strong as other areas of request for help from the congregation, as indicated by the small value of the correlation coefficient r . In other words, even for those with significant numbers of life stressors, the desire for help in “serving others beyond the family,” “caring for God’s created world,” and “working as a family for more justice in the world” is still a need highly sought from the church.

Families experiencing significant

levels of stress still want to find ways to serve others and the world around them.

MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS

A majority of these families already is engaged in their communities — serving others in need, caring for the created world, offering hospitality, seeking more justice in the world and stronger communities — and still list help in these areas at the top of their requests from their congregations. These are the faith practices that they are most likely to engage in with their families. Secondly, although a majority of respondents already pray with their families and talk to one another about their deepest concerns, they want help in strengthening their prayer and devotional time and in their communication with one another. These are the practices that they currently engage in more as individuals than as families.

In other words, it is not in the areas where families are least engaged, but rather in the areas where they are *most* engaged in faith practices that they are asking for support — serving beyond their families, praying together, and talking with one another about the things that matter. These felt needs hold across the age groups, from teens to older adults. They also hold across families; even those who are most stressed by life circumstances want to be involved in meaningful ways in serving others and in caring for and seeking justice in the larger world.

There also are some needs that are age and life-situation specific. For instance, both teenagers and older adults are interested in developing healthy lifestyles, perhaps creating the potential for cross-generational programming. Other areas

are rather predictable, and yet confirm the significance of these issues: young adults are asking for help in strengthening their marriages; teenagers and singles are interested in romance and dating relationships; teenagers are concerned with communication skills and anger management. It needs to be noted that this is a request for help with families, so their concern may be in communication and anger management in family relationships. Parents ask for help with parenting issues and guiding teenagers in dealing with sexuality. Older adults ask for help in caring for frail elderly family members. Children in divorced families indicate a need for help in coping with crisis, divorce, and single parenting. Again, they are seeking help for their families, not just for themselves.

Perhaps the most interesting challenge for the church is to offer guidance and support for families in these common areas of concern that are grounded in the beliefs and values of the Christian faith. Families can go to schools and community centers for marriage or parent education or anger or money management, but only the church can ground these life issues in Christian values and practices. Similarly, families can go to any number of social service agencies seeking volunteers and find ample opportunities to serve their communities. There are a myriad of “walks” for various causes, community cleanups, and so on. These families are asking their churches to ground their service in Christian mission. They not only want to offer charity, they want to strengthen their communities. The data suggest that these families are seeking an integration of the life of service with the life of prayer and worship.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings cannot be generalized beyond the 15 Baptist congregations they represent. These congregations are unique in that their leaders are so concerned about ministering with families that they sought out the Church Census as a guide for family ministry planning. We can conjecture, therefore, that families already were a central focus

for these congregations. These were congregations that had ministry programs in place, which may be why so many families were engaged in some of the faith practices, such as service to their community and caring for others in need. Also, they are Baptists. The 1997-1998 surveys found some significant differences by denominational groups on the Faith Maturity Scale and some of the demographic areas, such as income and ethnicity. The Baptist congregations in this sample were overwhelmingly Anglo and thus the findings cannot be generalized to other ethnic groups.

It is time in this article to issue the usual call that “more research is needed.” Indeed, it is. We need

similar studies of other denominations and religious traditions and cultural groups if we are going to minister to families in ways that engage them where they most need support and in ways that are sensitive to their life experiences. It would be helpful to know if the findings of this study hold in Baptist and other congregations for whom “family” has not been a central focus.

With these limitations in mind, the findings suggest that much more attention needs to be given to family service to the community and involvement in issues

of environmental and social justice as the heart of ministry with families. Perhaps these families are telling us that the focus of the church needs to be centered on ways families can minister to the world. Engagement in mission is family faith in action. Development of other faith practices, such as marriage and parent education, and family prayer and Bible study, and attention to issues such as communication and anger management and finances, and caring for the sick and grieving over the death of cherished ones, are not just family life education. They are part of the fabric of equipping families and strengthening them in faith and love for the ministry to which they feel called.

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Table 1: Most commonly identified needs by family type.

Marital Type	Most Frequently Scored Items on the “How the church can help” List	Individuals in these Family Types Who Marked Each Item
Married couple	Serving others outside our family	27.4%
	Developing a strong marriage	20.8%
	Family Bible study	20.6%
	Developing healthy habits – eating, exercise, rest, recreation	20.2%
	Communication skills	20%
Remarried couples	Serving others outside our family	29.6%
	Developing a strong marriage	24.8%
	Family prayer and devotional time	23.1%
	Communication skills	20.4%
	Family Bible study	19.6%
Never-married	Talking about our faith together	19.6%
	Developing healthy habits – eating, exercise, rest, recreation	24.8%
	Communication skills	24.2%
	Caring for sick, disabled, or aging family members	23.5%
	Serving others outside our family	23.0%
	Dating and romantic relationships	21.8%
	Preparing for marriage	21.2%
	Romance and sexuality in single life	20.6%
Divorced single	Managing money	20.0%
	Serving others outside our family	25.1%
	Developing healthy habits – eating, exercise, rest, recreation	22.4%
	Confession, forgiving, reconciling after hurt	22.0%
	Caring for sick, disabled, or aging family members	22.0%
Widowed single	Handling conflict and anger	21.5%
	Death and grief	27.7%
	Serving others outside our family	25.1%
	Coping with crises	20.4%

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END NOTES

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- 2 For a full discussion of biblical and sociological definitions of family, see Garland (1999).
- 3 Those interested in using the Church Census for planning and/or research can find a sample copy on the Web site: <http://www.baylor.edu/cfcm/>.
- 4 Percentages do not always add to 100%; we rounded numbers to the nearest whole for clarity.
- 5 Wilks' Lambda