Ron Deal, the president of Successful Stepfamilies, wrote an article titled “Redeeming the Remarried” for Christianity Today magazine in 2007. Deal is a great resource for family life ministers who want to start ministering to blended families and couples who have remarried. This is exactly what he makes a case for in his article. His theology of redemption for these families is solid and he points out that the church is leery to engage in such a ministry for fear that it will be encouraging a bad behavior. The fact is that between 25-30% of homes are functional stepfamilies. So we need to minister to their needs, and those needs are different than first-time family’s needs. The stepfamilies who are in our pews are God’s lost sheep as well and need to be reminded that they have “full forgiveness and the right to live life to the fullest in Jesus Christ” (33). These couples do not need to divorce again as if to make something right, but a remarriage ministry can “respond to broken lives” calling couples to “honor their remarriage covenant and to live holy lives starting from today (33). A remarriage ministry can be just what is needed to help these individuals and couples reconnect with God and to regain relationship with the church as a whole.

The pages of the article “Promoting Healthy Stepfamilies” by many contributing authors are now more green than black and white. What I mean is that I have gleaned so much useful information from this article and highlighted so much. Stepfamilies report needs in three specific areas: knowing how to blend together especially in regard to the stepparent-child relationship, the couple’s relationship including communication and time together, and co-parenting concerns. It is helpful to know that men generally are the least likely to want to participate in an intervention program but are responsive to the idea of developing family harmony. Promotional materials as a whole include that
the program will provide “participants with a better relationship with their partner, a
greater understanding of their partner’s needs, more confidence discussing difficult
issues, and more confidence dealing with children and discipline issues” (51). It is
helpful to know that stepfamilies whose relationships are less than two years old
reported receiving the most benefit and continued participation in the programs.

The best means of structuring programs for stepfamilies is in group settings,
initially running six sessions in length but then providing booster sessions that hit on the
developmental stages those stepfamilies go through, such as “We are a stepfamily and
pregnant” or “Help, we are a stepfamily with a teen!”. These interventions are key to
long-term benefits. Also many participating stepfamilies “reported that they gained
benefits from meeting other stepfamilies” (52). Again, here we are reconnecting
families to the church body as stated in the Deal article above. However, something
else to consider is that stepfamilies (as are all families) are “time poor” and many use
the “internet as a resource of parenting information” (55). This is a great way that
churches can help families find reliable information. Many churches have websites that
can provide useful information such as articles and links for stepfamilies. However,
regardless of the structure used it is all worthless to the participants if the facilitator is
perceived as lacking training and knowledge about stepfamilies.

My last article is a review of the literature out there on stepfamilies and makes
suggestions for practitioners. The article is a bit dated having been written in 1985
however I believe several of the concepts are still valid. Since stepfamilies have been
around for an additional 25 years since this article was written, we know that there is
quite an adjustment period for stepfamilies. Unique difficulties can show themselves
through the children involved whether that be “more conduct problems or socialized delinquency” (121). But that is not a sentence for all children in stepfamilies. Many families work through the adjustments and come out just fine on the other side. The degree to which it affects children greatly depends on the children’s ages and whether they are living with a stepmother or stepfather. One thing that still holds true is that the “stepsibling relationships are crucial to the success of stepfamilies” (122).

Emotional issues that all members of the stepfamilies go through include guilt, mourning, and the shifting of alliances. Parents and stepparents must determine roles and boundaries for their new family. The most important relationship to maintain is the remarriage, however. Many couples focus so much on the adjustment of the children that their own relationship suffers. Counselors can help by encouraging communication classes with those couples who are already married, preparation courses for those contemplating remarriage, and working with children in school settings.

From these articles it is obvious that a great ministry for churches is the ministry to stepfamilies. Since FLM are to minister to all the families in their congregations, then it is obvious that these articles are very useful in our work world. A focus of ministry to stepfamilies would be communicating that stepfamilies are welcomed, supported and loved. I don’t know if a special presentation to stepfamilies needs to be done except to possibly develop a team who can oversee the planning and facilitating as needed. Most importantly would be to start having ministries that they will want to plug into.
References:

