

World Methodist Conference 2016
Family Life Committee Workshop
Friday, September 2, 2016

PRESENTATION 1 – Changing Models of Family – Bishop Teresa E. Snorton, Committee Chair

Bishop Snorton is the Presiding Bishop of the Fifth Episcopal District of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) and Ecumenical Officer for the denomination.

A. Modern Definitions

Family is a word that has undergone a variety of changes throughout the years of human history. Modern definitions lead us to think about at least two constructs – the **nuclear family** and the **extended family**. The first one is a newer, more western, post-modern way of thinking about family as a single unit of persons, consisting of parents and children. Sometimes called the “elementary” family, the **nuclear family** focus is on a single household in which adults provide sustenance and nurture to children. Originally, the nuclear family was regarded as a married couple with its own biological children. Changes in the construct, the wider prevalence of divorce, long-distance marriages, and other economic and demographic variables have redefined the nuclear family to include blended families, where the children may be from prior marriages, and all other kinds of variations, including families in which the parents represent a same-sex marriage or relationship, or the children are adopted.

Other changes have led to the emergence of the **single-parent family**, where by way of divorce, or other separation (imprisonment, military service, employment in another location, death, etc.), there is only one parent in the home. In many cultures, single-parent families bear a “stigma” and are often regarded as deficient in some way. Judgement is often imposed on the single-parent as a “failure”. Women in particular bear the burden of these dispersions, although increasing men/fathers are choosing to raise their children without the presence of mothers in the home. Judgement aside, the single-parent nuclear family is on the rise and one which the church must give due attention and ministry.

The nuclear family emerged after the industrial age and the several great migrations into cities that offered economic opportunity and jobs. A more ancient construct for family is that of the “**extended family**”. Today, we would speak of it as an “intergenerational” or “multigenerational” family. Prior to the industrial age and still in many developing countries, this was/is the predominant model for family. Multiple generations of adults and children occupy the same home or even multiple houses/cottages/buildings on the same land, farm or complex. In post-modern, industrialized nations there is a re-emergence of extended family life, as economics, health challenges, and other factors make it more feasible for multiple generations to share resources and responsibilities.

The extended family is lauded as preserving continuity within the family, preserving and transmitting history and heritage across generations, and sharing the nurture and responsibility for the children’s upbringing. In the extended family context old traditions and rituals may co-exist alongside contemporary rituals and lifestyles. Multiple languages may be spoken within the home, particularly in immigrant families, where elders continue to rely on an original language as their only or primary language. Tensions can emerge when there is a collision of values in extended families, particularly as the younger generations desire to embrace what is popular in the mainstream.

Extended family life can also be complicated by families that represent more than one faith tradition, ethnicity, or race within the family. This usually occurs through a marital relationship that introduces a person of a different religion or ethnic group into the family. Values and definitions of roles may vary across cultures and create challenges, including which holidays to observe, how to celebrate special occasions, and how to raise the children.

Increasing, the extended family model is reclaimed due to a challenge to previously lived models of family life. Aging parents with health challenges move in with adult children. A surviving widow or widower moves in with his or her children after the death of a spouse. Unemployed or underemployed adults of all ages move back in with parents after job loss or due to a lack of sufficient income. Young adult children delay their departure from the home of their parents, most often due to an inability to generate enough income to sustain themselves. Divorced, widowed or abandoned parents move back to the family home or into the home of siblings or other relatives in order to create a stable environment for the family. In many cases, these versions differ from the original versions of extended family life, in that they were not planned, are not the predominant model and were necessitated by a particular event or life-altering reality. All family members engage in significant shifts, not only in physical location, but in terms of duties, sharing space with others, allocating income and other resources differently and other changes.

So, there really is no way to define “family” simply. Churches and congregations are compelled to look at their own memberships and communities and discover what are the variations of family present in those they seek to serve. Modifications to programs in order to meet real needs may be necessary. In the early years of my first grandson’s birth, my son and his girlfriend were ill-equipped and unable to take full responsibility for his care. At the age of fifty, I found myself responsible for the daily care of a newborn. I not only had to modify my home, my work schedule and life in general, but I discovered that I was not the only seasoned adult now faced with raising young grandchildren. As my grandson grew older, I sought ways to include him in the life of the church, which meant he not only attended events and activities designed for his age group, but he also attended a lot of “adult” functions with me. I was proud of my local church, who decided to open and staff the nursery during evening and weekend business meetings, adult bible study, etc. since so many of the attendees were grandparents that had children with them at those typical “adults only” meetings.

B. The biblical and legal concepts of kinship

For a broader view of family, let us briefly turn to the biblical and legal concepts of family and kinship, because they also contribute to the conversation. In the Old Testament, family was most often defined by **blood relationships or tribal connections**. We see this carry over in much of secular and legal life. However, the models and changes described above are now challenging this simplistic understanding of family. Churches and congregations need to be aware of when they may have to advocate for the rights of “families” that do not fit into such traditional descriptions and definitions.

In addition, the New Testament expansion of the definition of “**family through baptism**” expands our circle even wider. As members of the body of Christ, we covenant to care for one another, bear one another burdens, look after the widows and orphans, share our resources with one another (Acts 2). While the church is a “collection of individual families”, the worshipping community should think of itself as a “family”. I was recently visiting a church in the western United States and I was able to listen in on a conversation between the pastor and his minister of health and wellness. They were concerned about a senior citizen member of the congregation. They discussed strategies and way to help her with some basic life needs, as well as how to do so without overlooking and offending her biological family members, who seemed at that point to be preoccupied with other

concerns. My heart was warmed as I listened to their care and concern for a member of the body/the church family.

A variety of factors contribute to isolation and disenfranchisement of “individual” families within the church. Shame over divorce, HIV-AIDS, imprisonment, a suicide, etc. lead many families to leave the church. Domestic violence and child abuse lead women and children especially to “hide” from the church when they have visible signs of abuse or engage only from the margins to prevent discovery of their secret. Persons with long-term and chronic illness or mobility issues often get forgotten about if they are absent long enough and often enough from the regular gatherings of the church. Families struggling with mental illness or family members with disabilities often drop out of congregational life because of a lack of empathy and accommodation. However, as the body of Christ, we are called to care for each of them as if they were our own.

C. Culturally Sensitive Definitions of Family

Finally, let me suggest that having more culturally sensitive definitions of family might help us examine our approach to family life ministry. The **consanguine family** or family related by blood continues to be the predominant way in which family is created. These families may be single entities or multi-generational entities. However, recognition of the **conjugal family** or the family related by marriage might help us remember that many families are multi-cultural in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, class, etc. Our family life programs should make room for those who live in multiple cultural realities, assisting them in integrating and embracing their multicultural-ness and helping them resolve conflicts that may arise in family life. In addition, an increasing number of married couples are electing not to have children. Rather than “guilt” them and accuse them of selfishness, the church should also embrace this construct as a legitimate “family” with family ministry needs.

The **affinity family** of family relationships by choice is a final descriptor that is essential in family life ministry. Increasingly, adoptive families, blended families, stepfamilies, divorced families that share custody of children, foster families, unmarried, single adults who consider themselves as family, same sex families, challenge us to realize that many family relationships exist simply by choice. No blood, legal or religious relationship binds these persons together. They make the “choice” to become family to one another. In the African-American tradition, for example, “other mothers and grandmothers” and “aunties” are common among those who bear no blood or legal kinship. From the days of slavery, when biological families were forcibly separated, other women (and men) stepped in to offer care and nurture to children. Bonds were formed in ways that could only be described with common nomenclature – “sister” “brother” “cousin”- but were relationships of choice and often of necessity. In the US, the workplace has struggled when persons who grew up in this kind of environment request time off to attend the funeral of a “grandmother” who was not a blood relative, but in the person’s life had functioned as such. I have seen the unkindness, unyielding policies of human resources be insensitive to these realities. May the Church, which is the greatest embodiment of family by choice through our baptism, never deprive persons of a sense of “family” regardless of how it is defined and created!

PRESENTATION 2 - Family In Congregational Life “Quiet Zones-Prayer Spaces”– Rev. Suva Catford

Reverend Catford is a minister serving in Darlington District of the British Methodist Church, having moved recently from Pitshanger Methodist Church in Ealing, London, England, where she has been serving for the last four years.

Family life is undergoing many changes and challenges across the world.

The Family Life committee explores such issues as: relationships in marriage; rights of children and the aged; prevalence of violence; caring for all ages within the family; changing roles of women and men in society; effects of poverty; nurture of Christian values and fostering of education, health and the stewardship of creation.

In the UK, our culture is changing rapidly. As we embrace new technologies, it is hard to maintain a sense of who we are as communities, families and individuals. Our society measures us from cradle to grave in tests, exams and league tables, feeding our competitive natures. Drop out or burn out seem to be the only options.

Pitshanger Methodist Church has long desired to be a place of growth for all people. It is an older congregation endeavouring to engage families in the life of the church and to reach out to other communities. Three years ago we started to develop Quiet Zones from a project entitled Orison which is now "Prayer Spaces in Schools". The "Zones" have been used in our church building, in local schools and in a shop on an urban High Street and has been used by over 7,500 people. We've had children from our Nursery up to our most senior church member visit the Zones.

It is hard to describe exactly what Quiet Zones are, as the experience is different for everyone. At face value it is a whole lot of lights, curtains, cushions, water and sand, but time and again, there has been testimony to a deeper experience of ourselves and a deeper experience of faith.

There is no one way to go through the Zones; we give brief overview, which is in the leaflet. People wander around at first, seeking to discern what they are drawn to and then work from there. People notice how quickly time passes when they are engaged with the Zones. Some have returned to work on other Zones later in the week.

The entrance to the Zones is marked by turning over a rain stick and listening to the sound. This helps to slow down and says, 'This is a place to think about what matters for you.'

It is amazing how the Zones are quiet and purposeful: even 20 teenagers can be quiet for 20 minutes – what quality of silence and a privilege that is to witness!

One of the most popular Zones has a plasma ball as a focal point. This ball of light invites people to touch it. Some are nervous but others are hands on. The eyes of all ages light up as the light follows them around and they are invited to think about what God is like for them. Then there is a space to share thoughts on a large piece of paper, with the question "What one question would you ask God?" Seeing other's questions prompts people's reflection. It is amazing what questions are raised.

Here are a few:

Who created you?

Do you forgive everyone?

What do you look like?

Will I go to heaven?

What is the real reason of life?

In another Zone there is a labyrinth, where people are invited to walk slowly and deliberately. This can be challenging for children as they enjoy a race to the centre! However, children have an immense capacity for reflection. One 6 year old having walked the labyrinth whispered that her eczema made her embarrassed to change for PE/games. Having walked the labyrinth she told us that she didn't feel worried any more. Her teacher came back to us later in the week quite confused and amazed that the girl had taken part in the games lesson.

Image matters - in another Zone, a full length mirror allows people to stop and look at who they are: special, unique and precious. It is amazing how many children - 7 years and older, are fearful to look

into a mirror and, if they do, they look away quickly. Around the Zone there are words and phrases about image that can be read aloud or quietly to help people see themselves as God's precious creation. The mirror has above it "in God's eyes you are beautiful". In this Zone is a large hand board for people to write their names to see what it is feels like to be part of a community of people who are named and known. Beside the hand are the words from Isaiah 49:16 'See I have engraved your name on the palm of my hand'.

Bullying is a major concern not only at school but through social media. The next Zone invites people to let go of harmful words and images and to reclaim their God given beauty. There are sand trays, where people are invited to write the hurtful names or, for younger children, draw a sad face. The names are then rubbed out and replaced with their name or a smiley face. The effect of this can be huge. One teenager stood for 10 minutes writing and wiping out names.

The Zones also recognise that we can hurt others and there is a space to say sorry. People are invited to finish the sentences: "I wish I hadn't...", "I'm sorry I...", "I didn't mean to..." by drawing or writing on a magnadoodle (a magnetic drawing board). The words or images are then wiped away as the person says 'sorry'. Words in the Zone affirm the Christian insight that God forgive us.

Working in the Zones may highlight feelings and emotions, which in daily life we often suppress and can become harmful to our mental and spiritual health. One Zone asks people to consider if someone has annoyed, hurt or upset them. This acknowledges that holding on to bad feelings can make you feel worse and impact the way you interact with others. People are invited to let go of the feeling by dropping a vitamin tablet into the water and watching it dissolve. One teenager said that he came in feeling angry after a very bad morning and afterwards felt much calmer and able to go back to his afternoon studies. A 7 year old, who seemed to be messing about, said that he had used the magnadoodles and the water bowls to consider how he hurt people and that he needed to find other ways to get rid of his anger not just hitting his classmates.

One Zone has a large map that invites people to see themselves as a part of something much bigger by considering people and places that are important and writing a prayer or a message. The prayers are put on a net beside the map making a prayer wall creating a community of prayer and recognising the concerns we all have.

Here are some of the things that people prayed:

- Please help Connie get through cancer
- I pray to keep my family's country safe
- I pray for those living in poverty all over the world.
- Pray for granddad and hope he makes a good recovery
- I pray for persecuted Christians around the world

Finally, there is a Zone for people to gather their thoughts around a multi-coloured light display. Here we are invited to reflect that God always wants to know us and will always be there for us whatever we are going through. We can talk to God about anything. It is a quiet, relaxing place with cushions for people to sit on and consider things that are on their mind, things they need or want to say thank you for. They can write these down or just keep them. For younger children this can be a group activity. On one occasion the class fell silent for a couple of minutes and the teacher left the Zones in tears moved by the children's depth of engagement.

Leaving the Quiet Zones is marked by taking the rain stick and turning it back over. With school classes there is a time to debrief and a visitors' book where experiences can be shared. The people helping in the Zones do not to counsel but help to explain the Zones and are a supporting presence.

Quiet Zones offers people of all faiths and none a safe space to think about themselves and ask questions. Pitshanger church has experienced the joy and challenges of supporting young people as they explore faith. We have been blown away by the depth of the questions and the awareness of world issues. In a wealthy area of London, it has been eye opening for the church to realise young people are coping with poverty, the effects of war and fear of war for family members alongside the pressures of forming identity and growing up. Through Quiet Zones, Pitshanger church, and our circuit family, has built trust with schools and communities. We thank God for the opportunity and gifts of the many people who have taken part.

Here are a few of the things that have been written

"I really enjoyed it and it calmed me down and made me realise how much I need to spend time with God as he hasn't changed but it's me"

"I feel the tents helped me to think about God and what it going on around us. It made me believe that there is a God the end two tents helped the most. Thank you"

"Very unexpected and a surprise as I thought church was inactive. I found the tree Zone calming and the world area educational"

PRESENTATION 3 – Creating Community for Family Engagement – Mrs. Josefa Bethea Wall

Mrs. Wall is Director of Development for Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and Methodists Associated Representing the Cause for Hispanic Americans (MARCHA) at the United Methodist Church Development Center.

"If we take the time to care about people, we can transform the world. You never know how you can change someone's life by showing him or her that you care." Rehema Ellis, NBC News

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." 1 John 4:11

As people of Wesleyan heritage, we are called to community. Created in the image of God, we are bound together. How do we connect the church and community in an effort to engage and support the changing family of today and beyond?

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is one model that offers the church a unique and effective means to minister to families. It is evident in the successful use of *Quiet Zones* at Pitshanger Methodist Church and other community institutions. In their book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, John Kretzmann and John McKnight provide the principles and practices that guide the asset-based community development approach to community building. In my study and experience with the ABCD model, I found it to be a valuable plan to move toward sustainable community driven development. Applying ABCD to the church, a vital community institution, mobilizes people and resources for positive impact.

The strategy, in its simplest form, can be outlined as identifying the assets of individuals, community associations/networks and institutions. Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. Determining what assets are "inside" a community begins with recognizing the skills, capacities and gifts of community members. What talents and skills do individuals possess that will support the community building process and involve them as co-

producers of success. Furthermore, compiling an inventory of associations and networks helps identify the less formal systems that community members use to share common interests. Finally, businesses, public institutions, faith-based, nonprofit and human service organizations make up the more formal and most visible part of communities. Connecting these institutions in community building is essential and demonstrates a commitment to investing in the process. With a focus on internal assets and fostering relationships, communities are able to build and expand upon physical infrastructures and economic resources.

Translating the concepts of Asset-Based Community Development to faith-based organizations is seamless. The fundamental tenets of the model reflect Christian values and practices. ABCD emerges through the lens of abundance not deficiencies. As described by Susan Rans and Hilary Altman in *Asset-Based Community Development for Faith Communities*, faith-based initiatives using ABCD have increased the well-being of congregations and their communities. While resources from outside the community are needed, the key to long-term outcomes comes from within.

Adopted by Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, the ABCD framework has helped the church develop a new way of serving members of the community. Pastor Mike Mather has over a decade of experience with the ABCD model and transforming how the church works with community. Some changes are counterintuitive, for example, closing the food pantry. It was believed that the distribution of foods high in carbohydrates and sugars were contributing to obesity and diabetes among persons who were overweight. The creation of relationships between teen mothers and older women has been positive for teen mothers who decide to wait to have another child. Pastor Mather asks questions that invite people to think differently about what and how they can contribute to community.

“What three things do you do well enough to teach to someone else?”

“What three things do you want to learn?”

“Who besides God and me is taking this journey with you?” (Rans and Altman)

This helps the pastor and others to hear about assets, connect individuals with resources and opportunities and ultimately engage and mobilize them. The answers to these questions have helped community members to attain educational goals, form interest groups and find employment. Building effective community structures influence the education, health, well-being and economic conditions of families in a variety of ways.

In considering the global impact of Asset-Based Community Development, the strategy has been effective in advancing community development in Ecuador. In the traditional culture of indigenous Ecuadorians of the Chimborazo region, women held the knowledge to use natural resources to provide for their families. Being disenfranchised, the villagers of the region relied heavily on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide basic necessities. With the support of an indigenous community leader, the women researched the community’s interest in purchasing medicinal plants used to make personal products and herbal teas. Their success did not go unnoticed. Several stakeholders supported the enterprise and helped move the villagers beyond a state of complacency to providing for their families again. This is just one example of mobilizing assets to build community.

“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

We are called to community in our faith heritage by one whose ideas become a world movement. Church historian and professor, Gary Neal Hansen, notes Wesley's secrets to community building. They are not unlike the practices we have shared. Those continuously effective concepts are: 1) Try new things; 2) See what worked; 3) Abandon things that fail and 4) Innovate. (Hansen)

John Wesley's message to us remains, "...you unite together, to encourage and help each other in thus working out your salvation, and for that end watch over one another in love, you are they whom I mean by Methodists."

Resources:

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- Wesley, J. (1745, October 10). Advice to a People Called Methodist. Retrieved from <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/The-Wesleys-and-Their-Times>
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