A Working Theology of Family

& Family Life Ministry

at Risen Christ Lutheran Church

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**Family Life Ministry at Risen Christ Lutheran Church**

Ministry in our American culture is continually changing. These changes have greatly impacted the effectiveness of many current models of ministry, especially those that attempt to separate everything. These changes have decreased church attendance, cut into church budgets, and left the church viewed as out-dated and irrelevant. The real tragedy of it all is that we have hurt families in our attempt to help and minister to them.

Risen Christ Lutheran Church must continue on a path toward a new form of ministry. Ministry that meets people where they are and moves them toward a greater relationship with God and others as is God’s will and desire for their life (Mt. 22:37-40). This is important for our churches and is needed for our society, our community, and most importantly for our families.

Family Ministry is the style of serving, caring, and teaching people across the lifespan as God’s Word directs us. In order to move toward a new way of doing things, called family ministry, Risen Christ must then first understand what God says about family by developing a **theology of family**. The church must come to an operational **definition of family**—though this will indeed be difficult to establish. **Family Life Ministry** must also be defined as well as given a **rationale** for the shift in style and format of ministry. Finally, Risen Christ must understand what this ministry will look like through **visioning, mission** statements, and defining and setting **goals** and **objectives**. Risen Christ will see the practical implications of a staff person dedicated to direct family life ministry at Risen Christ with a **job description** and a proposed **calendar** and **budget** to carry out this ministry. In the end, Risen Christ will see the need for family life ministry so that we can continue to “proclaim a new beginning in the family of God, through faith in the risen Christ, God’s only Son.”
A THEOLOGY OF FAMILY

The First Family

Any look at family, should consider what we know about family. There are various resources that one should use to shape and form their understanding of family. The social sciences are resources that should help shape and form an awareness of family; however, the social sciences alone cannot shape a healthy and well rounded understanding of family. Rather one must look at what the Creator of family has to say in His inspired and infallible Word. To do so is to develop a theology of family that is derived from the sacred page of Scripture.

In Genesis we see the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all therein, by God (Gen 1-2). It is here that God establishes His most important estate through His crowning achievement—man and woman (Ps. 8:5; Heb 2:7). Man is created along with all the wonders of the world, yet with greater glory as he is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). However, this is the first and only thing about God’s creation that is not good as God exclaims, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). All that God has made up to this point has been deemed “good” by the voice of God (in Genesis chapter one the land and sea on day two(v. 10), the plants and trees on day three (v. 12), the sun and moon on day four (v. 18), the fish and birds on day five (v. 21), the animals on day six (v. 25), and all He made was “very good” at the completion of man and woman (v. 31)). Here God is emphasizing that man, and woman, who are created in the image of God are created to be in a community in relationships with others. As God brings together man and woman, the first estate is ordained by God is marriage. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

1 The term here is also used of the shields of the Leviathan in Job 41:15 that are so tightly joined together that even air cannot come between them (Slaughter, FLM handout, p. 19).
It is through the establishment of marriage that God meets our need for community and relationships by providing helpmates\(^2\) for the man and woman. Through this marriage, God is also establishing the estate of family. Through marriage, man and woman are given a procreative charge to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen. 1:28). This marriage relationship, defined as one man and one woman united in a one flesh relationship until death parts them (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:4-6; Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:10-11), serves at the very foundation for the community that God has established in family. This family community serves to fill and rule the earth (Gen. 1:27-28; Prov. 18:22; 1 Tim. 5:14), to worship, teach and pass on the legacy of faith (Deut. 6:3-9; 12:7; Prov. 22:6; Joel 1:3; Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21), to provide companionship (Gen. 2:18,23-24; Prov. 5:19; Mt. 19:5-6; 1 Cor. 7:3-4; Eph. 5:21-33), and much more. This understanding helps one see that marriage and family are designed and defined by God and God alone, to be unique communities for support, growth, and intimacy through a system of dynamic relationships (Slaughter, FLM handout, p. 16).

This new community, created through marriage to establish family, is designed to work in an order. This order must first begin with loving leadership of the husband, who is the head of the family (Eph. 5:23). The wife must also live in loving submission to the husband (Eph. 5:22, 24). This relationship, rooted and established in God, can only work when the two operate in faith built upon the premise of unconditional love for one another (1 Cor. 13). The husband who lords it over his wife—or leads the home in an oppressive and domineering way—has failed to love with a sacrificial love as Christ did (Eph. 5:25-30). The wife who fails to submit to her husband in reverence for Christ, fails to live in the loving submission that Christ has

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\(^2\) The term ezer kenegdo describes the helpmate in two important ways—they are similar in ways, and yet they are different in others (Slaughter, FLM handout, p. 17-18). These differences can be understood in only one way before the fall—complements of one another (Gen. 2:25; however, after the fall, shame is introduced with sin and they begin to cover and hide their differences (Gen. 3:10). Because of sin, our differences serve to separate those who focus on the “differentness” rather than the completion of one another in the one flesh union through God’s perfect provision.
called her to. This delicate balance is the hallmark of God’s creation for man and woman in marriage and family. Both man and woman must invest in their respective callings whole heartedly for God’s ideal order to function as He intended—to empower one another and the family (Balswick & Balswick, 2007, p. 29). Adam and Eve were the first to attempt to live out this delicate balance of loving submission.

The Myth of the Perfect Family

Many in society today still believe that this delicate balance should be upheld, while many others have given way to other worldviews. This greatly impacts the estates of marriage and family. Today there exists a notion that the perfect family exists in a man and woman who have children; however, this is far from the truth. While Adam and Eve were once perfect, sin entered the world ahead of children.

In Genesis chapter three we see the real picture of how sin entered the world—Adam failed to be husband to his wife Eve and no longer sought to protect her through his headship (see footnote 3). As sin enters into the world things reveal that they are no longer perfect, rather they are stained and soiled by sin and its affects. Adam and Eve no longer have a perfect relationship—the myth of the perfect family is shattered here. Eve is told that her pain in childbirth would be great and that her desire would be in control of her husband, but he will rule over her (Gen. 3:16). To Adam, because he failed to lead and protect his family, God reveals that he will work the ground which will produce thorns and thistle—toilsome labor, rather than joy in work (Adam was commissioned to work the ground in the

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3 It is important to understand that sin entered, not through the eating of the fruit, but rather though the stepping outside of God’s created order is the first sin. It is not that Eve takes the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, if this were so, scripture would reveal that sin entered the world through Eve. Instead sacred page reveals that sin entered the world through one man—Adam (Rom. 5:12-14). It is Adam’s failure to be husband, lovingly protect and provide for Eve, that constitutes the first sin. This is heightened in Genesis chapter three where Eve is told that her desire would be to be over Adam (the same word used in chapter four of sin wanting to overtake Cain). One must learn this order of Creation is established by God and should not be changed—though humanity has been trying to do so from the beginning of time.
Garden as it produced good things; Gen. 2:15). Adam also was informed of the punishment or result of sin, which is death\(^4\) (Gen. 3:19).

As one continues to look throughout the Old Testament, scripture reveals one broken and sinful family after another. The children of Adam and Eve continue in the sins of their parents. Cain kills Abel (Gen. 4:8). Noah has a broken relationship with his son Ham (Gen. 9:25). Abram, throws Sarai under the bus by having her tell the Egyptians that she is his sister so that he will be protected and treated well by them—never mind that they can do what they wish to his wife, Sarai (Gen. 12:10-20). Lot sacrifices his own two daughters to a mob for their pleasure (Gen. 19:8). Abraham again lies about Sarah, and gives her to be Abimelech’s wife (Gen. 20). Esau sells his birthright to Jacob who barters a bowl of lintel stew for it, having seen his brother’s desperate condition (Gen. 25:29-34). Rebekah dupes her husband with a ruse so that her favorite son Jacob would get the fatherly blessing rather than Esau (Gen. 27:1-40). Esau plots to kill his brother Jacob and Jacob flees for his life (Gen. 27:41-45). Jacob is deceived into marrying Leah, though he asked Laban to marry Rachel (Gen. 29:14-30). Sibling rivalry takes on new meaning as Joseph’s brothers beat him up, throw him into a pit, and then sell him into slavery because Jacob shows him favoritism (Gen. 37). Tamar has sexual relations with her father-in-law to conceive a child (Gen. 38). In Genesis alone, one sees that families are filled and cloaked with sin—and this is only Genesis.\(^5\)

When we look at David’s family, we see jealousy of his siblings (1 Sam. 17), multiple wives (Michal, the daughter of Saul; Abigail; Maacah; 

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\(^4\) It is important to note that even though the punishment for sin is death, God works through unlikely circumstances for our good. Death can be seen as an act of God’s unbounded grace—not even bound by death. For just as death entered through sin; sin was defeated through death. Death is established so that humankind might once again be pure and holy, rather than eternally separated from God.

\(^5\) In a classroom handout on finds a brief exercise that is helpful in one see how family is used in scripture. Broad definitions (Ps. 8; 24:1-2; 95:1-7; Rom. 8:19-22; Eph. 3:15); God’s family (Ps. 122:8-9; Is; 25:6-7); Relation of family and God’s family (1 Ki. 8:14-21; Ps. 29:11; 68:9-10; 94:14-15; Is. 43:6-7); Who is the family of God (Mt. 12:46-50; Rom 8:14-17; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 3:1-2); and the smallest unit of family (Ezr. 2:3; 6:4; Ps. 96:7-8; Jn. 19:25-27; Eph. 5:21-6:4) (FLM handout, p. 49).
Haggith; Abital; Eglah; and Bathsheba), adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11), the murder of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11), and poor parental discipline (1 Ki. 1:6)(doesn’t discipline Amnon for raping his step-sister, Absolom’s sister Tamar—the daughter of Maacah (2 Sam. 13:1-22), doesn’t discipline Absolom for murdering his brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:23-39)).

There are no perfect families\(^6\), for the sin of Adam has infected every individual, family, and community. This sin has broken the family into many different forms and left it needing redemption and restoration. God has answered this very need through that which needs it most—God uses the family as the agent for all of salvation history!

**Jesus’ Family**

It is through the family that God chose to send the Messiah, Jesus. We see this greatly preserved through the genealogies of Jesus recorded in the Gospels (Mt. 1:1-16; Lk. 3:23-38). These two genealogies trace the blood line of Jesus back to David—Matthew through Joseph, Jesus’ earthly step-father and Luke through Mary, Jesus’ earthly mother.

A biblical theology of family, must take note of Jesus’ family. Mary conceived a son by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18; Lk. 1:29-38), Joseph was not involved in the conception of the child. Joseph then serves as a step-parent to the Messiah, Jesus. While many in our culture tend to discount the role of step-parents, Joseph was a valuable partner in raising Jesus. It was Joseph who was warned in dreams to take Mary as his wife and to move his family for protection (Mt. 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22). It is in this important community that Jesus was brought up in the “training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). It was this community that took him to be at His Father’s house in Luke chapter two (41-52). It was in this family that Jesus

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\(^6\) “The Old Testament three different types of households are portrayed: nuclear households which are co-residential groups comprised of a married couple, any of their unmarried children, and servants or a widowed individual living with a child or children (e.g., Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau), extended family households when additional kin are added (e.g., Abram, Sarah and Lot), and multiple family households which are comprised of more than one conjugal pair (e.g., in the book of Ruth, when Naomi and Elimilek reside with their sons Mahlon and Chilion, and their wives Ruth and Orpah)” (Berke, 2002, p. 53).
continued to grow “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2:52). Joseph fulfilled what God asked of him as a husband and father of a family.

**God Revelation through the Family Relationships**

It is through the family that God most often depicts His love for His creation in two ways—the marriage relationship and the fatherly relationship.

The first through the imagery of marriage, God reflects his great love for His people. In the Old Testament, God displays His unconditional love for wayward Israel through the prophet Hosea. Hosea is instructed to take for his wife an adulterous woman who will bear him unfaithful children (Hos. 1:2). So Hosea married the prostitute Gomer. She would commit adultery time and time again, yet Hosea was called to receive her back into his home and into his bed. This was a picture of what Israel was doing to God. Israel continued to fall into sin, which was a betrayal of the relationship that was held with their God. Yet, God being rich in mercy continually received Israel back and forgave their sins and iniquities to show His unconditional love for her. This is God’s faithful example of His expectations for His creation.

Saint Paul also used God’s relationship to the people through the act of sacrificial love demonstrated by Jesus Christ to form the understanding of marriage. Paul revealed that a husband’s love for his wife was to be a sacrificial love like Jesus—who gave Himself up for His bride the church (Eph. 5:25-33). Paul also called the wife to respect her husband and submit herself to him as she would to the Lord (Eph. 5:22-24). This is the relationship that the church is to have with Christ, an attitude of respect and submission under God’s authoritative Word.
The scriptures also reveal God in the relationship of a father. Jesus many times calls God His Father. The most notable uses of this relational imagery comes from the Gospel of Luke. The loving and gracious father continues to love his two wayward sons, one who leaves for a distant land and another who is angry because the father rejoices upon his return. It has rightfully been one of the most loved parables and could rightly be called the parable of the loving father rather than the parable of the prodigal son. This relational imagery of God as Father is not contained only in the New Testament, but appears also in the Old Testament in a very tender way. Hosea depicts God as teaching Israel to walk, catching them when they fall and lifting their burden (Hos. 11:1-4).

Scripture is clear on the value of family and the relationships therein. Family is the smallest community that is established through the marriage union of one man and one woman. Inside the context of family, sexuality is a blessing gifted to mankind by God. Inside the context of family, there is mutual encouragement and proper care—both physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is in this context of family that God reveals the greatness of His love for humanity and provides a laboratory for His children to live out the love they have received.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF FAMILY

The Need for a Definition of Family

While the family should be the arena that people live in community according to norms established by a universal truth—for the Christian, the sacred page of God’s inspired and infallible Word; however, the human experience does not always reflect this. Instead we see families broken by

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7 Jesus uses this analogy so often both of His Father and calling Him our Father that biblical references have been left out; however, one of greatest note is that of John 14:6, “No one comes to the Father except through [Jesus Christ].”
8 It is also helpful to read through a bible dictionary to get a picture of family set in biblical times. One of note is that compiled by David Noel Freedman, Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible p. 613-614.
the sin of each individual, compounded by our infected creation (Rom. 8:19-22).

Here are some statistics, compiled by Olson, DeFrain & Skogrand in Marriages & Families (2008, p. 8-11), that reveal what is happening to families—a dramatic departure from what family once was created to be.

- In 2000 there were 2.3 million marriages and 1.2 million divorces
- Today those who choose to marry have a 50% chance of divorcing
- Only 54% of marriages today consist of a bride and groom who have never been married
- Most divorces in the United States involve children, and more than 1 million children are affected each year by divorce
- Single parent families with children has increased from 12% in 1970 to 37% in 2005
- About half (52%) of all African American families are headed by a single mother
- It is predicted that 60% of all children will have lived in a single-parent household by the time they reach 18
- More than half of all couples cohabit before marriage, this is up over 800% since the 1960s
- For those who divorce, about 75% of those remarry, the divorce rate increases about 10% for each remarriage

One might ask, “What does all this mean?” Garland (1999, p. 29) says, “all of this means that families are increasingly defined by those persons chosen to be family, and many families no longer define their primary purpose as bearing and raising children.” Families have become arenas not for living out values, but for selfish pursuits of pleasure, happiness, and wealth. This leaves millions of children uncared for and has left many families today in ruins, struggling to find stable ground.
These realities, though not to this extent, are what prompted President Carter to convene the first White House Conference on Families in the 1980s and an executive order was released on September 2, 1987 by President Reagan for the consideration of policies and regulations that protected families (Berke, 2002, p. 47).

Definitions on the other hand have an ability to state what is acceptable by society, setting a norm for families. Definitions have the ability to shape families into a viable and safe communities (Garland, 1999, p. 22)—like they have strived for in the past. Today we see many different family forms, but we are hard pressed to see anything that these families build their house upon—there is no foundation. Families need a common foundation to build upon, regardless of the family structure. This foundation is revealed, sealed, and stated in a definition of family. In the midst of changing values, moralities, and family types there must be a lighthouse giving direction in the storm.\(^9\)

**The Purpose for a Definition of Family**

This definition of family will give families direction when they find themselves in need of it, hope in the midst of devastation and pain (emotional, physical, and spiritual), and shelter in the midst of the storms of life. For this to happen, there must be an “ideal” or “norm” for families. This is difficult to achieve in our post-modern world that shrinks from absolutes; however, we have much data on the value of marriage and family that can build this foundation block by block. What is more than that, we have God—the creator and sustainer of marriage and family—on our side. It is God who instills hope for the hopeless (Ps. 33:20; Prov. 23:18; Rom. 8:24-25; 2 Cor. 1:7; Heb 6:11; 11:1), comfort for the broken hearted (Ps.

\(^9\) For an excellent brief look at family through history, culture, and theology read “Defining Family: Challenges for Public Policy and Implications for Church Leaders” by Debra L. Berke published in Family Ministry volume 16, number 3 in the Fall of 2002.
This definition will also enable the church to partner with the state in directing where family should be going—on to solid ground. This definition, shaped by the church’s values and beliefs supported by the social sciences, will serve as the basis for various policies established by governmental branches. This will serve also to solidify the norming value of a definition of family—an ideal to strive for, with statistical backing, to improve society as a whole.

To accomplish this, a definition will need to be free of structural mandates and cultural insensitivities while still solidly on the biblical foundation of God’s Word. This definition will need to “be broad enough to encompass a range of family structures, dynamics, and functions” (Olson, DeFrain, Skogrand, 2008, p. 6) while still being narrow enough that family is not whatever one determines it to be. This definition must be able to transcend the household—those who live in the same residence—so that additional relational connections might still be considered family (such as a grandparent who raises their grandchild). In order to begin formulating a working definition of Family for Risen Christ, one must begin to see how definitions can be too inclusive or too exclusive and thereby not as effective as possible.

Olson, DeFrain, and Skogrand suggest family is “two or more people who are committed to each other and who share intimacy, resources, decision-making responsibilities, and values” (2008, p. 6). This is a viable definition; however, it is overly inclusive and allows people living together directly contrary to God’s Word to be considered family (such as same-sex couples and cohabiting couples). The strength of this definition is that it highlights the function of family in “shared intimacy, resources, decision-making responsibilities, and values.”
The once standard legal definition is “a group of individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption.” This is another viable definition; however, the weakness of this definition of family is that there is little relational connection in it. This definition works for most legal issues, but neglects to take into account the bonds that make family apart from “blood, marriage, or legal” emancipation (such as the family that takes in an emancipated teen exiled by the biological family).

As one can see, a definition of family cannot be void of values, yet “has very practical implications for public policy formulation, evaluation, and implementation” (Berke, 2002, p. 57). Through a common definition of family, “we must stabilize marriage and family relationships because we are concerned about the high divorce rates and the stress of raising children in our fast-paced, individualistic culture. Families are the most significant contexts of Christian discipleship. Family relationships have the potential for providing profound experiential learning of Christian virtues such as love, patience, kindness, justice, and forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation” (Garland, 2002, p. 20).

The Working Definition of Family

There are many factors that help shape an operational, or working, definition of family; the first being that of a solid foundation in God’s Word so that the definition reflects God’s values. One must also take into account the history and tradition that has shaped and formed family for years; however, one would do well also to take into account some of the cultural sensitivities and distinctiveness that surrounds the diverse nature of family.

Historically family, from the Latin word meaning household (familia), has referred to the relational unit of kin connected by blood relation, marriage, or legal arrangement (Berke, 2002, p. 48-49). This however has often been confused with household, which refers to the individuals

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A large portion of this section has been gleaned from Debora L. Berke, Defining Family. Page notations are from this article unless otherwise noted.
connected by a residential unit (p. 49). History must inform how we define family so that continuity can be balanced with the change family has experienced. Permanence in family will be preserved while flexibility is instilled for people to live in the relational nature of family that is fluid for so many.

The fluid nature of family is stabilized somewhat by defining just what family is and reflects the unique relationships within families established by birth, adoption, choice, and other relational ties (p. 50). This definition of family must also take into account various cultural functionalities, such as extended family inclusion, in order to be functional for the unpredictable reality of family in the world today.

While not every family will reflect the Christian values and beliefs established by God’s Word, we know that following His guidelines lends to healthier families. Most of all, we know that the Christian virtue of unconditional love reflecting Christ’s love for humanity is the bonding agent and hallmark of healthy functioning families. While households do not have to share the same beliefs as Christians about the definition of family, the reality is that families are best supported, encouraged, and nurtured according to biblical values (function) as opposed to a particular family form (structure) (p. 54).

Taking this information into account, Risen Christ Lutheran Church should operate from a full understanding that family is established through the Work of God joining one man and one woman together in marriage. It is this act of God that creates family—regardless of procreation. While this is the ideal picture of family one must also understand that our theology reveals a paradox that we live in the midst of—the balance between God’s definition of family and the reality of how family is lived out in the world today. Therefore, Risen Christ Lutheran Church must broaden the scope from which ministry is done to and for families rather than run the risk of
not ministering to all of God’s people (those members of His household the church, and those yet to be members). The operational definition of family is an **organization of people in relationships (established through conception, adoption, marriage, or another formal designation)** joined by love and commitment to one another by the sharing of purpose, resources, and experiences as well as meeting of each others needs that endures across time and location.

**An organization of people in relationships**

While we are created by God to be in community, it is family that God has established to meet the enduring need for relationships. Each family will have a unique set of boundaries and rules to which it expects that those within the family will respect and obey. Though no family is perfect in doing so, this organization operates with discipline and forgiveness according to the order in which God has created (with Jesus Christ as the head of the family). While not all families keep these standards all the time, they do not cease to be family; rather they depart and return as a way of reflecting scriptures confession and absolution. It is here within this organization that people have ample opportunity to confess their own sin and receive the forgiveness won for them by Jesus Christ as well as freely give that same forgiveness to those who will sin against them.

**Joined by love and commitment to one another**

This organization of relationships called family is bound together in commitment to one another—a family strength that should be instilled into

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11 Conception reflects the bloodline that perpetuates family through procreation. Adoption stands to represent the legal channels in which a family, not procreating either for medical reasons or by choice, grows through taking economic, spiritual, relational, and physical responsibility for a child. Marriage is included here to reflect that a husband and wife are family in and of themselves—this also reflects the reality that through marriage a new family (though of the same bloodline) has been created in this union. The original working definition was composed the word “choice” was used rather than “another formal designation; however, the change was made to guard the definition from becoming too broad. The change still allows for “families” to contain those who are not related by blood or legally adopted. This change also maintains a differentiation for permanence as opposed to a close friend who does not experience the enduring nature of family.

12 Family strengths are those characteristics that are found in strong families. Hamon writes about these strengths and connects them to biblical texts; this is a brief review of the strengths and texts. Commitment (Gen. 15, 17; the
families. It is this commitment that gives the family the ability to endure for a lifetime as well as draw a delineating line around close friendships which may very well come and go across the lifespan. Love is also used in the working definition to reflect that it is love that brings people together as a way of interacting with one another within the family and thereby reflecting God who creates and establishes family. It is love that chooses to see the goodwill in members of the family, rather than choosing to see the negative traits of family members. Love is that which allows patience with one another, kindness and gentleness in our interactions with one another, and it is love that seeks to meet the needs of others. It is this love—which comes from God (1st John 4)—that is the foundation for our choice to forgive one another. Families are joined together by love and commitment.

**Sharing of purpose, resources, and experiences**

Love and commitment lead families to sharing. One of the first acts of sharing begins when two people from different families begin to share together their purpose in life—their goals, dreams, hopes, and aspirations. As two people share their purpose, they feel as though they “need” to be together—this is attachment.\(^{13}\) This attachment gives couples a sense of comfort with one another, enabling them to share their thoughts and feelings in an intimate way. It also leads them to share their resources. There are many resources shared within a family; however, those of note include emotional capital, time, economic resources, and spiritual beliefs. These resources are exchanged in a number of ways through the network of relationships in the family (this is not an equal sharing, but sharing based upon one’s responsibility established by God’s order of creation—husbands

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\(^{13}\) Garland defines attachment as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world” (1999, p. 43). Attachment is demonstrated when people have a need to be with another and feel anxiety when they are not in their presence (p. 43).
and wives are called to share much more than children). Finally, shared experiences help define family through the form of the greatest sharing of a commodity that everyone has an equal amount of—time. Shared experiences build memories that serve to strengthen relationships and keep them connected. These shared experiences that happen consistently over time become family traditions—yet another family strength that should be instilled in families.

**Meeting of each others needs**

Through the sharing of resources, people in relationship meet one another's needs. These needs are seen clearly in the intimacy\(^{14}\) of family relationships. People within a family have needs that will need to be met—physical needs, spiritual needs, relational needs, and emotional needs. All of these are best met when there is safety within the family—an atmosphere of friendship rather than one that is judgmental and closed. While in the safety of family, members will allow others to see their inner thoughts, needs, and desires with the hope that their family members will be sensitive to these needs and meet them. Through making their needs known others can attempt to meet those needs in love making the family a place of protection, provision, support, and encouragement.

**Endures across time and location**

Families are not something that come and go—family is differentiated from other relationships with this characteristic. The enduring nature of family transcends time and location. Healthy families do not have to be together all the time, but can be apart as well (David Olson refers to this as enmeshed or disengaged). This enduring nature reflects the foundation on which families must be built upon—love. Saint Paul reminds us that love never fails in First Corinthians chapter thirteen (v. 8). While families do

\(^{14}\) With the use of this word, the author is attempting to depict the full breadth of the word. There is emotional vulnerability in families that develop an atmosphere of safety. There is physical closeness, of an appropriate nature, within families through touch—hugs and kisses. Therefore, intimacy is the vulnerable sharing in a safe environment so that physical and emotional needs are made aware to another in the hope that they will be met.
experience separation because of sin, family remains family regardless of personal preference. If you do not like or approve of an action someone does within the family, they do not cease to be family. Members of a family may choose to cut relational ties; however, this does not mean they are no longer family. Rather, in these situations, we see families failing in part to live in the full reality of what God created family to be.

With this definition of family being the locus for ministry at Risen Christ, the family of God will be able to build up, equip, and encourage families throughout the world instilling strengths that will cover them with blessings. Blessings that are hewn through family commitment, time together, effective communication, appreciation and encouragement, fulfillment of appropriate roles and responsibilities, shared spiritual life, community support, positive family identity, and the ability to cope with stress (Garland, 2002, p. 22). In doing this, families will be stabilized, marriages will be protected, and children will be strengthened.

**A Definition of Family Life Ministry**

The church must also look at what it means to be ministering to families—building up, equipping, and encouraging them. There is a common theme in the New Testament that connects the home to a reality in the church—a gathering of families into the body of Christ—as family, brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 8:12-17; Gal 4:5-7; Jas. 2:15). Jesus himself in Mark chapter six (v. 31-35), calls those who gathered around Him and do His will His brother and sister and mother. While scripture clearly teaches about family relationships—children (Ex. 20; Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20), parents (Deut. 6:3-9; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; 1 Tim 6:1; Tit. 2), spouse (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pt. 3:1-7), caring for the aged (Mk. 7:9-13; Tit. 2)—Jesus teaches membership in another family, the family of God (Jn. 3; 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Gal 3:26-4:7; 4:21-31; 1 Thes. 1:4, 6). This is the ministry of
the church, to bring those not yet a part of the family of God, into the Church through adoption by baptism and instruction (Mt. 28:18-20).

This is done through the ministry of the church that rightly teaches God’s Word and rightly administers His sacraments so that the needs of God’s family are met. Family life ministry is the methodology in which Risen Christ Lutheran Church carries out this mission. Family life ministry is building upon the strengths that families have and instilling the strengths and characteristics that families need. As Garland states, “Family [life] ministry should encompass everyone in a congregation” (2002, p. 23) because everyone belongs to a family and should be conformed to the likeness of Christ Jesus. But what does a definition of family life ministry look like without just stating it is what we are currently doing, or how everything is done in ministry?

Family life ministry has been defined in many different forms. Guernsey (1990, p. 5) defines family ministry as “the church’s empowering the people of God to relate to one another as if they are family, especially if they are.” This definition is broad and almost comical—act like family especially if you are. But what does it look like? Guernsey goes on to explain that it is not a set of programs, but a process (or methodology) in which the church intentionally shapes and forms the family regardless of the content of programs (p. 6). If Christianity is going to be applicable to life, it must first be applied to the most intimate of relationships—that of husband and wife, parents and children (p. 7).

Ron Deal states that family life ministry “is comprised of preventative and therapeutic efforts designed to strengthen the family. Interventions are driven by a theological understanding of family life originating from a study of the biblical text, family systems theory, and family life cycle” (http://www.amfmonline.com/articles/anmviewer.asp?a=135&print=yes). According to Deal, family life ministry is primarily preventative by teaching
relevant biblical truths to empower families. It should also be focused on outreach, by addressing the needs of families within the community and partnering with them to strengthen families and grow the family of God. It is also intervention in cases when it is deemed necessary. For Ron Deal, family life ministry is the thread that is woven through all that we do in the church.

Garland suggests that family ministry is what is done by a “community on a mission” to develop faith within the congregation so that they are more like Christ and in that likeness then minister to others they interact with (Garland, 1999, p. 374).

Family life ministry is the work of the church to first and foremost proclaim the full counsel of God through law and Gospel. Family life ministry is education across the lifespan (conception to death) through various programs and events—such as bible studies, grief presentation, support groups, educational offerings, marriage preparation, and parenting education as well as fellowship events. Family life ministry is equipping members of the family of God to interact with one another as children of God who model the freely given forgiveness they themselves have received from Jesus Christ. Family ministry is strengthening families by infusing them with knowledge about relationships as well as encouraging them to live out that knowledge in wisdom. Family life ministry provides services such as baptisms, blessings, confirmations, weddings, prayers, and funerals. Family life ministry is personal and relational interactions between people caring for one another. Family life ministry is this and so much more that the church does, but always has an eye on how this impacts and blesses the family.

When we leave the definition of family life ministry as broad as this, we lose what family life ministry is. Be sure to understand that family life ministry does all those things, but family life ministry is not that. Rather we must have a complete, and yet focused definition of family life ministry.
Therefore, **family life ministry is the methodology in which the church ministers to the needs of families—at all stages and in all forms—in relationship to their homes, communities, churches, and world so that Christ is reflected in and through their lives.**

This definition allows the church to develop various models for carrying out family life ministry in their context and community; however it provides the lens in which the church focuses those ministries—strengthen families, relationships, and communities through the power of God’s Word lived out in their everyday lives.

**A Rationale for Family Life Ministry**

Many have asked why this “method” of ministry is needed? Why do we need to refocus the way we are doing things? Why do we need to use this new term? Ron Deal states,

> Family is God’s plan for both keeping faith alive in the current generation and passing faith to the next. Family is the key mechanism for spiritual formation in children and is a key maturing mechanism for us as adults. For example, is it just me, or has anyone else noticed that singleness is God’s tool for teaching us self-restraint; parenting is God’s tool for teaching us humility and prayer; being parented as a child is God’s tool for teaching us surrender and obedience; sexuality is God’s tool for teaching us vulnerability and oneness; marriage is God’s tool for teaching us sacrifice; and family conflict, crisis, and tragedy is God’s tool for teaching us forgiveness and mercy? God uses these aspects of family life to mature us and deepen our faith. Our ministry to families should strive to do the same [for families in our church and communities through family life ministry] (Deal, 2005, p. 4).

Gary Oliver, in *Developing a Family Ministry for Your Church*, says that unhealthy families are undernourished spiritually, emotionally, and relationally (p. 3). Children raised in such an environment have difficulty establishing healthy relationships (difficulty in communicating clearly, stabilizing emotions, resolving conflict effectively, and trusting in others; p. 3) as they progress through the life cycle. Families in the world today are
hurting. There are so many dysfunctional families that there often seems as though there isn’t a healthy family in the world today.

Roehlkepartain helps one understand families in the world today with powerful statistics from the United States Census Bureau. Single parents who don’t marry compose 39% of adults, while another 35% are recovering from divorce; 22% of adults are married, yet the spouse is not around; 5% of adults are widowed. Single-parent families are composed of a mother and children 85% of the time, while those composed of a father and children representing the other 15% (2001, p. 13). These statistics reveal families are hurting.

Families today scarcely reflect the strengths of healthy families. Rather families today are crumbling because they lack commitment to one another—we see this in the marriage relationship as well. Families are no longer carving out and protecting family time, but crack open the window at the local drive-thru for a family meal as everyone heads in different directions. Communication has been limited to sharing only what you have to in a limited number of characters so that you can retreat back into your own little digital world. Appreciation and encouragement have been replaced by competition and “smack” talk. The spiritual life has been watered down to what I want for my life and the roles and responsibilities of the home have been abandoned at the hospital. Families have abdicated their responsibilities to the schools, the church, and the day care down the street. Family identity has been lost along with the family keys and when crisis hits, the home comes down with a great crash (Mt. 7:24-27).

Be sure to understand that the call to family ministry is not a call to keep up the status quo (Garland, 1999, p. 373), but it is a call to repair the

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15 This is a far cry from the community of faith, hope, and love suggested by Chartier that depicts faith as an anchor in crisis, a worldview for framing values, family strengths needed for the cohesion of various personalities, and power to heal personal brokenness (2000, p. 49-53).

16 A WELS report referenced by Wayne Mueller at the South Central District Convention, June 6-7, 1994 revealed statistics within the WELS represent the breakdown of the family. Only 45% of WELS members attend church on Sunday; 11% attend formal bible study; and only 5% of WELS homes have daily devotions.
crumbling foundation of family and society by quelling the rampant individualism and selfishness with God’s loving community established to meet one another’s needs spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It is a call to buttress the walls of homes in the community with the strengths that provide stability for all in the family. It is a radical remodeling of our homes from the heart out and it is in and through these broken and dysfunctional families that God can and will restore our foundation.

The church must engage in family life ministry to see people hurting, not as a problem, but a place that God has called us to apply His healing salve—His Word of love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace. We need family life ministry to teach families once again how to be families—worship together, grow together, serve together, study God’s Word together, forgive one another, encourage one another, care for one another, and practice stewardship together (Garland, 2002, p. 24-25).

This is the mission of the church, for there is no other social institution that has more lifelong contacts, no other organization walks through the milestones of the lifespan, and no other group with such a high value of marriage and family (Bergam, p. 210). It is parents who are the primary faith formers (Search Institute) and the church must encourage parents to live out their faith in the family. When you look at the world as a village of 100 people, only 30 would be Christians founded on the principles that support and encourage family (Olson, Defrain & Skogrand, 2008, p. 31). The question is no longer, why does the church need to do this. The question is, how can the church not afford to do family life ministry

As the church begins to focus ministry on intentionally meeting the needs of the family, a partnership between the home and the church will form. Families will begin to partner with the church, because their needs are being met and most importantly we are treating families not as the problem but the solution. Families desire solid and practical education—the church
will provide focused and practical educational offerings for the full lifespan. Families will see a remedy to being stretched too thin as the church models time management and asset building with in the church. Families and congregations will be found working hand in hand to bless others in their communities. Families will be found in gatherings across generational boundaries as we truly value one another as God does. Relationships will once again be the focus of our communities, biblical values will be lived out, and the community itself will be strengthened (Garland, 2002, p. 27-28). This is the work of the church. This is family life ministry!

**FAMILY LIFE MINISTRY AT RISEN CHRIST – VISION**

Risen Christ Lutheran Church sees the reality that children are less and less likely to grow up with a biblical worldview (Renfro, Shields & Strother, 2009, p. 141) and even less likely to grow up with a faith rooted in God’s Word. Our way of doing ministry appears to be less effective in a world of individualism, secular humanism, and post-modernism. Therefore the church must shift the focus of ministry from the programmatic model that has served the church in the past to an active and intentional model of ministry to families across the lifespan so that needs are met and the cross of Jesus Christ is lifted high in true faith. This is not a condemnation of the ministry of the church done in the past, but a whole-hearted acknowledgement of a change that has taken place in the world and an opportunity that is facing the church. In order to minister to this changed world, the ministry model of the church must change while keeping the focus—Jesus Christ as revealed in God’s inspired and infallible Word—meeting peoples needs in social ministry as well as proclaiming salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

The path for ministry and the mode of changing ministry models at Risen Christ will be a slow process, but it will greatly impact the current
generation as well as generations to come. To make this shift, one must be sure of the foundation—this process began in the first part of the paper, establishing definitions for family and family life ministry, and will continue through consistent study of God’s Word. While the members of Risen Christ continue this process, a duplication of ministry will occur—foundations of families in and around the church will be strengthened. This is most clearly done by going back to God’s design for faith formation—the family and the family of faith (Renfro, Shields & Strother, 2009, p. 144).

It is unfortunately clear that parents have abdicated their responsibility in teaching the faith at home, and the church was more than happy to perpetuate this by taking over their God established role (Renfro, Shields & Strother, 2009, p. 146). The church must call families to once again take up the mantle handed them by God through the blessing of children—they must teach the faith at home. The church also has a role in this as champion for the family—encouraging, educating, and equipping. Yet there is an early step in this championing process—Risen Christ families must understand their purpose as parents is to pass on the faith which equips people for all that life brings. This is the reason God blessed them with children—“to be equipped for His purposes” (Renfro, Shields & Strother, 2009, p. 148). The vision of family life ministry in the church is to forge a balanced partnership between the church (equipper, encourager, and educator) and the Christian home (teaching, training, and toiling) so that the one true faith is firmly founded in our lives as we love God and our neighbor across all generations.

Satan is hard at work in the world today and “any attempt to reclaim families for God’s kingdom will be met with spiritual opposition” (Renfro, Shields & Strother, 2009, p. 162); however, this is God’s will and with God

17 Jay Strother notes that most parents do have a purpose for their efforts as parents—that their children be happy. However, this happiness is not attainable apart from God; therefore they were undermining their efforts. (Renfro, Shields & Strother, 2009, p. 147).
all things are possible (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23; 10:27; Phil. 4:13). With God working in and through us, the end is a picture all should see. The end is a spiritual house *founded* on the solid rock of God’s Word, *framed* for stability for the next generation, *filled* with the Spirit of God through the means of grace, and *finished* with the fine work of salvation. This is the spiritual house that “you also, like living stones, are being built into” (1 Pt. 2:5).

**Foundation**

“No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus Christ is the Church’s one foundation (LSB: 644) and the source for all that which is built (Heb. 3:4). This foundation is focused on caring for the current and future generations through the ministry of Jesus Christ. The foundation must be laid in a solid and long-standing *biblical worldview* through the milestone ministry of Risen Christ. This biblical worldview is infused in the children through the ministry of the church and home operating in tandem, focused on God’s plan for the church and family revealed in His Word.

**Framed**

As this ministry grows and takes root, the framing structure of the home will be in place. The home will be built with the values of God—His great love for people (Mt; 13:44-52; Jn. 3:16)—and lived out through the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 6:22-26).

**Filled**

As each wall is pieced together, the home is filled with light that will shine throughout the house, the church, the community, and the world as God has called all Christians to be the light to a sin darkened world (Mt. 5:14-16; Lk. 8:16-18; 11:33-36; 16:1-14; Jn. 1:1-18; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46). As the church and home become light houses in the community, faith will radiate out from us as we continue our course in faith.

**Finished**
Through our course in faith we will be empowered by the working of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20) to empower others in the faith. And when our life comes to an end, those of the household of faith will gladly hear the powerful words of the one who saves—“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Mt. 25:21, 23).

To accomplish this the church and home will partner to establish a milestone ministry that will strengthen the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ along every step of the lifespan. Milestone ministry at Risen Christ will be called Faith Legacy. Families will bless their children publicly every two years for the first eight years of the lifespan, every year for the next ten years (until age 18 where there is a graduation celebration and sending event), and the church will bless and pray for them for the milestones and achievements they experience for the rest of the lifespan. The milestones are laid out below and will be led by a passionate and gifted family member of God’s household of faith.

† **Conception** (conception to birth)—when the church learns of the conception of a child, education, support, and encouragement will begin through the cradle role and baptismal preparation program. The cradle role is a ministry of encouragement with education about major changes that the family will experience. The baptismal preparation program is an intentional strengthening of the relationship of the church with the family. The pastor will visit the family on at least two different occasions while functionally teaching about baptism, the baptismal rite, and the ministry that the church will offer to the family over the milestones of the lifespan.

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18 Balswick & Balswick have an excellent understanding of empowering. The biblical model of freedom is the ability to empower and serve others. In the end as we move toward finishing our course in faith, we can fully empower others as we educate, equip, and encourage others to reach their full potential established and enacted through the power of God living in us! (2007, p. 27-31)

19 The program will be build upon the Faith Legacy Series produced by Kids Kount Publishing, [http://www.kidskountpublishing.com](http://www.kidskountpublishing.com). Other good resources used in developing this include: Vibrant Faith Ministries, [http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org](http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org); The Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide by Dr. James Dobson; D6 Family, [http://d6family.com](http://d6family.com); Heritage Builders, [http://www.heritagebuilders.com](http://www.heritagebuilders.com); The Logos Ministry, [http://www.thelogosministry.org](http://www.thelogosministry.org); and Orange Ministry, [http://www.whatisorange.org](http://www.whatisorange.org);
† **Birth & Baptism** (birth to less than two years old)—the church incorporates families into the baptismal rite through the introduction of the family to the congregation by the head of the household (taking special care for those who have special needs and circumstances). The family is educated and equipped to be leaders of prayer in the home, church, and community. The focus at this milestone is to gain comfort with prayer in a family context.

† **Family Devotions** (two to four years old)—families are the primary faith formers, therefore, the church will partner with the family to educate parents in that which they need. First and foremost the family will be informed and encouraged to perform family devotions at least five times a week. The church will partner with them in these devotions through weekly bulletin inserts that will outline the devotion for the five days of the week (these will also be available via the church website). Families will experience training in how to lead family devotions as well as be partnered with a mentor couple (or parent in a like circumstance) who has experience in spiritual leading of the family. Parents will also be educated in parental practices, such as discipline, worship and bible study attendance, and the family strengths. Parents will be encouraged—as all members are—to be a part of regular worship and bible study. These worship services will be focused on practical living of the Christian life at church, at work, at home, and in the world. Bible studies will regularly be offered to further equip, educate, and encourage families to live out their faith—forgiveness & reconciliation, faith formation, vocation, time & resource management, marriage enrichment, marriage mentoring, family finances, communication & conflict resolution, biblical literacy, parenting for special needs, family relationships & lifespan, family strengths, stewardship, and families with special needs & circumstances (including children with special needs, military families, life issues, legal
documentation needed for families, and social services provided by the government). Each milestone along the journey of the lifespan will contain with it age appropriate information so that family devotions continue to grow and mature with the needs of the family.

**Family Worship** (four to six years old)—worship is more than something that families do on Sunday. The church will teach the family the value of worshiping together in a multi-generational worship service at church. This is the planned gathering of God’s faithful to remember the Sabbath day (Ex. 20:8) which is not to be forgotten or neglected (Heb. 10:25). The family will be enlivened to the benefits of worship—fight Satan (1 Pt. 5:8); resist temptation (1 Cor. 10:13); dress in the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10-20); receive rest (Mt. 10:24-25); serve & meet the needs of the Body of Christ (Heb. 10:24-25); learn & grow in faith (2 Tim. 3:15-17); and to be fed by the hand of God (Mt. 4:4). The value of worship is so important to understand, because the family can reap the benefits throughout the week as they worship together as a family in their own home—for where two are three are gathered in Jesus’ name, He is there with them (Mt. 18:20). This then becomes a way of living, presenting your life as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to the Lord in worship (Rom. 12:1-2). God’s people worship Him in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24). The church will educate, equip, and encourage parents to be responsible for what then enters their place of worship—their bodies and their homes. Families will be instructed in the impact of music, movies, and media as well as proper uses of these things so that Satan doesn’t have a foothold in the Christian home (Eph. 4:27).

**Family Service** (six to eight years old)—service is a hallmark of the church. Families will be equipped and encouraged to serve as a family in the church, community, and the home so that members of the church will see the purpose for which we serve others in the love God has for us and
others. Serving together begins to reveal a reality in parenting—much more is caught than taught. When families serve together they see the value of other people, are able to see their blessings in new light, and experience valuable time together in living out the Christian faith. The church will champion family service with a quarterly servant list. The servant list will have service projects for all age ranges and locations. These will range from helping another family with in the church to church planned and directed mission trips. Each of these family service projects becomes a natural classroom where faith is taught through teachable moments and fashioned by the activity of serving.

† **First Bible** (eight to ten years old)—the church will gift to the child in third grade God’s Word. More than gifting the Word to children, the church will continue to instruct families in the use, understanding, and utility of God’s infallible and inspired Word. It is here that the root of bible education is applied to the more sensitive issues in life—sex education begins at this age, confession & absolution is practiced, and family systems are strengthened through education. Family devotions begin to take a firmer shape centered around the bible—including memory work. Together the family is taught how to read the bible, where to search for answers, resources to help them understand God’s Word, and the changeless love of God revealed in scripture creates and sustains faith within the Christian home. Various bible activities will be taught and experienced within the context of the family—such as bible hunts, favorite verses, mapping salvation, and biblical history—to instill a genuine and enduring love for God’s Word.

† **God’s Plan** (fifth to sixth grade)—the church will provide a family retreat for males as well as one for females to address gender specific issues. Prior to the retreat, parents will be educated on how to speak to their children about sexuality, sexual activity, intimacy, dangers is sex, and
God’s plan for the sexes as revealed in God’s Word. This retreat will mark the beginning of the transition into manhood or womanhood through the passing of the baton blessing event—for males the gift of a baton, and for females the gift of a journal. Families will be taught the dangers of adolescence, the struggles in adolescence, and the strain that the parent child relationship will go through in the coming years and how to protect that valuable relationship. The church will continue to encourage families through bible studies, preaching, and mentoring so that relationships are valued, strengthened, and sustained in a healthy and biblical way.

† **Honor** (seventh grade)—the church will offer a family retreat that will focus on instilling honor and integrity into children and families. The retreat will focus on communication between parent and child so that open sharing and dialogue can take place in the home. Parents will be educated on listening skills and children will be equipped with appropriate ways to talk to their parents while honoring them as God calls them to (Ex. 20:12). Parents and children will also be equipped with ways to deal with conflict within the family. Far to often families think that they shouldn’t have to deal with many of the things they do—irresponsibility, thoughtlessness, hurtful words and action, neglect of relationships, and the like which are all sin. While the person may indeed “know” better, the remedy for sin is the forgiveness we have received through Jesus Christ. This enables us to be tenderhearted, kind (even when others sin against us), and forgiving of others, just as Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32). Finally the retreat will help families see how they can honor all people. Jesus Christ loves all people and has shown their value by giving his life for them—the value of something is determined by the price someone is willing to pay. We too must value others in this same way—loving them enough, not to leave them in sin which separates them from God.
† **Faith** (eighth grade)—the church will offer a retreat for those seeking to be confirmed into the church as youth. This retreat will focus not on the educational transmission of biblical truths in the traditional sense; rather it will focus on how the faith one confesses is to be lived out. This retreat will be mandatory for those seeking confirmation at Risen Christ and will educate youth how to live out their faith with appropriate decision making at home, church, school, and with friends.

† **Confirmation** (membership in the church through public confession of faith)—confirmation is a process of strengthening the home; therefore, it should involve the family. Youth are required to attend classes beginning in the sixth grade and apply for confirmation in the eighth grade. Confirmation is a rite of the church in which an individual confesses the faith before man and God declaring commitment to Christian membership in the church. To reflect the purpose of the church in affiliation with the family, a family member is to attend at least fifty percent of the classes (these classes may also be substituted with offerings from Family 101) with their child so that the family shares the faith strengthening process known as confirmation. Confirmation will give practical tools for understanding the faith (knowledge of scripture), practicing the faith in accord with God’s Word (wisdom in living), and applying God’s will for one’s life (living the Christian life) through dynamic offerings of large groups, small groups, family groups, and retreats. The culmination of this confirmation program will be the confession of their faith. This is done in two parts. The questioning of the confirmands provides them an opportunity to confess before man (Mt. 10:32-33) all that they have come to know and believe about Jesus Christ and His Word. The second aspect of this confession is demonstrated in a written statement of faith that each eighth grade student will complete. These statements will then be compiled and published in a booklet for the congregation.
† **Relationships** (ninth grade)—the church will continue to build on the sex education that began in the third grade, was focused upon in confirmation, and is now being tested in high school. The Relationships retreat will continue to encourage youth to make decisions that align with God’s will and Word. Youth will come to understand God’s will for the opposite sex, created order, boundaries for sexuality, and guidelines for relationships. Parents will be given many resources to draw upon in the continual nurturing and directing of their children in God’s plan for sexuality.

† **Responsibility** (tenth grade)—the church will support the family in teaching appropriate responsibilities as the task of parenting is turned into a task of encouraging youth to make godly choices in life. The responsibilities that will be focused on will be driving and appropriate decision making skills. A partnership with the local driver’s education program and police department will be forged to develop a first class educational opportunity (using graphic demonstrations). The latter part of the retreat will focus on discerning God’s will for your life. Encouragement to the family will be given through the reality that God will continue to walk with you wherever you go (Josh. 1:8-9).

† **Friendships** (eleventh grade)—relationships are extremely difficult to prepare for largely because the church has failed to teach youth about the value and role of friendship. This retreat will focus on the various friendships that one has through life—family, friends, dating, and work. All of these relationships have been addressed through the various legacy steps on the journey; however, these relationships are moving front and center in the lives of youth. Of particular note are the relationships surrounding friends and family. These are the most valuable and important relationships (outside of one’s relationship with Jesus Christ). This retreat will teach people how to set boundaries, guard against sin,
appropriate ways to seek out a spouse, and the power of friendships in
godly dating.

† **Roots** (twelfth grade)—prayer is the central part of the Christian life and
will be a tool as the teen is launched into adulthood. This retreat will be a
passage event into adulthood as the parents give a blessing object in a
prayer quilt forged over the years of their life. Families will be intimately
connected through prayer, participants will see the need and use for
prayer in the church, and the teen will be connected to a church as they
prepare for college. The church will also celebrate their roots in the
church family through a special blessing service for graduates.

† **College** (preparation)—students and parents alike need support for
young adults setting off for college. This support ranges from financial
planning, budgeting, loan applications, college applications, reference
letters, traveling to school, and living in accord with biblical values. In
the even years, Risen Christ is to offer an appropriate workshop to help
families deal with and prepare for the transition of a young adult into
college. This will be done in conjunction the Roots ministry step.

† **Christian Life** (college years)—various retreats and activities will be
offered for college age young adults to actively get them involved in the
life of the church. Prayer and service will be the center pieces of this
ministry as these young adults are differentiated from their family and yet
identified in the church family. While independence is greatly sought in
the age range, interdependence will be instilled through mutual love and
affection of various generations. Fellowship groups of various ages
(children and seniors) will provide prayer & care packages (supplies for
college as well as written prayers and blessings for them) throughout the
year. One summer event each year will be designed to bring these
groups together in a multi-generational fellowship event (picnic, potluck,
or some other activity). Through this intentional ministry, various
generations will see the value of interdependence in the Christian life over and above autonomy and independence.

† **Graduation** into Work (college graduation)—college graduates will be recognized in our worship service, but will also be given some networking tools through employment readiness training. Partnering with the community, Risen Christ will develop, maintain, and implement job training programs—such as resume development, interview skills, applying for jobs, computer skills, and networking. This will also serve as a link to the community to find ethical and qualified applicants to fill positions in the community.

† **Marriage Preparation** (engagement)—marriage preparation will begin at an early age, with educating youth on mate selection—being equally yoked (1 Cor. 6:14-16), emotional connection, physical relationship boundaries, and communication skills. Marriage preparation will include the use of PREPARE-ENRICH by Life Innovations ([https://www.prepare-enrich.com](https://www.prepare-enrich.com)) as well as Christian Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program by PREP Incorporated ([http://www.prepinc.com](http://www.prepinc.com)). Other resources will be used at the discretion of the pastoral staff. Wedding and marriage preparation policies are to be reviewed and updated annually by the pastoral staff in conjunction with the elders. These policies are to be compiled into the Risen Christ Marriage Planning Guide distributed to all who inquire about marriage at Risen Christ Lutheran Church.

† **Marriage E²** (enrichment)—the marital relationship is one of great value; however, it is a relationship that is greatly attacked by the world. Therefore the marriage enrichment program of Risen Christ Lutheran Church will produce at least one bible study annually that is crafted to strengthen, support, and sustain marriages in the congregation and community. Risen Christ will also plan activities, including a week long
devotional and sermon series for national marriage week (February 7-14). Through the year, there shall be at least two offerings for personal marriage enrichment through programs such as ENRICH, The Couple Check Up, or another Marriage Makeover resource. Finally, Risen Christ Lutheran Church will annually plan and carry out a marriage retreat that is available to members of the congregation and community—this retreat must be advertised through various channels in the community as an outreach program to support and strengthen marriages in the community.

† **Marriage Mentoring** (enrichment)—for those relationships that are struggling, marriage mentors will be assigned. The marriage mentoring program at Risen Christ will be the use of Christian Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program by PREP Incorporated (http://www.prepinc.com) and other resources as designated by the pastoral staff. Marriage mentors need not have a perfectly strong relationship, but have a connecting point that will make them relevant to the couple in need—if they are contemplating divorce, match them with a couple who has experienced the situation. Intense marital mentoring should be done in connection to pastoral staff—such as those who are separated or contemplating divorce. Marriage 911 (produced by the National Institute of Marriage, http://www.nationalmarriage.com) will be used for this mentoring process in partnership with the pastoral staff. The marriage ministry of Risen Christ should be yearly training and connecting mentors to those who will benefit from this ministry.

† **Fellowship** (living as a community)—Risen Christ Lutheran Church is a community of families that finds a new beginning in the family of God through faith in the risen Christ, God’s only son. It is in this fellowship of believers that relationships are built for the welfare of the church and her families. Several times a year, fellowship events are to be held that bring
all the generations of the church together. These events should be planned and implemented by the boards of the church, ministry bodies, or fellowship groups at the approval of the church counsel.

† **Fellowship Groups** (small groups)—as the church continues to grow, the relational nature of Risen Christ will become strained. Innovative programs can be used to bring the family of God together—such as Dinners for Eight—however, for mutual care and support fellowship groups are formed. In the church pastors cannot care for all the members of the Body of Christ in a close relationship, rather small groups must commit to one another to pray for one another, encourage one another in the Christian life, and befriend one another. These are called fellowship groups. Risen Christ fellowship groups are to be formed each year. In conjunction with adult information class (membership requirement for the church), new groups should form with those who join the church membership. Yearly sermon and bible studies shall be used to start up groups from the existing membership of Risen Christ as well as a tool for reaching out to those whom members wish to invite to church. These are not primarily for faith formation, though faith will be nurtured through the use of God’s Word in these groups; rather the purpose of the group is to enjoy the fellowship of believers who gather around God’s Word and Sacraments at Risen Christ and to minister to one another in love.

† **Health** (caring for the temple of the Holy Spirit)—a yearly health program shall be offered to the fellowship of believers. These offerings should range from stress and financial management to weight management and healthy living. These resources should be done in conjunction with area health facilities to build a network of resources. These workshops will continue to remind the members of Risen Christ
Lutheran Church that we are stewards of God’s gifts to us, and our bodies are one of those gifts we need to manage well.

† **Man & Woman in Christ** (biblical view of men and woman)—this element of the milestone ministry at Risen Christ is greatly needed in the church to help teach a biblical view of men and women in the midst of a confused world in the area of manhood (masculinity), womanhood (femininity), and the roles each play in marriage and family. This will be a bold education project for the pastoral staff to work through; however, it will continue to place the foundation of “who” we are and “whose” we are in the sacred page of scripture. Created order is greatly needed to be taught in the church so that men know their role as provider and protector (emotionally, spiritually, and physically) and so that women know their role as God’s perfect provision for man as his helpmate (not subservient, but submissive in following God’s perfect will). This has practical implications within marriage—marriage roles not based upon egalitarian or traditional views, but on God’s spiritual gifts granted for each person to complement and strengthen the family. Husbands must be taught the important role of setting boundaries for the family so that they are within the boundaries of God’s will established in His Word, for this is the purpose and role God gave man at creation. This will help combat the power struggle of selfish people for control of the family and remind them just who is in control of the family—God.

† **On Mission** (missional sending)—the Risen Christ family greatly values the family, which means we value all families throughout the world. Most importantly Risen Christ values the faith that brings families closer to the members of the family and closer to their Savior Jesus Christ. Each year Risen Christ shall commit to several mission projects, trips, and activities. These will be published for the family to do along with organized trips for the church family (international), the youth (domestic), and the family
These groups will be prayed for in the worship service and given the “fabric of faith”. The fabric of faith is a piece of fabric that is given out to those in which our missionaries comes into contact with—they give them a piece of fabric while telling them about why they are serving, because of Jesus’ great love. Each missionary group will be encouraged to submit a report to the congregation through a bible study to perpetuate the joy of serving ministry.

† **Retirement & Life** (issues related to retirement)—Risen Christ must also prepare families for the various milestones that families will experience. One such transition that is often overlooked is the transition into retirement. Workshops that will encourage, educate, and equip family members preparing for or experiencing retirement should include financial planning, budgeting, and estate planning as well as the change in activity level, schedule demands, and the impact upon the marriage relationship. The church can support families in this time of change and the church can reap the blessing of volunteers connected to the church with time on their hands. The church should also be directive on wills, living wills, and other legal documentation. Through workshops and bible studies the church can partner with legal teams to help make sure families have their financial and legal house in order. There is one other important thing to plan for after retirement—the end of life. The church can provide grief education—how to deal with it and support another person in the grieving process. After a grief bible study the church will provide a workshop that prepares them for issues surrounding the end of life. This workshop can address various legal documentation and estate planning; however, this is not what often is overlooked. Rather the workshop focuses on planning your funeral, in conjunction with local mortuaries and the church, the details of your final resting place until the resurrection are worked out so that your grieving family members don’t have to worry about the details
of the funeral—rather they can receive the encouragement and hope from the promise of the resurrection at the funeral service.

† **Crisis** (crisis care & support)—the church is able to deal with some crisis and should be prepared to equip families through various crises; however, the church must also have a strong referral network. Risen Christ will regularly review and prepare a list for referral in several different areas—eating disorders, cutting, depression, marital therapy, family therapy, and the like. The church must build the bridge between the community resources and Christian counselors when referral is needed.

† **Family** (relationships and management)—families come in all different sizes, shapes, and forms and so do the needs individuals experience within the family. The church is charged with the task of meeting all these needs. Risen Christ will care for families as they are, and move them toward the strengths that families need to exhibit. Family strengths are taught through the strong families class and nurtured through continuing fellowship groups that are centered around the prayer and nurture of one another—the same characteristics that will be exhibited in the family, regardless of form, to instill strengths and nurture others. Through the introducing of family strengths, the family will also be equipped with the resources to help them manage their family according to God’s Word—setting priorities, setting boundaries, setting consequences for sin, and setting guidelines for forgiveness. This will extend beyond the emotional capital that is traded within the family to the physical resource management as well—finances, time, work, and activities. These will help the family function in the strengths that will work to cement the family relationships in a healthy foundation.

† **Parenting** (stage appropriate parenting groups)—for those who enter into the vocation of parenting—either by biological procreation, adoptions,
or foster parenting—support is needed. The church will not only give support but also help parents manage the difficult responsibility that the Lord has blessed them with. Parenting class and mentors shall be offered each year, rotating between parenting children, special issues (special needs, teen related needs, launching children, boomerang children, and parenting your parents in the sandwich generation), and parenting adolescent children. These parenting classes will be approved by the pastoral staff and the board of education for content. While parenting is difficult—dealing with the stresses of the world and work while bringing up your children in the midst of all that life throws at you—many parents can become overwhelmed. In addition to teaching godly discipline, parents must be taught how to carry out their vocation as parents. Parents must be firmly grounded in God’s Word so that the home is a haven for Christian living. Through the various steps of the milestone ministry at Risen Christ, parents will be taught how to pray with their children and in front of others, how to lead regular family devotions and family nights, and how to develop a place of worship at your home (setting up a home altar). These are important aspects of parenting that will be addressed as the church partners with parents to bring children up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

† **Family**² (financial management)—regular financial offerings shall be made available to the community and congregation. Risen Christ Lutheran Church partners with Thrivent Financial for Lutherans in bringing educational offerings to the membership of the church each quarter. These events will be supplemented with a bible study (such as Financial Peace University, [http://www.daveramsey.com](http://www.daveramsey.com); or The Road to Financial Freedom, [http://www.crown.org](http://www.crown.org)) every other year. Along with the family financial classes, budgeting will be taught in all marriage preparation so that couples make healthy financial decisions for their family.
† **Family 101** (Wednesday family worship & education night)—Risen Christ Lutheran Church will maintain a family night in which families will gather together at the church for a family meal, fellowship, worship, and education. The family night will begin with a meal provided by the church and served by a rotation of families in service to the church. After the meal, families will gather in the sanctuary for a brief devotional worship service. The evening will close with appropriate offerings of bible studies for all age ranges. Family 101 will provide multi-generational activities as well as age segregated activities so that focused learning can be achieved for all involved.

† **Public Faith** (faithful living in society)—Risen Christ will help people live out their Christian faith in the public arenas in which they choose to participate in. Some of the topics that will be addressed at this faith step include sanctity of life, separation of church and state, politics and the church, voting the faith, and other appropriate topics. A partnership in this ministry is the Alliance Defense Fund and Iowa Family Policy Center. The purpose for this is to aid people in making Christian decisions when they are not at the church so that others may see the truth that frees all people (Jn. 8:32).

**Family Life Ministry at Risen Christ – Mission**

The mission of Risen Christ Lutheran Church is to “proclaim a new beginning in the family of God through faith in the risen Christ, God’s only Son.” This mission statement helps direct all that the church does in ministry; however, it is also important that family life ministry (defined as *the methodology in which the church ministers to the needs of families—at all stages and in all forms—in relationship to their homes, communities, churches, and world so that Christ is reflected in and through their lives*) have its own mission statement that directs
and enables leaders to select ministry offerings that best achieve the mission.

Therefore, the mission of Risen Christ’s family life ministry is to provide directive ministry to families of all sizes, shapes, and forms so that the home is the center of faith development, supported by a church family that faithfully holds out the Word of God for all people.

The purpose of family life ministry is to minister to the needs of all families—and all people are part of a family—however, the purpose of ministry is that they would be adopted through Baptism and Christian teaching (Mt. 28:18-20) as Children of God (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). When people are adopted as children of God, they begin to learn from Him by studying His Word and ways, which when followed, makes the home the center of faith formation. Finally, families are not alone in this ministry. They are supported by a church that focuses on the ministry of support for families in all that they do, and yet the church alone cannot fulfill this great ministry alone. The church and family need to be gathered around the pure teachings of Jesus Christ, compiled in the Holy Scriptures. It is in God’s Word that the power, strength, and endurance are provided so that in the end families will be able to say along with the psalmist, “Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come” (Ps. 71:17-18).

**Family Life Ministry at Risen Christ – Goals & Objectives**

The goals of Risen Christ are established triennially and compiled in at a summer leadership summit. This summit—directed, planned, and implemented by the board of future planning—narrows down the goals of the church into several categories. The following are the goals for Risen Christ
to accomplish in the coming three years, as well as various objectives needed to accomplish the vision of family life ministry.

**Worship** The pastoral leadership of Risen Christ will strive to increase the average weekly worship over 400 by the close of 2014.

† Complete construction on sanctuary addition, which provides seating for another 80 worship attendees.

† Offer monthly fellowship events connected with worship services—i.e. outdoor worship service and picnic, or jazz service and fish fry.

† Develop no less that 6 thematic sermon series that are connected to the use of visual arts in the worship service (drama, video, special music, or pictures).

**Word** The Board of Elders in partnership with the Board of Education at Risen Christ Lutheran Church shall provide a year calendar of educational opportunities—at the start of the 2013 school year and each subsequent year thereafter—that includes no less than six milestone ministry, three of which are new.

† Research, design, and implement Family 101 (a Wednesday evening family night that provides a meal, fellowship, worship, and education) by the end of 2015.

† Consistently provide two Sunday morning pastor led bible studies, one in which focuses on a book of the bible and the other on a family related topic (marriage, financial management, conflict, communication, parenting, and other similar topics).

† Provide connections to new members joining the church by restructuring the adult information class so that it moves new members directly into a fellowship group lead by an active member Risen Christ who attended Discipleship 101 with those seeking membership in the church.
**Fellowship** The ministries of Risen Christ shall continue to offer five fellowship events each year that are advertised to the community as outreach events as well as family fellowship activities for members of Risen Christ Lutheran Church.

† Start three to five new fellowship groups a year and provide a church wide small group campaign with an appropriate resource and sermon series.
† Plan and implement a couple’s retreat that enriches marriages at all stages of the lifespan.
† Plan and implement National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14) with two week sermon series and marriage devotional booklet made available to the community.
† Plan, implement, and invite the community to join the church family in a church picnic in early summer.
† Plan and implement a patriotic musical around September 11th.
† Carry out Fall Family Fest, an event that welcomes families to the church for carnival type games, free pictures, and prizes.

**Service & Mission** The family of Risen Christ will send out three (at minimum) missionary groups each year (local, domestic, and global) and financially support a missionary through Mission Central.

† Risen Christ youth will participate in an annual mission trip or project of their choosing.
† The church family will financially support a missionary to Asia for the duration of three years and $5,000 a year in addition to current budgetary missional support.
† The members of Risen Christ will organize, plan, and implement a yearly mission trip.
† The staff of Risen Christ Lutheran Church will maintain resources for families to participate in service at the church and in the local community.

CONCLUSION

The ministry at Risen Christ has much to gain by ministering to the needs of families. To minister to these needs, many churches begin by doing a needs assessment (something that the Risen Christ family has done); however, it is much more important to understand just what family is. Risen Christ defines family as an organization of people in relationships (established through conception, adoption, marriage, or another formal designation) joined by love and commitment to one another by the sharing of purpose, resources, and experiences as well as meeting of each others needs that endures across time and location. With this solid understanding of family, a ministry to families can be established and enriched over time. This ministry is to be called family life ministry—provide directive ministry to families of all sizes, shapes, and forms so that the home is the center of faith development, supported by a church family that faithfully holds out the Word of God for all people. As this ministry is carried out, the solid foundation of God’s Word, the church, and the family will together change the world as they share, pass on, and live the faith of Jesus Christ!
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