

United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministries: Not Just for Couples

**Nurturing the spiritual growth and emotional health of all persons
Helping all persons develop and maintain healthy relationships
Supporting those dealing with transitions and crises**

All persons, including singles, belong to families. **We are shaped and influenced by our families of origin; and, as we mature, we form new families with those with whom we choose to share our lives.** Those who remain single by choice or by chance need healthy relationships too. The church at its best functions as an extended family, offering acceptance, love, and support; relationship education and enrichment appropriate for various life stages and circumstances; and comfort and guidance during transitions and crises.

Marriage and Family Ministries help make disciples for the transformation of the world by supporting personal spiritual growth within the context of relationships. Family life exposes our self-centeredness and rough edges, challenges us to grow, and enlarges our capacity for compassion and selflessness. Ministries that deepen our self-awareness and our understanding of others, help us resolve family-of-origin issues, and teach us skills for effective communication, conflict-management, and intimacy build on this potential and help us evolve spiritually to become more Christ-like.

The breakdown of family life in our society and our current high rates of divorce, unmarried cohabitation, and unwed births cause enormous personal pain for many individuals and contribute to our most critical social problems. **Effective marriage and family ministries can interrupt this negative cycle and help persons grow spiritually through healthy relationships and family life.** Love flowing more freely within our homes empowers individuals to transform their communities and the world.

Effective Marriage and Family Ministries:

**Affirm marriage and family life as a vocation.
Embrace and support those who are single “by choice or by chance.”
Equip all persons with skills for maintaining healthy relationships.
Provide guidance for making wise decisions about dating and sex.
Teach those who marry how to sustain their love.
Partner with parents to raise emotionally healthy and responsible children.
Support families engaged in elder-care or dealing with other special needs.
Help to heal broken relationships and the wounds caused by them.**

*Jane P. Ives
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Recommended resources on reverse

“We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity.” So begins paragraph 161.IIA, Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, which then notes that families come in a variety of configurations, encouraging “social, economic, and religious efforts to maintain and strengthen relationships within families in order that every member may be assisted toward complete personhood.” *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012) p. 109

RESOURCES FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRIES

The *Growing Love in Christian Marriage Pastor’s Manual* and the *Couple’s Manual* (United Methodist Publishing House, 2013, available through Cokesbury) are the **official United Methodist resources for marriage preparation**. The *Couple’s Manual* provides an inventory for identifying a couple’s strengths and areas in which they may benefit by growing, as well as numerous exercises which couples may complete on their own or with guidance from a pastor or mentor couple. The *Pastor’s Manual* provides instructions for administering and interpreting the inventory; suggestions for pre-marital counseling and follow-up; **along with information about and resources for comprehensive marriage and family ministries (relationship education for children, youth, and adults; marriage preparation; marriage education and enrichment; and ministries with those in crisis or transition).**

The website www.marriagelovepower.net provides **helps related to *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* and marriage and family ministries in general**. “The United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministry Directory,” posted there, lists resource persons by annual conference, indicating the particular training or experience they have to share. “Upcoming Events and Training Opportunities” lists events scheduled by organizations recommended by United Methodists. **You will also find a series of “Best Practices and Recommended Resources” articles on marriage preparation, marriage education and enrichment, relationship education for all ages, parenting, and ministering with persons facing various challenges (infidelity, domestic violence, pornography addiction, etc.)** Other documents include sample wedding policies for local churches, a survey that can be used for planning or for helping expand our network, training information for *Growing Love in Christian Marriage*, and a supplement for the *Couple’s Manual*. At <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>, you can search by topic or title to find most of these documents as well.

At the Coalition of Marriage, Family, and Couples Education (CMFCE) website www.smartmarriages.com, you will find **the most complete information available about marriage and family programs**. You can search the archives for articles on almost any relationship-related topic, sign up for free e-newsletters, and find upcoming events.

To receive announcements and updated information about marriage and family ministries, please send me an email including your name(s), mailing address, telephone number, and name of your local church, indicating whether you are lay or clergy and whether you would like to be included in the Directory or just receive emails.. Please also **share your experiences with and recommendations for effective marriage and family ministries**.

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