

Supporting People during Remarriage and Blending Families

“I do’s” along with the more recent occasions to “redo - the - do’s” have become an important part of congregational life. Even so, marriages and remarriages create a dynamic in our congregations that needs to be considered as couples and their children strive to find faith, hope, and security that will equip and empower them to embrace the many joys, challenges, and uncertainties that reside within their own versions of family. They are searching for programs, relationships, and inspiration that will give them the confidence and wisdom to deal with whatever another day might bring.

This reality is intensified by some statistics indicating that the number of couples who resign or forgo their initial intent may be as high as 50 percent of all first marriages, approximately 70 percent of all second marriages, and up to 90 percent of third or more marriages.

How congregations can be supportive:

- Our ministries must embrace the heart of the people’s needs and circumstances. Individuals carry a sense of vulnerability with the hopes and dreams they bring into relationships. Unresolved issues, feelings, and past life experiences have the potential to affect the intimacy, openness, and communication necessary to really thrive.
- Use sermon illustrations that are real and relevant. Provide invitations and entry points for people of all ages to gain insights for their own daily lives from biblical stories.
- Regard the individual needs and strengths of blended or step-families apart from those of a nuclear family. Though they have many similarities, they are fundamentally very different. Invite people of all ages from a variety of family configurations to periodically assess the content and approach designed to welcome, nurture and engage them.
- Provide pre-marriage classes with options for ongoing small group fellowship and support. Plan retreats for couples and families to join with others to enjoy inspiration and support.
- Give family members an opportunity to nurture basic skills for communication, coping and conflict resolution through parent-child, inter-generational, and couples events. A resource titled *Faith Family Style: Generations Growing Together* is available through Augsburg Fortress by calling 800/328-4648 (ISBN6-0001-3236-0). *Just Family Nights*, a home-based activity book, is available through the Institute for Peace and Justice at www.ipj-ppj.org Include occasions to acknowledge and nurture individual family identity and common intent as you assist them in creating a common family vision or mission statement.
- Provide and promote resources in your church library for personal and family enrichment. Scan through a variety of Web sites, including The Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment, www.bettermarriages.org, Stepfamily Association of America, www.saafamilies.org or InStep Ministries, www.instepministries.com for information and resources.
- Invite couples or families who have endured specific challenges and transitions to walk with those who are currently involved in similar stages of family life. Offer mentoring relationships for fellowship, encouragement and support.
- Nurture a sense of understanding and pastoral care in Sunday school teachers and congregation leaders. Encourage them with an open and affirming heart to shape attitudes and misbehaviors that are typical of children trying to manage family transitions. (Most negative behaviors stem from feelings of insecurity and perceived neglect or insignificance.)
- Include specific prayers for new marriages and step-families for a few weeks following the actual wedding date. Keep a cumulative record of the dates to honor anniversaries with recognition and prayer.

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