

## The Michigan District

# FAMILY FRIENDLY PARTNERS NETWORK

by Galan Walther

Most would say that ministry to families is important. It's hard not to say that about something so fundamental. And, when you consider the current statistics, demographics and trends, it becomes abundantly clear that families need ministry more than ever. Strengthening the Christian family according to God's design in Holy Scripture is the focus of the Family Friendly Partners Network.

In the fall of 2004, Ben Freudenburg, newly arrived Director of the Family Life Program at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, sat in my office discussing the idea of a process to equip congregations in ministry to families. The result of that discussion was the beginning of the Family Friendly Partners Network Training in Family Ministry. In the inaugural training, 19 congregations in the Michigan District (the initial goal was eight) were introduced to the concepts of ...

- ... The family-friendly attitude
- ... Assessing ministry opportunities within the congregation
- ... Training parents in faith formation\*
- ... Pre-marriage and post-marriage ministry resources
- ... Parent education through the life span
- ... Equipping parents to teach God's design of human sexuality
- ... Ministering to stepfamilies and single parents

The Family Friendly Partners Network is an intentional, three-year, fee-based process to train and equip congregations desiring to be intentional in equipping families to pass on faith in Jesus Christ to the next generation. Currently, eight congregations are participating in the second Michigan District Family Friendly Partners Network. One of those congregations is Trinity, Utica. David Sheldon, Minister of Family Life, writes about Trinity's participation in the Family Friendly Partners Network:

The Book of Ecclesiastes has lately been the focus for Trinity Men's 6:30 a.m. Wednesday Morning Bible study. We read yesterday from chapter 12, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come." We at Trinity have been wondering about how many of our youth will actually remember their Creator when the days of trouble come upon them. Even though we have an outstanding school and wonderful programs for youth and children, we were concerned that we weren't getting the job done. That is why our congregation became interested in the Family Friendly Partners program led by Ben Freudenberg of Con-

cordia University and supported by the Michigan District.

We began in earnest in the fall of 2007 and are now about halfway through the three-year training cycle. Let me share a few personal thoughts about what's happening here at Trinity. First, we have a FFP Leadership Team, which includes all three of our pastors, other staff and wonderful church volunteers. This Leadership Team already is carrying the banner for this ministry. This is very exciting for me as Family Life Minister because I am not carrying this load myself. It has become a total team effort and as a result, the outreach potential has grown exponentially.

Initially, two teachings have really helped Trinity realize the need for great attention in this area. The first was a realistic view of the family in the Christian Church in America. Ben shared with us many concerns about how divorce, lack of faith-forming in the home, and misplaced priorities have negatively impacted the family. He raised the alarm for our FFP Leadership Team so that we could raise the alarm at our church. Truthfully we are very aware that there are problems with the family, with our families, but seeing it in black and white and in a format that could be shared with Trinity made all the difference.

Second, 932 of our members completed a Family Life Survey on a Sunday morning. We received a book of results that gives us tremendous information on the health of our families, both traditional and nontraditional. We shared these results at a congrega-

tional meeting and in a three-part sermon series. The first was on faith formation in the homes, the second was on parenting, and the third was on marriage. The congregation is getting the message, which is laying a strong foundation for future family ministry efforts.

Family Friendly Partners has raised the awareness level for our congregation. We will continue to train as a team, and then we will build ministry teams who will carry the banners for the various components of this ministry. We pray that when our youth do face the troubles of this world, they will indeed remember their Creator God.

For further information about the Family Friendly Partners Network process, contact Rev. Galan Walther at the Michigan District office by phone: 888.225.2111, ext. 252 or e-mail [galan.walther@michigandistrict.org](mailto:galan.walther@michigandistrict.org) or Ben Freudenburg at Concordia University: 734.995.7348 or [freudb@cuaa.edu](mailto:freudb@cuaa.edu).



*\*Faith formation speaks to instruction in the faith (catechisis, Bible study, teaching Bible stories, etc.). As Luther puts it, "teaching the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc." and growing in the faith as the Spirit works through Word and Sacraments.*