A PAPER DISCUSSING VARIOUS FAMILY MINISTRY METHODS

Introduction

This paper will look at three approaches to family ministry in the local church context. This field has become a much-debated area of controversy, particularly in North America with rival theological perspectives based upon the significant, and increasingly-powerful, role of parachurch organizations which, some argue, take young people from the local church. These organizations respond that they are needed because the church does not cater for young people, but rather has a recent history of being ineffective at evangelizing and discipling these young men and women, and so they stepped in to go where the church was unwilling to go.

Family-Integrated Ministry

The first method of family ministry to be discussed will be the *family-integrated* ministry approach. The National Centre for Family-Integrated Churches argues that, 'the Biblical family is a scripturally ordered household of parents, children, and sometimes others…forming the God-ordained building blocks of the church.'[1] This stands in opposition to how those who hold to this position view the current circumstance of the evangelical church in America, which, they argue, promotes fragmentation, 'through age-graded, peer-oriented, and special-interest classes, thus preventing rather than promoting family unity.'[2] Consequently, therefore, the church is, as Voddie Baucham articulates, a 'family of families.'[3]

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[1] "A Biblical Confession for Uniting Church and Family": www.visionforumministries.org/projects/ncfic/a_biblical_confession_for_unit.aspx accessed 07/01/2016

[2] Ibid.

[3] V. Baucham, *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), p. 191-195, taken from, Timothy Paul Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009, p. 56

The author defending this view in *Three Perspectives of Family Ministry,* Paul Renfro, works for a church in Houston, Texas, and notes that the structure and calendar of this church is simple, with the aim of providing time for, 'families to live life together, so that parents can disciple their children and…practice hospitality toward those inside and outside the family of faith.'[4] Thus the only services the church has are a Sunday morning service and fellowship meal, small groups during the week and a monthly meeting to train men to be spiritual leaders.

In preparation for the service the jobs are segregated by gender, not age (men prepare the technology, women prepare the food) and, as is fundamentally important, 'At every level, adults and children engage in service and fellowship together.'[5] During the service, families are seated together, 'Babies, toddlers, preschoolers, children, youth, single adults, parents, grandparents-all of them, gathered in anticipation, preparing to worship their heavenly Father.'[6] This has the effect that the family have all heard the same message from Scripture and so are able to engage with the message afterwards, where, Lord willing, the father can explain the message in a way that elaborates the point clearly for his own family.

In Renfro's church, the 'father gathers his family, guiding them toward reflection, repentance, and reconciliation before a time of prayer'[7] in preparation for communion. After the communion and service ends they share a fellowship meal, and Renfro notes that fellowship extends long after the meal has finished.

As part of this movement, the church refuses to acknowledge 'adolescence', instead arguing that this relatively modern psychological development has allowed men to shirk their responsibilities as men, and instead keeps them from maturing as they ought, or would have in a different time. As Renfro writes, 'If we expect immaturity and irresponsibility in those years, that

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 57

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 59

is exactly what we will get.'[8] In response, he notes that, 'In our congregation, we encourage fathers to celebrate their son's twelfth birthday with a manhood ceremony.'[9] This transition into manhood allows them to attend the men's meeting every month.

With regards to how this looks, Renfro explains that the family becomes the hub for teaching and training in the church, led by fathers who are the spiritual heads of their homes. They are taught to use their homes for the purposes of evangelism, by inviting unbelievers into their lives, sharing and opening their homes for the Gospel, and demonstrating what an open home of faith looks like when the task of family ministry is taken seriously.

There are a number of key positive facets that this movement offers to the church as a wider community, the most obvious of which is that the family gets to worship together in the service, allowing them to watch as their father, the head of their home, is humbled before the preaching of the Word. In this picture, the child may not understand all that is happening, but he or she understands that their father is not the boss in this place, and that means that something even more important is happening. This ought to generate a seriousness towards church which will inculcate a reverence in the child so that when the sermon is explained later, they will be eager to listen to it.

Furthermore, another positive of this movement is that inter-generational relationships are encouraged between believers, and this has exceptional power if considering members with unbelieving parents, for example. Renfro's example of unmarried mothers coming in and being discipled by other mothers is extremely compelling and other movements ought to learn from this example, rather than segregating such women and relegating them to a Sunday school class dedicated to others in their estate, and thus keeping them from discipleship that leads to growth.

There are, however, a number of compelling negatives concerning this movement. The one that strikes me as the most concerning is Renfro's quotation from Baucham, who called the

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[8] Ibid., p. 61

[9] Ibid.

church a 'family of families'. As Shields noted in his response, 'the church is not a "family of families" but the family of God.'[10] Indeed, the image most used of the church in the New Testament is not a family, but a body, made up of many members doing various different tasks in accordance with each individual's gifting. The emphasis on the local, nuclear family is not the Biblical emphasis of the church. Again, as Shields articulates, 'Inclusion among the people of God had nothing to do with birthright in a nuclear family and everything to do with adoption into the family of God.'[11] As Haynes notes, 'Isolationism…isn't the answer. Instead of protecting our children from the outside in, we need to strengthen them from the inside out.'[12] This movement isolates the community of faith by heightening the family to the ultimate place of importance.

Secondly, another issue I have with this movement is that, whilst Renfro lauds his church's discipling of the men (aged twelve and upwards), there is no natural mechanism for discipling women. They are to be taught in the home, and if that doesn't happen, it rather seems like they will starve spiritually. Granted, there is an expectation of intergenerational discipleship, however this appears to be largely an organic occurrence, and, in my experience of churches on both sides of the Atlantic, organic discipleship is, at best, largely mythical discipleship. This, therefore, leads to a community in which the wisdom and knowledge of women is largely left untapped. They are demoted to serving in matters of food and hospitality, when Paul emphatically gives women a ministry role within the church (Titus 2).

The third concern I have with this movement is that the father of the home is given a patriarchal role akin to an Old Testament family. This is not the New Testament model of family. Further to this, Renfro quoted Paul by saying that fathers are to lead their children and that children are to obey their parents, but he failed to include the admonition to fathers not to exasperate their children. In my experience with family-integrated families, I have seen too many

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[10] Ibid., p. 79

[11] Ibid., p. 80

[12] Bryan Haynes, *Shift*, (Group: Loveland, CO, 2009), p. 68.

fathers use heavy-handed tactics to demand obedience from their offspring, despite disagreement. Unless they are married, women are still under his headship and home, even if adults, and so are unable to live a life independent from the will of their fathers. This requires an extensive use of Old Testament texts, and ignoring New Testament texts. Such abuses aren't in every family, of course, but there is a trend that I have noticed and it makes me nervous to give all spiritual authority of believers to a father who is not an elder. All believers should be under the oversight of an eldership, not merely their parents.

Family-Based Ministry

On the other end of the spectrum is the *family-based* ministry. This philosophy differs from the family-integrated model by acknowledging that there is a culture in the Western church of age-segregation, and so, rather than attempt to deconstruct that culture, proponents of the family-based model attempt to harmonize the church's current dominance in youth development with the responsibility given to parents by God. As DeVries states, 'We are not suggesting a radical change in programming. What we are suggesting is a fresh mindset: parents and family are crucial to faith development in every area of a ministry's program.'[13] The purpose, therefore, in the family-based model is not to remove all programs and church structures that young people have become accustomed to, but to reengage parents in these ministries so that they can come alongside, support and supplement the teaching their children are getting. *Contra* to what family-integrated proponents claim, family-based ministry is not an attempt to permit parental abdication of responsibility, but to utilize the best of both worlds.

Practically, this looks extremely different from the family-integrated movement. As Shields writes, 'My family-based church still hosts age-graded, gender-specific small groups every Sunday morning. Many children go to Extreme Zone while their parents participate in

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[13] J. Burns and M. DeVries, *Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 2003), p. 7.

weekend worship celebrations.'[14] Further, 'There is still a weekly large-group service for youth

where we preach the gospel, worship together, and hang out in the gym. There are yearly

children's and youth camps as well as retreats that are organized by age, gender, or life stage.'[15]

Despite the plethora of things happening, however, Shields also explains that, 'Our programs

work with parents in discipling their children.'[16] Indeed, he suggests that the reason why his

philosophy is different is because, 'family-based churches intentionally include intergenerational

and family-focused events in each ministry.'[17] The plethora of options in some of the churches

Shields would share this principle with would seem to allow a greater degree of choice for the

young people, and thereby permit them to engage in the things and activities and groups they

enjoy, so that when they actually are present, they are engaged because they have chosen to be

there.

The other side of this coin is that family-based ministry is often saturated in the local

culture. In doing so they are using the arguments as old as those proposed by William Laud.

Rather than becoming the world, as critics accuse, they claim to use the attractions of the world

as a way to invite people in and therefore to compete with the world by presenting the Gospel in

a way that is subversive, yet clear. This involves creating a culture that bears resemblance to the

local world and culture, but also has distinctives that sets it apart. Thus the use of music that

sounds similar, but has Christian lyrics. This becomes attractive and interesting to unbelievers,

because it doesn't smack of 'boring' or 'cultic', but has a familiarity to it that can be reassuring.

One evident positive aspect of the family-based ministry method is that children are

actively entertained and engaged in a safe, Christian and God-honouring environment. There is

much to be said for simply getting young people from our society to simply sit and listen to the

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[14] Shields, *Perspectives*, p. 99.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 100

Word explained and taught faithfully, so any means to achieve this end must surely be considered useful in some sense.

A second positive aspect of this ministry is the evangelistic appeal to non-believers. By introducing the Gospel through means that are familiar, there is an ability to truly reach out to lost young people. Indeed, this may even act as a method of discipleship to young people, for they are being trained to invite friends to events and studies where they can build friendships and relationships that are purposed around the Gospel, and perhaps lead to real conversations down the road. This doesn't happen as often in other churches where there is almost no acceptance of, or interaction with, the culture.

There are negative parts to this method of family ministry however. For me, the primary one is that, despite citing one example, Shields hasn't made a clear case *how* his church attempts to properly incorporate parents to come alongside and train their children with the help of the youth leaders. Indeed, he doesn't give many examples of encouraging intergenerational discipleship, an intrinsic part of church life that the family-integrated movement aims to preserve at all costs. He mentions the importance of this, but I must acknowledge that there wasn't a substantial emphasis placed upon incorporating these youths into church life after they grow beyond the provided activities, groups and programs. A greater dependency upon discipleship throughout the breadth of the church would be of greater value, arguably, to encourage these young people to transition into adult membership of the church

A second criticism is that these unbelieving children tend to bring in bad habits. A poor theology of God's sovereignty can lead parents to become overly protective, and thereby hinder the potential evangelism by taking their kids away from these 'bad influences'. However, this is a double-sided argument, for if these same parents were to come alongside the youth leaders in evangelizing these unbelievers, then they would be building relationships with their own children, and also participating in evangelism work for the Kingdom. However, too often the reverse happens, and these 'bad' youths are left rejected by yet another community as the

downward spiral continues. Unless a clearer strategy is found, therefore, that incorporates the parents in this ministry, this cycle will continue unabated.

Family-Equipping Ministry

The final method of family ministry is *family-equipping* ministry. This method aims to be a middle ground between the aforementioned movements. Strother notes that, in his context, 'There was a gap between the church's ideals and parents' actual practices and expectations.'[18] This had developed, for his church (but arguably broadly applicable), because they, 'had developed ministry models failing to call parents to embrace their role as primary disciple-makers.'[19] This bears a similarity with Renfro's comments noted earlier. The consequence of this recognition was to progress into a middle ground, where, 'Family-equipping churches retain some age-organized ministries but restructure the congregation to partner with parents at every level.'[20] This is so that, 'parents are acknowledged, equipped and held accountable for the discipleship of their children.'[21]

This has led to the creation of a deliberate discipleship program that, for Strother, endeavours to convict parents to teach and train their children to reflect Christ, and seek His glory, rather than happiness. In doing this, the effort is to, 'partner with parents to see God raise up generations of children…who love God with all their hearts, souls and strength.'[22] This is put into practice by fundamentally acknowledging that 'all ministry efforts…[have]…two partnered influences – church and home,'[23] which ensures that any programs ought to be conducive to a partnership between these two arenas, rather than over-emphasizing one over the other. This

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[18] Ibid., p. 142

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 144

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 150

[23] Ibid., p. 151

requires clear communication and expectations between parents and church leaders. Furthermore, Strother notes the importance of the church developing a format to assist parents (especially less confident or competent parents) so that they aren't daunted by the task, but encouraged, eager and capable to lead their children well.[24]

A positive of this method is that there are opportunities for children to learn together. Whilst the other methods certainly expect this to happen, there is definitely enough anecdotal evidence available to build a case for the power of the Sunday School teacher in the evangelization and discipleship of young children. Where the family-integrated expects this to happen organically, the family-equipped method assists in the creation of generational relationships within the church, and also allowing children to develop intergenerational friendships, sitting at the feet of the rabbi, as it were. However, there is also a focal point on the family, which the family-based method would unwittingly seem to abjure.

A negative of this method, however must be, as Shields explains, an absence of a missional focus. In the flurry of these arguments, attempting to find a rationale for a middle road, and attempting to encourage and train parents, there does seem to be a loss of the intensely missional efforts found in the family-based movement. This criticism could be lobbied to both family-integrated and family-equipping philosophies, and I suspect both would resent it, but haven't, in Shields' nor my, opinion adequately answered this charge.

My Response and Position

As a primary point of response to these three positions, I want to set forth a separate vision. First and foremost, in my mind, the church is the place of *discipleship*. This ought to be non-negotiable. The home is the primary place of *evangelism*, for children cannot be *discipled* into the faith. This premise underlines my disagreement with all three of the studied movement's use and appropriation of Deuteronomy 6. The context of Deuteronomy 6 is for children who are

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[24] Consider Haynes' use of this model to encourage and train in Bryan Haynes, *Shift*, (Group: Loveland, CO, 2009).

within the covenant community already. As we are under the New Covenant, and acknowledge that access to the covenant is by faith in Christ upon repentance of sins and submission to His rule in our life, we must also be bound to recognize that any *discipleship* undertaken is of believers. Children, until they are brought to faith by the power of the Spirit, are to be considered lost and therefore *evangelized*. Upon conversion, they are to enter the church as members (when old enough to participate) whereupon discipleship is the prerogative of the church. Now, granted, if the parents are believers and members of the church, then of course primary discipleship in the day-to-day life occurs within the home, under their guidance. *Not* simply because of their position as parents, however, but purely because they are mature believers of the church. They are to disciple because they are called to disciple believers. It so happens that they are members of the same earthly family.

This is where I believe the family-integrated movement has a fundamental flaw in its rationale. Their premise seems to be to, inadvertently, recreate an Old Covenant community within the new covenant, with each family having their own head priest (the father) who guides and trains these children *through* covenant life, rather than teaching and training them to *enter* the covenant through the Gospel. Only upon entering the community of faith can any parent disciple their children. Until then, their children must be understood as lost. This is also applicable to the parents mentioned by Shields whose gut-reaction is to 'protect' their children from bad influences. If God is sovereign, which He is, then their children are equally lost, because of their wicked sinfulness, as the children deemed to be 'bad influences'. This ought to spur said parents to reach out to all of those children and young people as opportunities for evangelism, rather than to withdraw towards isolationism.

So what is my position? I lean towards the family-equipping method as being the most suitable and appropriate, biblically, for the church. I lean this way because I think it presents the strongest understanding of discipleship and evangelism in the correct context, which, when utilized properly, should lead to a 'church-and-parent' effort to evangelize children of the covenant community and children of the local community, and upon their conversion to faith, to

an appropriate discipleship, be it in the home, with assistance, or through using their home for young people whose parents aren't believers.

Firstly, the home is a place where believing parents are to protect their children, and teach them the Gospel. This requires appropriate knowledge of the Gospel and discipline to model the Gospel life. It does not constitute discipling, but rather leads to the end of salvation (Lord willing). Secondly, upon conversion, the child and parents ought to meet with the elders and formulate a plan as to ascertain the veracity of the conversion, consider baptism and subsequent membership into the local body. Upon conversion the parents become primary disciplers (because of a shared faith), and the church should come alongside to assist in this, and in preparation for the child becoming a member in due course. This is also important if the youth is not from a believing home; the church becomes aware and begins the discipleship process even when the parents are unable, or even opposed, to this.

Thirdly, this fourth option is, at its basic premise, focused on evangelism because each child is in need of salvation, and thus any friends of a believing parent's child is also a mission field. Then, through the church, they can disciple their own child, whilst maintaining friendships with unbelieving children. I firmly believe that allowing our children to have unbelieving friends is essential to their development of a healthy worldview (not isolationist or protected), and upon conversion, offers them opportunities to evangelize their own friends.

Would I advocate the use of programs in this model? Yes, if they were appropriate, faithful to the Word and led by members of the congregation who were recognized as being skilled at teaching a particular age-group. I don't believe in the need for a professional youth pastor, but believe that most churches functionally utilize their own members as they are deemed faithful and skilled enough to teach. This would harness Paul's expectations in Titus 2 that older women are to train younger women, thus creating relationships that would culminate in discipleship friendships covering the areas Paul mentions.

Unlike the family-integrated movement, this fourth option will use members to train age-specific groups *within the context of the church community* (using both genders), and unlike

the family-based movement, this will use *members* to train children, rather than other leaders who have little relationship with the parents. As a result, there will a true partnership developing between parents and teachers because they will *be both* in many cases. Consequently, this will create a culture of shared responsibility between church leaders and parents because they are teaching in church what they are expected to teach and model at home.

So how would I implement this model into a local church? The first step is to *cast a vision*. To do this I would need to *teach* the vision to the eldership and then the church. The vision is that the home is a place where believing parents are to protect their children, and teach them the Gospel. This requires appropriate knowledge of the Gospel and discipline to model the Gospel life. It does not constitute discipling, but rather leads to the end of salvation (Lord willing). Upon conversion the parents become primary disciplers (because of a shared faith), and the church should come alongside to assist in this, and in preparation for the child becoming a member in due course. This is also important if the youth is not from a believing home; the church becomes aware and begins the discipleship process even when the parents are unable, or even opposed, to this.

After teaching the vision I would then set about *assisting parents in understanding how to evangelize their children* in a Godly way, giving appropriate praise for knowledge of the things of God, but teaching them to beware giving their children a confidence of salvation that is not theirs to claim. This teaching of parents is important because, at Jones notes, 'The majority of parents have abdicated their role for a far different reason… 'No one ever told me how.' When it comes to planning for spiritual growth in their children's lives, parents have received little or no guidance from their church.'[25] To do this I would prepare materials and a Sunday School class for parents in which I would teach, from Scripture, how evangelism is to be undertaken, and especially in the context of the home. I would strongly suggest the importance of daily family

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[25] Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, (Wesleyan Publishing House: Indianapolis, IN, 2011), p. 112.

devotions to illustrate the importance of the Word for themselves as parents (showing they submit to God), and offer examples of how simple that can be done.

Next, I would then walk through the *process of handling conversion of children*. As mentioned above, these children are to be brought into membership of the body. This process begins with a casual interview with elders in which the child can retell their conversion experience. The parents and elders will begin meeting to establish a timetable to assess the veracity of the child's conversion and discuss appropriate expectations for baptism. (I hold to a position of baptism that leads immediately to membership, and so I would withhold baptism until parents and elders were convinced of both the conversion and spiritual maturity to handle the tasks of membership.) Then membership would be discussed with the parents and child, along with expectations of membership, and particularly the transition of authority from the home to the church (i.e. in the instance of unrepentant rebellion or egregious sinful behavior).

Finally, after becoming a member of the church, the *child will then enter a number of discipleship groups*, some of which would be age-specific (such as tailored Sunday School lessons), and others would be gender-specific (such as men's group). The tailored Sunday School lessons would cover essential doctrines and assist in learning the important theological principles of the Christian faith, including the spiritual disciplines and the grace of Christ amidst inevitable failure. The gender-specific groups would cover things that may be more geared towards men or women, such as lust, leadership, teaching, authority and the duties of spouses, parents etc. These gender-specific groups will be the place where most intergenerational discipleship will occur, as older men will already be engaged in discipling younger men, and thus the new members will slot right into an ongoing relationship, and be treated as a full member of the body, albeit still mature and growing. The older men and women will be trained to be discerning in what to cover, and when, so as to remain appropriate to the ages of the young people. The parents will be encouraged to attend the same group as their children until the child is an adult legally, in which instance they can then opt to move to a different group. This will allow for parental supervision

and Godly knowledge that will assist in parenting and discipleship at home, as a brother or sister in Christ.

Objections Answered

There are three clear issues that I can see being presented as arguments against my implementation plan. The first is that I would continue to use age-segregated groups. The family-integrated model is adamant that the use of these groups is inherently schismatic to a local church, rending intergenerational relationships apart. I, however, must disagree. There is a reason why a first grader does not sit in the same classroom as a college senior, and that is a level of maturity and a discernment of appropriateness. Focused discipleship for young people of various ages is helpful because it speaks to those young people about issues where they are at in their stage of development. It can terribly unhelpful to talk to 9-year-old boys about pornography because that would make them inquisitive; however, there is an absolute need to have that discussion with an 11-year-old boy.

Further, I would disagree that this damages the discipleship of the parents, and limits intergenerational unity and discipleship. I don't believe in the need for a professional youth pastor, but believe that most churches functionally utilize their own members as they are deemed faithful and skilled enough to teach. Sunday School teachers have a reputation of being loving, kind, gentle and extremely influential in the discipleship of young people, primarily because they are members of the body who aren't professionals but faithful in their love of Christ and in their love of the flock. Friendships may not be formed immediately, necessarily, but familiarity is fostered, and this familiarity ought to lead towards friendship and then discipleship. The older the child is, the more likely they are to seek the approbation of their teacher, and more eager they are to develop a friendship with them. Likewise, parents should be aware of the fundamental doctrines being taught in this Sunday School class, and so will know the schedule and be able to interact with their child on these topics throughout the week.

Indeed, beyond even that, by having gender-specific group, it is clear that the church would be able to harness Paul's expectations in Titus 2 that older women are to train younger women, thus creating relationships that would culminate in discipleship friendships covering the areas Paul mentions (and, of course, men training younger men).

The second issue that I can foresee being challenged with is the foundation of my argument concerning the distinction between home and church, and specifically between evangelism and discipleship. For many, I expect, the clear distinction that I have drawn between the spheres of authority would be deemed untenable and perhaps even dangerous. The family-integrated movement typically resists any transition of authority over their children from the parents to the church, whilst the family-based movement would argue that parents are disciplers more than evangelists.

In response to this, I will firstly explain my premise further. The family is no longer under the Old Covenant. Deuteronomy 6 was given to a people whose children were deemed *in the covenant community* purely because of birth and circumcision of the males. Now, we know from even within the Old Testament that this is not strictly true. Yet nevertheless, these movements appropriate the commands of Deuteronomy 6 as applicable to our day, without reading them through the lens of Christ's having fulfilled the Law and closed the Mosaic Covenant. Under the New Covenant, therefore, the nuclear family is not considered the building block of the church, but the image used by Paul most frequently is that the church is a body, made up of all different tribes and people groups. Our own families, therefore, cannot be guaranteed salvation merely because we teach them to recite John 3:16, nor that we read our Bibles together every day. Our children are not Christians because we are, nor can we expect them to become so. Therefore we need to *evangelize* them.

After conversion, however, I believe that there is a transition of authority to the church (upon baptism and membership). This is because membership aligns the young person with the church. He is a member of the church. Like a football team, if a fan wears the top we can assume he wishes to associate with the team, and be known as a supporter of that team. This is what

baptism and membership does. However, if the young person commits an egregious sin, or enters into unrepentant sinful activity, he must be disciplined by the church, because the name of Christ is at stake.[26] This means that there has been a transition of authority regarding spiritual matters from the parents (who were spiritually in charge of evangelizing their children) to the church (who are now spiritually in charge of discipling these young people and holding them accountable to the expectations of members).

Note, however, that this does not mean that the child is not discipled by their parents. On the contrary, their parents will continue to be primary disciplers, but because of proximity not parenthood. Thus there will be a cooperative effort by the parents and church, based upon the varying types of discipleship groups offered to the young person.

The third issue that I would expect to face is that it doesn't appear to be very *outward* focused towards mission. After all, the family-based model is extremely missional, seeking to harness the power of the culture to not only maintain the interest of our own children, but also attempting to appeal to the broad swathe of unbelieving youth in our surrounding culture. This appears to be very compelling, and at first I felt the weight of the argument myself. However, in response to this argument I would say three things.

Firstly, we must not forget that, fundamentally, we are to *evangelize our own children*. We are all placed within a sphere, and our own children are under our spiritual care. Unlike the other models studied above, we do not take for granted that our own children are believers, nor even that it is inevitable that they will become believers. Rather, we understand that our home is a mission field just as much as the office, school and cul-de-sac is one.

Secondly, we can *utilize our children's larger friend-base*. All children, especially in public schools, have a large friendzone. Many of those children who interact with ours will be unbelievers just like our children, and so rather than withdrawing from the world and isolating them (which I would argue is inherently unbiblical and even outright dangerous), we can actually

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[26] 1 Corinthians 5 being the obvious example.

come alongside them, and evangelize them along with our own children by seeking to have God moments,[27] and sharing in those moments with whomever is around. This leads to a wider evangelism model where our homes are used to evangelize our own children, our neighbour's children and other children from school who may never darken the door of a church building. As Wilder comments in his essay in *Trained in the Fear of God,* 'There is something powerful about families witnessing to families. "The family table is a beautiful picture of gathering and blessing…what a joy to sit at [the] table and make room for the world to join us."'[28]

Finally, to assume that a church's outreach ministry and evangelism is wholly contained within the family ministry is wildly off the mark. If that were the case, as the objection seems to imply, then it must be evident that no church ought to evangelize and support missions across the state, nevermind across the globe. No, it is a straw man to suggest that, if a family focuses on the evangelization of the children and their immediate sphere of influence, they are not missions minded. Rather, the church will have a missions vision that family ministry will fit into and seek to observe.

Conclusion

This paper has walked through three approaches to family ministry and noted potential strengths and weaknesses in each one. I noted that the family-integrated method was unduly focused on men in the church, and seemed to rest more on the Old Covenant than being founded in the New Covenant, whereas the family-based method was too focused on the young people and did not cultivate a truly intergenerational culture of discipleship. The family-equipping model, I stated, had the weakness of being inward-focused, trying to find the middle ground, rather than seeking to be evangelistic. I then gave my own position and offered a slightly refined

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[27] As articulated by Haynes, in Bryan Haynes, *Shift*, (Group: Loveland, CO, 2009).

[28] Michael S. Wilder, "Building and Equipping Missional Families", in Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, (Kregal: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011), p. 250, quoting, Lila W. Balisky, "An Ordinary Family in Mission," *Evangelical Misisons Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2008): 444, http://www.mfest.ab.ca/An%20Ordinary%20Family%20in%20Mission.pdf.

option, based upon the premise of the family-equipping model, but noting a greater clarity

between *evangelism* and *discipleship* in the home.

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