

TRANSFORMING FAMILIES

with

STUDY GUIDE

Approved By
The 216th General Assembly (2004)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed By
The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy
of the General Assembly Council

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To: Middle Governing Bodies and Their Resource Centers, Sessions, and Libraries of the Theological Seminaries

Dear Friends:

The 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in reliance upon God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in exercise of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every dimension of life, has approved this policy statement “Transforming Families.” It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian church and the society to which it ministers; and will determine procedures and program for the ministries divisions and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action.

This policy statement is the result of a development process that included wide consultation and participation throughout the church, drawing upon biblical sources and insights from the Reformed tradition in giving renewed definition to Presbyterian understandings concerning its own life in relation to the well-being of families. In approving the section of the report on “A Vision of Transforming Families,” the 216th General Assembly (2004) affirmed the following: “This vision of transforming families presents a challenge to the church at every level. . . . This challenge of strengthening and transforming families will require wide collaboration and a multitude of co-laborers. The task is daunting, but the power of God can make more of our imperfect efforts than we could ask or think” (page 12).

The policy statement comes to you with a study and action guide, designed for personal and class use, in the hope that we may all become more aware of our call to be God’s people in our daily lives and work.

Yours in Christ,

Clifton Kirkpatrick
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

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Transforming Families

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do the following:

1. Approve the Introduction and Theological Context as follows:

I. Introduction

The 209th General Assembly (1997) called for an examination of changing families and social structures that support families, focusing especially on their effects on children, in order to develop principles and recommendations to strengthen the church's ministry to contemporary families in both the church and society in the 21st century (see *Minutes*, 1997, Part I, pp. 536ff). The resulting task force was to pursue its work with the understanding that there is a variety of families. Answering this call requires attention to the cultural and socioeconomic contexts of today's families, and it is of primary importance that we lift up the theological commitments that we bring to this endeavor. The church's reflection on families in contemporary society begins with theological affirmations grounded in the Bible and our Reformed confessions, is informed by the cultural and socioeconomic realities of our common life, and issues in a vision of transforming families.

As our *Book of Order* states concerning the church's mission, "God's redeeming and reconciling activity in the world continues through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who confronts individuals and societies with Christ's Lordship of life and calls them to repentance and to obedience to the will of God" (G-3.0103). The sovereign love of God, the gracious lordship of Jesus Christ, and the empowering fellowship of the Holy Spirit ground our lives as Christians; yet we are also rooted in family structures that evidence the corrosive pressures around and within us, as well as the failed relationships among us, even as they remain sites of God's gracious presence and activity. Our family lives, like the other spheres of our existence, need transformation by the Holy Spirit; and our world needs the transformative agency of families that understand the breadth of their vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Confession of 1967 declares: "God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age" (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.06). It identifies four particularly urgent problems and crises through which God calls the church to action. Along with racism, war, and poverty, it lifts up interpersonal relations and family life; and we should recognize that these are not separate compartments, as witnessed by the destructive effects of racism, poverty, and war on families. Among the cited symptoms of "alienation from God, ... neighbors, and (self)" in the realm of interpersonal relationships and family life are "anarchy in sexual relationships," "pressures of urbanization," and "exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication" (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.47). The sins of both inner inclination and outward condition are mentioned.

These symptoms have not disappeared. We, too, can cite current examples of failure to live the "chaste and disciplined lives" that The Heidelberg Catechism enjoins, "whether in holy wedlock or in single life" (*The Book of Confessions*, 4.108)—casual sex, disposable relationships, and children who are deprived of stable parental relationships. And marriage does not guarantee that God's good intention will be lived out. Infidelity, physical and emotional abuse, lovelessness, lack of mutuality, and casual divorce are further examples of our alienation and disorder. Cultural and systemic pressures that threaten family well-being have not abated. There may be disagreements among us about the weight to assign to various causes and cures, but few would deny that families face troubling challenges today. Without pretending that there was a golden age when happiness and stability reigned in families, we can acknowledge that family well-being in our time is beset with peculiar as well as perennial perils.

Without discounting the contemporary cries of alarm concerning family life, we cannot accord the last word to the laments. We would be belying the faith, hope, and love we profess if we did. The grace of God has not lost its determination to reconcile. The love of Jesus Christ has not lost its ability to include. The communion of the Holy Spirit has not lost its power to transform. Our faith should enable us not only to be honest about the depth of our dilemmas as families, but also to be visionary about the scope of our vocation as Christians living in families and bound together in the Body of Christ. By paying attention both to guidance that comes from God's Word and our faith traditions and to the awareness that comes from the living of these

days and the study of them, we are challenged to discover a vision of family life as encompassing as our calling as Christians. In seeking first the reign of God, we should be receptive to the Spirit's work in the transformation of our lives in families and resolute about being transformative influences toward a society that is more family-friendly for other families as well as our own.

II. Theological Context

A. *Loyalty to God*

1. *Sovereignty and Idolatry*

In the Scriptures and the Reformed tradition, family loyalty stands under primary loyalty to God. The Ten Commandments begin with an expression of God's covenantal sovereignty: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). The first three commandments make it clear that no human authority, including family ties, should command our ultimate allegiance. The Fourth Commandment proclaims that God's sovereignty extends over time, setting aside our labors for worship of the Lord God in community and household. The covenant established by God also instructs us to honor our fathers and mothers and to honor our marital covenants as part of our service to God.

Jesus honored his family, but he also challenged deference to family authority with the shocking words: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Furthermore, he called people to new family ties that went beyond biological ones. When he was told that his mother and brothers were outside and wished to speak to him, Jesus replied, pointing to his disciples: "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12: 49–50).

2. *Baptism and Identity*

Christian identity is formed in baptism and shaped in the continuous practice of discipleship within the covenant community. The identity given us at baptism takes precedence over family origins, ethnicity, social identity, or gender; for all are one in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27–28)

Having shed their clothes for baptism, the early Christians were being shown that they received the water with no identifying or status-giving garments. Whether adults or children, they had no merit to present, earned or inherited. Our incorporation into the body of Christ through baptism is sheer grace, regardless of our personal qualities, the character of our families, or anything else that we bring. By grace, we belong to the sovereign God who "claims us, and seals us to show that we belong to God." We receive a new identity, and with it a new ultimate allegiance. The *Book of Common Worship* beautifully expresses this new reality:

Through baptism we enter the covenant God has established. Within this covenant God gives us new life, guards us from evil, and nurtures us in love. In embracing that covenant, we choose whom we will serve, by turning from evil and turning to Jesus Christ.

B. *Christian Vocation*

1. *Corporate Calling*

In baptism, family life is embraced and placed in proper context. At the font we are surrounded by the commitments and ties of our families. This solidarity is seen most clearly in the baptism of children as one or both parents/guardians normally accompany their child, confess their faith, and make promises regarding the child's upbringing. The covenant God has made with the church is extended to the faithful and their children, even before those children are able to respond. This parental participation within public worship is deeply Reformed. In medieval Europe, baptisms were regularly performed in the presence of midwives and godparents in a private service. Parents almost never attended the baptisms of their children. As an element of the reform of the church, Calvin insisted that parents present their children for baptism during the services of public worship. In this way, the nurture of children in the family was placed in the context of the nurture of children in the church; family promises are placed in the context of promises by the wider community of faith.

The congregation makes a specific pledge to the baptized, to guide and nurture them “by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ” (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 406). When members of the congregation make this commitment, they do so regardless of their own age or station in life. Everyone in the church is commissioned to a vocation that nurtures newly baptized members of the community. We are called to help each other “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). This commitment to God and one another defines the basic Christian vocation.

2. *Reciprocal Responsibility*

This remarkable, all-encompassing vocation is not expressed hierarchically. Of course, those who are more mature in the faith have a natural responsibility toward those who are younger in the faith, but all are called to a vocation to the whole body. Responsibility and accountability move in all directions—older toward younger and younger toward older, children toward parents and parents toward children. It is the vocation of young people to help older people grow in Christ, as surely as older people are called to help the young grow. All members of a household share a common vocation toward one another and the whole household.

3. *Family Vocation*

The vocation of Christians in families includes a vocation as families. The Presbyterian church’s Study Catechism begins with a question about God’s purpose for human life, answering, “God wills that I should live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the love of God, and in the communion of the Holy Spirit.” This calling is the pattern for human life, both as individuals and in community. Families are called to a life together that is lived by grace, for love, in communion. God calls families, as well as individuals and churches, to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which they are called, promoting the family’s growth in building itself up in love (Eph. 4:1, 16).

Families are called to live by the grace of Christ. Families can be wondrous instances of grace, formed less by deliberate calculation than by serendipitous gift. Parents and children do not choose each other, sisters and brothers are not connected by mutual selection, and families extend in unintentional ways. Even the family choices we make—such as marriage and adoption—are shaped by a love that often surprises us rather than chosen after a calculation of benefits. In the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, families are called to live together graciously and to extend circles of Christ’s grace beyond narrowly conceived family structures.

Families are called to live for the love of God. Love within families can be grace-filled, not contingent on rational calculations. Familial love is delightfully irrational, transcending explanations and enduring beyond validations. Receiving love, we become ones who give love. Familial love is not dependent on the worth of the other, or the health of the other, or the success of the other. Instead, love grows from the sheer presence of the other. For the love of God, families are called to love openly and to extend circles of God’s love beyond immediate family structures.

Families are called to live in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Families are more than collections of individuals. Family relationships can go beyond the development of personal capacities and talents to the mutual enhancement of gifts. Individual development is nurtured by familial bonds that, in turn, enhance personal growth. In the communion of the Holy Spirit, families are called to extend circles of the Spirit’s communion beyond immediate family structures.

The Christian vocation of families is to nurture all members “to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). In fidelity to this calling, families are no longer confined to concern for their own well-being, for their purpose leads to the wider family of faith and the wider human family. This calling is both gift and duty, God’s endowment and God’s law.

Family life that is shaped by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the love of God, in the communion of the Holy Spirit finds its purpose beyond itself in the joyful worship of God loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving neighbors. The full vocation of families does not occur naturally. The call of God shapes enduring familial commitments yet also requires the development of practices and skills. From prayer to service, Christian practices give concrete form to families’ vocation so that they may “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17).

4. *Encompassing Vocation*

The church has a particular responsibility to encourage the vocation of families within the community of faith, giving special pastoral attention to struggling families. However, the church's responsibility extends beyond its own members. Authentic Christian discipleship moves us beyond ourselves in service to the whole human community. Families of all types struggle, and any family can be torn apart by abuse, economic devastation, desertion, and other reversals. The welfare of all families should not be ignored by withdrawal into residential, educational, and even religious enclaves of privilege. The Confession of 1967 reminds us that reliance on Scripture impels the church to service beyond itself: "The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ have set the pattern for the church's mission. His human life involves the church in the common life of all people. His service to men and women commits the church to work for every form of human well-being" (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.32).

C. *Marriage and the Family*

1. *The Importance of Marriage*

One of the critical issues in understanding family is the place of marriage. Three-and-a-half decades ago, the Confession of 1967 cited interpersonal relations and family life as a critical problem in society, and it provided guidance and language that continue to be valuable:

The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which God created humankind. Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of alienation from God, neighbors, and self. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead people out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, people have joy in and respect for their own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by society when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time. (Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text. Cf *The Book of Confessions*, 9.47d)

In its exploration of the basic ordering of human life that leads men and women into the full meaning of life together, the Confession of 1967 echoes the creation story in Genesis 2, where the constitutive relationship between man and woman is told in intimately relational terms: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

This Genesis passage portrays the committed, enduring relationship between a man and a woman as foundational for married interpersonal life. Scripture itself exhibits several forms of marital and family relationships, none of which is a precise equivalent of contemporary marriage and family life. However, in the development of Israel's covenant history, the pattern of monogamous marriage became the established norm. This pattern was affirmed by Jesus (Matt. 19:5). The Reformed tradition embraced marriage as a good for all in society, Christian or not: "Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family" (*Book of Order*, W-4.9001).

The Reformed tradition, while aware that diverse patterns of marital relationship are in evidence in the Scriptures, has read Genesis 2 in light of the later Old Testament and the New Testament direction toward monogamous marriage. Thus, the foundational pattern of Genesis 2 is prominent in the Presbyterian Service of Christian Marriage:

God created us male and female,
and gave us marriage
so that husband and wife may help and comfort each other,
living faithfully together in plenty and in want,
in joy and in sorrow,
in sickness and in health,
throughout all their days.
God gave us marriage
for the full expression of the love between a man and a woman.
In marriage a woman and a man belong to each other,
and with affection and tenderness
freely give themselves to each other.
God gave us marriage
for the well-being of human society,
for the ordering of family life,
and for the birth and nurture of children. (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 842)

The church affirms that marriage is instituted by God, that marriage is good for human society, and that marriage is a form of family life that provides a suitable context for the nurture of children. Acknowledgment of the good of marriage for society does not deny the importance to society of the contributions of single persons. Neither singleness nor marriage is spiritually superior. Both single and married persons are called to be instruments of God's love and grace.

2. *Marriage as Basic to Human Relationships*

Affirmation of marriage's significance in the Christian tradition is by no means a claim that marriage exhausts what the church means by family. The church upholds the meaning and significance of marriage between a man and a woman, but it does not denigrate other forms of family life that demonstrate and nurture godly character. The language of the Confession of 1967 is instructive. The marital-biological family that is basic to human relationships is just that: basic. The marital-biological family is neither exhaustive nor exclusive as a family form. Rather, as the Confession of 1967 affirms, the marital-biological family "exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which [God] created humankind," but it is not the only form of interpersonal life; and it does not fully exemplify God's ordering of interpersonal life.

While basic, the marital-biological family does not ensure good and faithful family life. That such families fail and fall short is clear, not only from experience but also from reflection on the very scriptural texts that establish the basic pattern. The intimate mutuality of Genesis 2:23–24 is followed immediately by the fracturing of the relationship between Adam and Eve, sibling rivalry between Cain and Abel that climaxes in fratricide, and disordered sexuality. One of the most striking characteristics of the biblical descriptions of life in households is their ruthless honesty about family struggles. From Adam and Eve through David, to the scandal of Mary's pregnancy in the Gospels, the Bible is candid about the difficulties and failings of human relationships and human families. Moreover, there is no sense in Scripture that those who are part of other forms of family are necessarily living outside of the will of God. Scripture affirms a basic form of family life, and it also portrays other forms of human flourishing that are appropriate to the service of God. That portrayal does not mean that all forms of family life are equally equipped to live out faithful Christian vocation. Even God's good ordering of interpersonal life is lived out by fallen human beings, and thus is susceptible to distortion.

3. *Mutuality in Marriage*

Marital-biological families are not automatically faithful to God's good purpose. All too often they do not embody mutuality in marriage as equality between husband and wife or live out Christ's call to love our neighbors. The scriptural witness to God's ordering of interpersonal relationships is too often read in ways that subordinate women to men. "Christian families" can fail to fulfill their vocation; they can even be oppressive and destructive. The marriage service of the Presbyterian church reflects the contemporary understanding of marriage as a faith commitment in which "husband and wife are called to a new way of life, created, ordered, and blessed by God" (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 842). This new way of life is an expression of the theological commitment of mutuality that is disclosed in surprising ways in New Testament descriptions of the relationship between husband and wife: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21); "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor. 7:4).

Contemporary Christian emphasis on mutuality in marriage owes much to broader cultural movements, especially the struggle for women's equality in the 1960s and 1970s. Reflection on the roles of women in families, church, and society, combined with fresh reflection on biblical texts, has reshaped the church's commitment to the full equality of men and women in all relationships. This marital equality is explicitly linked to the equality of all persons before God in baptism and the call to discipleship. For those that do marry, it becomes an arena of their growth in holiness. In our church's marriage service, the persons being married are asked: "In your baptism you have been called to union with Christ and the church. Do you intend to honor this calling through the covenant of marriage?" (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 859). Our equality as persons in baptism has implications for marital relationships. Subordination is replaced by mutuality, for "there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The church's recovery of God's ordering of interpersonal life leads to hope that the promise of marriage can be fulfilled as husbands and wives better live out their new reality in Christ. The church must encourage enduring covenantal relationships between couples, sealed by public promises to each other that are made before God, marked by the fruit of the Spirit's presence. As the Apostle Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace, patience kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things” (Gal. 5:22–23). Moreover, recovery of God’s ordering of interpersonal life offers possibilities for marital and family life that open toward a rich web of interpersonal relationships extending beyond the marital-biological family.

D. Beyond the Basic Structure of Human Relationships

1. The Household

Beginning with its dramatic stories of families and long lists of “begats” in Genesis, the Bible indicates the importance of clan ties and households that endure through generations in Hebrew society. The household in Scripture is inclusive of the marital-biological family yet more expansive. In biblical times, the household was a basic relational unit, including parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and servants. Households embodied expanded kinship ties that we often reserve only for the marital-biological family. “Household” is an elastic concept in the Old Testament, sometimes restricted to the small, immediate cluster of persons who lived together, sometimes expanding to encompass a large community attached to a patriarch. In most cases, however, households embraced “blood relatives” and persons beyond blood relationships in a web of familial associations.

Households are prominent in the New Testament as well. Several epistles counsel families and households concerning their responsibilities. The importance of households is most clearly seen in references to the “house-tables”(guidelines for households) of Colossians and Ephesians (Eph. 5:21–6:9; Col. 3:18–4:1). These Christian instructions to families assume the reality of prevailing cultural arrangements that the church no longer condones (such as the subordination of women and the practice of slavery); yet they also exceed the bounds of the Roman world. Roman house-tables focused on the need for inferiors to obey superiors, but the Pauline house-tables emphasize the mutual responsibility of all parties to one another. While traditional family patterns are retained, they are relativized and reordered. The Christian house-tables do not simply set out the obligations of wives to husbands, children to parents, and servants to masters. Instead, all are addressed as responsible moral agents who are bound to one another by ties of mutual responsibility. Thus, alongside the expected direction that children are to obey their parents, we read that parents are not to provoke their children to anger (Eph. 6:1–4). It is even more surprising that the traditional injunction for slaves to obey masters is paired with a reciprocal admonition: “Masters, do the same [render service with enthusiasm] to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality” (Eph. 6:9). New Testament house tables are not prescriptions for 21st century family life (specifically, the hierarchical description of marriage and the acceptance of the institution of slavery). Yet their Christian re-ordering of 1st century family life offers trajectories and guidance toward patterns of genuine familial mutuality in Christ.

2. Single Persons

The Bible also includes depictions of persons who do not marry. There are hints in the lives of some prophets, but the New Testament offers the more prominent examples of John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus himself. There is no implication these men lived less than fulfilled lives because they lacked wives and children. In a similar way, single women have often been examples of heroic faith, serving faithfully in places that men deemed unworthy. It is clear that a person may live a full and faithful Christian life without marriage or parenthood. Marriage is one of God’s good gifts within human life; it is not the ultimate form of relationship within the age to come (Luke 20: 34, 35). The church must respect and honor those who remain single, whether through choice or circumstance. Persons who do not marry have a significant role in the development of children. In baptism, responsibility for the nurture of children is given to the entire faith community. Jesus’ invitation—“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matt. 19:14)—displays the whole community’s role in children’s lives, specifically the vital role of single persons as friends and mentors of children.

3. Adoption

The bonds we associate with families are not restricted to persons who are maritally or biologically related. Adoption is the clearest example of the family’s extension beyond marital-biological bounds. In adoption, one who was not previously in the family is now fully included. Adoption is such a powerful witness to the extension of kinship bonds to those outside of biological relationship that it becomes a primary way of speaking of our relation to God, especially in the New Testament. Paul writes to the Galatians:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal. 4:4–7)

Instead of an anomalous way of referring to family relationships, adoption becomes a controlling metaphor for human relationships. In the New Testament, adoption is the image both for human relationship to God and for the establishment of familial ties among those who are brothers and sisters through adoption: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you ... have received a spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:14, 15). The biblical picture of adoption can be a helpful way for all family members to think about mutual relationships among themselves and also with persons beyond marital-biological family connections.

Adoption also provides a possibility for single persons to raise children. Single parenthood, whether through adoption or other circumstance, is often challenging, but it can be an opportunity for the community of faith to demonstrate its responsibility for supporting all parents, for shared parenting of all the church's children, and for loving service to all the world's children. Furthermore, the biblical understanding of our adoption by God can enrich the church's support of adoption in society.

4. *Extension of Familial Relationships*

Familial commitments are extended to those outside the marital-biological family. This inclusion is dramatically apparent in the constant scriptural refrain of care for the widow and orphan and the strangers among us:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:17–19, NRSV)

This concern for care for those beyond our families is echoed in our confessions (The Second Helvetic Confession 5.235). Our devotion to our families fits within our devotion to God, but the living out of this love of God necessarily involves extending care to those outside our families as though they were bound to us by familial ties. Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Jesus' disciples, and Paul and Barnabas are biblical examples.

Moreover, such compassion is to be extended even to those with whom we have no relation at all. Israel was commanded by God to love the stranger and alien since the people of Israel were once aliens themselves:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Lev. 19:33–34)

E. *The Nurture of Children*

1. *The Importance of the Nurture of Children*

The mandate for this study stipulated focusing especially on the effects of changing families and changing social structures on children, and we have strong theological warrant for attending to their nurture. As expressed in their vow at baptisms, all members of the Christian community bear responsibility for the well-being of children. Their well-being ranges from learning about God to knowing how to brush their teeth and tie their shoes, to discovering the joy of learning, and to being able to live in a technological world. The well-being of children also entails being shaped by the transforming love of Jesus Christ so that children come to love neighbors and seek justice, becoming people who can give and receive love. There is no "one size fits all" approach to children—we must pay attention to the needs of each one. The nurture of children is not a distraction from service to God; it is an integral aspect of service to God. The Second Helvetic Confession addresses "the rearing of children" in this way:

Children are to be brought up by the parents in the fear of the Lord; and parents are to provide for their children, remembering the saying of the apostle: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). But especially they should teach their children honest trades or professions by which they may support themselves. They should keep them from idleness and in all these things instill in them true faith in God, lest through a lack of confidence or too much security or filthy greed they become dissolute and achieve no success.

And it is most certain that those works which are done by parents in true faith by way of domestic duties and the management of their households are in God's sight holy and truly good works. They are no less pleasing to God than prayers, fasting and almsgiving. (The Second Helvetic Confession, 5.249–250)

Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility to care for their children, while churches are called to be communities that support and complete the nurture of children. Teaching children who they are in Christ is an honorable and important duty for the entire community. We should strive to provide for them, to keep them safe, to ensure that they will not be hungry or homeless, to prepare them for life, and to encourage their participation in the mission of the Triune God. In this way, families, individuals, and the entire church learn to live lives of service and love for the whole world.

2. Reverence for God

We can give no greater gift to our children than to nurture them in the love of the Triune God. Nurturing children toward the love of God is a calling that encompasses the totality of our daily lives. After Moses delivered God's covenant law to the people of Israel, he instructed them that these Ten Commandments, grounded in the commitment to God alone, were vital for the formation of their children:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)

As persons who have made baptismal commitments to the children of the church, we tell the stories of promise, deliverance, sin, forgiveness, and peace so that our children will grow to love God with their whole beings and love neighbors as ourselves. We teach children in the formal settings of worship and Christian education, but we must not restrict the task to those areas. We are called to bear witness to the mighty acts of God at home and away, at the beginnings of each day, and when we prepare for sleep.

In teaching our children about God, we must instill in them habits of piety, daily disciplines, spiritual, moral, and practical, that will nurture love for God and equip them for a faithful life. Self-discipline is bedrock for the Christian life.

3. Provision of Material as Well as Spiritual Need

In Jesus' discourse on the character of God, he suggests that one of the signs of care for children is providing them with food when they are hungry (Luke 11:11–13). Riches can be dangerous, and poverty can devastate a family. As church communities, we must be committed to the economic well-being of all children and families.

4. Preparation for Adult Responsibilities

The Second Helvetic Confession notes that nurturing children in the love of and reverence for God embraces all aspects of life, including preparing them for a life of work. As people who believe that all true knowledge comes from God, we must ensure that our children are educated to understand the complexity of issues surrounding science and technology, and to be aware of economic realities in a global society of extreme poverty and excessive wealth.

We are called to teach children about the world. Families are called to turn outward in communal lives of love and service to others. Yet many families have a disturbing tendency to turn inward and function primarily for their own good. Instilling and demonstrating a vision of God's love for the whole world is integral to the nurture of children.

F. Resistance and Transformation in Family Life

As Christian families are being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will find ourselves in tension with the cultural values of materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism, which are treated in the "Cultural Context" section of this report. Our calling should not only make us resistant to those values that compromise our discipleship; it should inspire the resolution to be culturally transformative, to work for change of those conditions that threaten the well-being of all families, not just our own.

1. *Formation and Resistance*

In particular, children can be nurtured to become suspicious of prevailing cultural attitudes towards wealth, consumption, entertainment, and sexual self-indulgence. Children, parents, and all in the church will need to have a strong sense of Christian identity in order to live out the life of discipleship within the broader culture. The church's primary call is to shape its practice in conformity with its profession of faith. Presbyterians cannot be content merely to make pronouncements about family life without a common life that is consistent with their public statements. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must enable families, households, congregations, and communities to honor God through strong family life. The church is called to strengthen existing families, to encourage the development of new, strong families, and to exercise compassionate ministry with struggling families in the name of Jesus Christ. Honoring God and one another through attention to Sabbath would be an excellent place to start, giving time for all to rest and restore relationships. Work, television, extracurricular activities, and even church activities can overwhelm families such that the Sabbath is honored more in the breach than the observance. The church must teach and model Sabbath for families.

2. *Social Transformation*

In light of our Reformed heritage, we should also seek to be agents of social change that does justice and loves kindness (Micah 6:8). Even in a time of diminishing cultural influence of our denomination as well as other mainline churches, we can combine nurture of a community that practices contrasting values to those of the dominant culture with the practice of civic responsibility for the public good. As the Confession of 1967 states: "The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights" (Inclusive Language Text, 9.44). In commenting on critical social policy issues, the church should not assume that it occupies privileged moral ground, avoiding its own responsibility for the significant pressures on family life in American society. Yet government and corporate policies and programs have profound effects on family life, for good or for ill, intended or unintended. Thus the church is faithful as it analyzes social realities and calls for public policies that encourage strong family life and remove impediments that families face in living out their full vocation.

3. *Personal Responsibility and Institutional Constraints*

The final two sections of this report provide two kinds of analysis of the current conditions and crises of families. One is primarily cultural, and the other is primarily economic and sociological. It is important to see the two as connected, and it would be a mistake to abandon either of them out of preoccupation with the other. Cultural analysis gives us ways of diagnosing failures of personal responsibility. Whether we speak of expressive individualism, hedonism, a marriage-averse culture, or a divorce-inclined society, we can cite personal self-indulgence, resistance to self-sacrifice, and heedless self-assertion at the expense of others' welfare as "habits of the heart" that imperil the commitment and faithfulness that found and sustain family covenants. In sinfulness, people continue to make bad choices.

Socioeconomic analysis gives us ways of diagnosing systemic and institutional ills. Whether we speak of the utilitarian individualism of global capitalism, the injustices that reside in the persistence of classism, racism, and sexism, the dominance of "principalities and powers," or the damage done by the absence or presence of particular governmental policies and programs, we can cite the victimization and injustice perpetrated by systems, structures, and institutions at the expense of various kinds of families. In sinfulness, our systems sorely limit people's room to make good choices.

4. *Sin of Two Kinds*

At its best, our Reformed tradition has been able to speak both judgment and grace concerning both personal sin and social sin. It has been willing to label as idolatrous every "ism"—cultural, ecclesiastical, economic, political, or social—that solicits and receives the unqualified loyalty that belongs to God alone. If the church is to be resistant to questionable cultural values in our era, it must have the courage to take issue with both personal irresponsibility and institutional injustice. Sin always has a context, and we must address the systemic contexts that reduce us to consumers and make it difficult to establish and sustain family ties. Sin also persists in every context. No matter what cultural, economic, or political reforms we witness or accomplish, we shall not rid the world of either personal irresponsibility or institutional imperfection. The church should never settle comfortably and idolatrously into the "isms" that surround and shape it, and it should avoid simplistic dismissals of either personal or systemic analyses of the predicament of families. Promoting

marriage should not relieve us from addressing structural roots of poverty, but relief of poverty alone will not guarantee willingness to assume the responsibilities of family commitments. The human heart will always need transformation, as will the systems, structures, and institutions that we inhabit. In us and in our systems are mentalities and practices that are not family friendly, and even our family norms need transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit. We confess our complicity in the materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism of our culture and our families' infection by these forces. We also believe that God's grace can transform us and our families to reflect the glory of God.

G. *Hope for the Future*

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17–18)

As reflected in Paul's words to the church at Corinth, the church holds forth the promise of God's transformation of family life as it seeks, in the words of the Confession of 1967, to "lead [people] out of this [present] alienation and into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ" (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.47d). The church hopes that, by the grace of God, all families and persons and institutions might be transformed to reflect God's good intentions. It seeks to extend the bonds of kinship—that every family might find its identity in and pattern its ways upon the "one universal family" (Ibid, 9.44a) that God is forming in Jesus Christ.

1. *The Keynote of Compassion*

"Sensitive to both the sufferings and the joys in families and to the indications that all family arrangements are not equally conducive to human well-being, the church must stand against the inhumanity that marks too many relationships—the failure to receive and uphold one another in justice and love. The keynote of the church's response must be compassion. Just as its Savior had compassion for the crowds 'because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6:34), so the church must look upon families caught in the confusions and struggles of our time. This compassion is not contradictory, but rather complementary, to the church's obligation to lift up a vision for family life—to 'lead men and women into the full meaning of life together'" (Confession of 1967, Inclusive Language Text, 9.47d)

2. *Cooperation and Resistance*

The church seeks the well-being of each family; in whatever circumstance it finds that family, striving to strengthen family life "in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics." The church is grateful for the individual and social values that have sustained families amidst such difficulties: the freedom of conscience, the promise of equal rights under law, the commitment to education, the concern for senior citizens and those with disabilities, and the tradition of community organizations that have unfolded in our nation's history. The church appeals to those values to buttress families in their vocation. But the church will also "have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare" (The Confession of 1967, *The Book of Confessions*, 9.25), such as the forces of disease and death, scarcity of time and resources, insecurity and conflicting interests that make family life difficult for most people. With vigor, the church also resists the forces of materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism that undermine the common good and the vocation of families. It must call itself and society to repent when either is complicit with such forces.

3. *Encompassing Care*

Because all are touched by the sins and struggles of this world, the church extends its welcome and nurture to all persons and families. None should be excluded from care and compassion on the basis of family form. The church rejects principles or policies that would deny compassionate ministry to any persons, and particularly the most vulnerable persons (the children, the poor, the elderly, and the disabled), based on family circumstance. By the same token, the church cherishes hope for God's grace to work transformation in all persons and families.

4. *Rejoicing Hope*

Is there hope for Presbyterian and American families? Yes, but our hope is not dependant upon our good intentions or hard work, however much of both are needed. We do not see the future clearly, but we serve a

God who is transforming us. In this hope we can rejoice, living in faith that our family lives will be redeemed and show forth the righteousness of Christ. In this way we will live out our baptism by participating in the ongoing mission of the Triune God who created us good, who has redeemed and saved us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and who continues to empower and enliven us through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Eternal God, our creator,
 you set us to live in families.
 We commend to your care
 all the homes where your people live.
 Keep them, we pray, free from bitterness,
 from the thirst for personal victory,
 and from pride in self.
 Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge,
 moderation, patience, and godliness.
 Knit together in enduring affection
 those who have become one in marriage.
 Let children and parents have full respect for one another.
 Bind together in communities those who live in singleness,
 and light the fire of kindness among us all,
 that we may show affection for each other;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Book of Common Worship*, 749, adapted)

2. Approve “A Vision of Transforming Families.”

A Vision of Transforming Families

Given this theological context, and conscious of the cultural and socioeconomic forces affecting families today, the church affirms a vision of families being transformed by God and being agents of transformation in society. We envision a church and society in which persons freely devote themselves to building up one another within their families, and families freely devote themselves to the will of God and the welfare of others.

We envision a church and society that welcomes and nurtures all persons, regardless of their family circumstances. Both single persons and married persons should be respected and honored, in the community and in the family of God. We look toward a society in which all members of the family are valued equally, with special attention to children and others who are more vulnerable. The church rejects attitudes or practices that value some more highly than others—based on gender, age, class, ability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or any outward condition. It opposes the forces of racism and sexism, which cause great suffering in families and widespread blindness to that suffering.

We envision a society in which families assume primary responsibility for the care and guidance of their own members, supported by other citizens, members of faith communities, and social institutions. It is preferable that those institutions with the best combination of knowledge of the family situation and adequate resources respond to family needs.

We envision a society in which marriage is honored by the church and society as a basic social relationship of unique importance. The church commits itself and calls others to make coordinated efforts to prepare couples for marriage, assist couples in their marriages, reconcile their conflicts where possible, avoid divorce in non-destructive marriages, and seek healthy outcomes for all who experience divorce.

We envision a society in which the well-being of every child is nurtured and supported. In light of sociological data indicating that a loving, lasting marriage of the mother and father is the most successful (90 percent) context for children’s flourishing and that children who experience divorce flourish in a smaller, though significant, majority of cases (75–80 percent), the church urges both parents or guardians to be active in the nurture of children and recognizes the important assistance that congregations and other family support systems can offer.¹ The church commits itself to give special attention to those families where the well-being of children is most at risk. With support from church and other institutions, even at-risk families can successfully move through difficult times and their children can grow into healthy adulthood.

We envision a society in which adoption is honored, supported, and promoted. A variety of other family and family-extending relationships should also be encouraged, insofar as they fulfill the functions of family in a way that demonstrates and nurtures godly character.

We envision a society in which families have sufficient time together at home to nurture relationships, to care for children and other dependents, and to worship God together. Likewise, families need access to sufficient economic resources to support the household and care for dependents. Universal health-care coverage is imperative for family well-being. We reaffirm the call of the 207th General Assembly (1995), in its policy statement “God’s Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation,” that “all conditions of paid employment, including compensation and working conditions, should sustain and nurture the dignity of individuals, the well-being of households and families, the social cohesiveness of communities, and the integrity of the global environment” (*Minutes*, 1995, Part I, p. 426, paragraph 34.522).

We envision a society in which families, faith communities, and other institutions work together to promote virtues and habits that make for healthy and stable families and communities. Coordinated efforts must be deployed against violence and abuse in the home, which shatter the bonds of family trust. We reaffirm the call of the 213th General Assembly (2001), in “Turn Mourning Into Dancing! A Policy Statement on Healing Domestic Violence,” to “hear the voices of victims and survivors and respond to their calls with the following goals: first, to protect the victims from further abuse; second, stop the abuser’s violence and hold the abuser accountable; and third, restore the family relationship if possible or mourn the loss of relationship” (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, p. 234, paragraph 25.017).

The church, along with other political, social and economic institutions, should cooperate to reduce the influence of powers that exalt family-distorting values of materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism. We reaffirm the call of the 204th General Assembly (1992), in its policy statement “Pornography: Far from the Song of Songs,” for Presbyterians to “oppose pornography as defined by the report and support constitutional protection of free speech” (*Minutes*, 1992, Part I, p. 718, paragraph 39.011).

This vision of transforming families presents a challenge to the church at every level. We call on the whole church to transform its own life in relation to the well-being of families and to renew its ministries to families and single adults. When Christian vocation is understood to encompass our lives together in families and our concern for the well-being of all families, it follows that the church must look to other social institutions to play important roles as well. This challenge of strengthening and transforming families will require wide collaboration and a multitude of co-laborers. The task is daunting, but the power of God can make more of our imperfect efforts than we could ask or think.

3. Approve the following recommendations:

a. That all church members and their families seek to embody biblical and confessional teachings about God’s intentions for families

(1) by practicing family-strengthening virtues and habits in their own lives;

(2) by extending the bonds of kinship beyond their own marital-biological families; and

(3) by undertaking at least one family-extending relationship, such as being mentors, adoptive grandparents, foster parents, big brothers/sisters, and other programs.

b. That sessions do the following:

(1) Commit themselves to a program of comprehensive support for loving, lasting, egalitarian marriages. [This program might include marriage and parenting education, use of an intensive pre-marital inventory that challenges couples to examine their relationships, marriage mentoring and marriage enrichment events, readily accessible counseling during marital crises, and connections to divorce recovery groups. All of these kinds of support need to be available to all family groupings including single parents, with the necessary adaptations to the circumstances of each.]

(2) Designate committees or individuals to review the congregation’s programs and practices, with a view to making them more family-friendly. [Questions to be asked include: Do the programs and practices welcome all families and singles, or do they implicitly exclude some? Do they tend to separate family members or bring them together? Do they make it easier or harder for families to spend time together at home?]

c. That presbyteries, clusters of churches within presbyteries, or particular congregations consider approaching local church bodies of other denominations about the possibility of joining in a community marriage policy consistent with the values affirmed in this policy statement and in community efforts on behalf of those fleeing domestic violence and abuse. [Such policies would help churches of different denominations in common support for marriage and family life. Such policies should not detract from ministries to single parents and other forms of families undertaken by particular congregations or groups of congregations.]

d. That presbyteries and synods supply their churches with information on area organizations that deliver education on marriage, parenting, and singleness; hold marriage and family enrichment events; offer marital and family counseling; assist people needing refuge from family oppression; sponsor divorce recovery programs; and facilitate adoption and family-extending relationships.

e. That the church's theological seminaries be urged to address family issues in their own communities, as well as family ministries issues and strategies in their curricula, field education training, research projects, and clinical pastoral education.²

f. That the General Assembly Council, through Congregational Ministries Division's Family and Single Adult Ministries Office, recommend, on CMD's Website and in its publications, useful resources relating to singles ministries, premarital counseling and premarital inventories, marriage and parenting education, marriage and family enrichment, marital and family counseling, domestic violence ministry, divorce recovery, Christian Families Week, adoption, and other family-extending relationships. [Where resources appropriate to Presbyterian churches are lacking, the Congregational Ministries Division shall consider publishing such resources.]

g. That the General Assembly Council, through National Ministries Division's Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) committee, urge employers to allow adequate time and provide sufficient wages and benefits for their employees to fulfill family responsibilities.

h. That synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians in their own lives, occupations, and communities urge employers to offer more flexible work hours; more paid leave for the care of dependent persons and child-related activities; health insurance for all family members; telecommuting options; more possibilities for part-time jobs with prorated wages and benefits; family-supporting wages for all workers; and more available, affordable, and flexible child-care programs.

i. That General Assembly entities, synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians "bring the church's influence to bear so that the media will act to strengthen moral values."³ Inaccurate and demeaning pictures of family life, which encourage materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism, should be contested. More attention should be paid to the nobler sides of singleness, marriage, parenting, adoption, and other family-extending relationships.

j. That the 216th General Assembly (2004) urge synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians to advocate for local, state, and federal legislation that might strengthen family life. The following broad purposes, in the assembly's judgment, should be pursued in such legislation:

(1) Expand educational programs conveying information, attitudes, and habits conducive to healthy relationships in marriage, singleness, and other family situations.

(2) Affirm and advocate for tax codes, entitlement programs, and conditions of employment that assist all families. When revenues are lost or extra expenditures incurred through abolishing "marriage penalties," the resulting shortfall should not be made up at the expense of programs that serve the poor.

(3) Make generous financial support available for the care of children and other dependents. Such support should not discriminate among those who choose to have dependent family members at

home, those who choose commercial care, and those who choose other care arrangements. The goal is to ensure quality, affordable, and safe care for every child and dependent.

(4) Induce employers to offer more flexible work hours, more paid leave for the care of dependent persons and child-related activities, more telecommuting options, more possibilities for part-time jobs with prorated wages and benefits, family-supporting wages for all workers, and more available, affordable, and flexible child care programs.

(5) Ensure “the right of every person to have access to quality health care that is adequate, affordable, and accountable” as a necessity for family life.⁴

k. That the Presbyterian Washington Office (and other appropriate General Assembly offices) convey these policy concerns to political leaders and church members; and that they monitor legislation addressing these concerns, reporting to Presbyterians when they have an opportunity to influence such legislation.

l. That the Board of Pensions make presbyteries, sessions, and plan members more aware of the assistance that is available to facilitate adoptions by pension plan members.

m. That the report be approved as a whole for churchwide study and use.

n. That the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) be directed to prepare a related study/action guide for churchwide study.

o. That the Stated Clerk be directed to publish the entire report “Transforming Families” in the *Minutes*; and that the Office of the General Assembly be directed to place the report “Transforming Families” with study/action guide on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Website, to distribute it to the middle governing bodies and their resource centers, to sessions, and to the libraries of the theological seminaries, making additional copies available for sale to aid study and implementation efforts in the church.

p. That this assembly expresses appreciation to the members of the Task Force on Changing Families, the Changing Families Synod Consultation, the Changing Families Panel, the staff of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and the Theology and Worship Office, and others who offered comments and suggestions in the development of this report on behalf of the whole church.

q. That the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) report back to the 217th General Assembly (2006) on the progress it has made implementing these recommendations.

Rationale

Introduction

An examination of the issue of changing families and changing social structures that support families on behalf of strengthening the church’s ministry requires attention not only to the theological heritage that informs our inquiry but also to the situation of U.S. families in today’s society. Moreover, consideration of social structures that support families is only part of the task. When we cast a critical eye on contemporary life in our nation, we see structures, systems, institutions, and cultural values that do not support families, but rather often undermine them. For the church’s ministry to be truly in touch with cultural reality and the actual struggles of families requires the discernment to sort out the pushes and pulls to which cultural and socioeconomic pressures subject them. In the two sections that follow, the church is offered two approaches to sorting out what is going on with families. Although the two are integrally connected, cultural and socioeconomic analyses offer somewhat different angles of vision. Exploration of the cultural values that shape us provides a way of assessing the damage done by the materialism, consumerism, hyperindividualism, and hedonism that saturate the culture that is part of us even as we are part of it. Socioeconomic analysis alerts us to the impact of our global economy, of our governmental structures and policies, and of the institutional arrangements of our work places, religious organizations,

and other affiliations on family life. One gives us a way to address personal responsibility and irresponsibility in interpersonal and familial relations; the other gives us a way to address the conditions in our social environment that severely limit our room to make good choices and to create and maintain faithful family covenants of mutual-ity.

A. *Cultural Context*

1. *Cultural Influence on Families*

While large-scale social and cultural changes have profoundly shaped family life in recent times, there are other kinds of changes that families also experience. In modern societies, families still serve as a central institution for most people as they move through the stages of life. Families are typically the first and last source of support for individuals. At their best, they provide the first experience of unconditional love and acceptance. They are the first place where individuals practice the virtue of interdependence and develop the capacity for a responsible relation to self and others. Yet at different stages of life, people are bonded with one another differently as their needs, interests, and capacities change. Some of these changes are related to the life cycle development of individual family members. Family experience at any given time is profoundly shaped by how the developmental needs and issues of its members interact. Every family changes over time as its members mature and age.⁵

Families also experience change in less predictable and continuous ways through the impact of crisis experiences: illness, bereavement, estrangement, divorce, unemployment, discrimination, substance abuse, crime, victimization, and other disruptive events. Today, there are many configurations of people who lovingly bond as family in difficult situations. These include mutually adoptive families (where older youth who are homeless or from dysfunctional families are blended in by non-kin); organization-adopted families (in which a congregation as a whole, a community organization, or individual mentors become family to youth who are resettled refugees or who cannot live at home); shared parenting (in which a parent away at college or career visits with the other parent and child when possible); and grandparenting in place of parents. Few other human relationships are as affected as families are by the intimacy that bearing life's joys and burdens together creates.

At times of crisis, all families, regardless of family form or the cause of the crisis, should expect to find the support, solace, and encouragement of the Christian faith through the ministries of the church. Members of a congregation grounded in Christ and being transformed by the Holy Spirit can surely be expected to care for each other.⁶ As Paul taught the Christians in Galatia: "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2, NRSV). Caregiving is a fundamental expression of the commitment and love with which Christians serve one another beyond biological ties and express the inclusive compassion of God. Yet both universal experiences of change and unanticipated events occur in particular social and cultural contexts. Cultures organize these events socially, interpret them, and guide individuals and families through them. This is the "cultural context" that shapes the intersection of family and congregational life. In formulating church policies for changing families, it is necessary to take into account how the particular features of U.S. culture, particularly the values and meanings that predominate in our society, influence families' experiences of change and the church's response.

Much has been written about the impact of U.S. culture on the family, and much of this literature raises disturbing issues. The U.S. values of self-sufficiency, respect for privacy, and individualism tend to cause those in need to be reluctant to seek help from the church. These values, as well as the impact of job mobility and time stress, may make church members reticent about contacting those who need care. In addition, the economic cost of caregiving is greatly increasing. As a result, care needs, especially long-term needs, are being met more and more by commercial providers while forms of congregational caregiving are relegated to the paid staff of the church. When this professionalization happens, congregational affirmations of love and faithfulness may seem hollow. As communities grounded in the love of God, congregations must struggle to resist the values and social forces that isolate people from one another and that depersonalize care. Earl Shelp and Ronald Sunderland remind us of our vocation:

God calls people to faith and community. Responding to God in love requires responding to God's children in love. Congregations in most instances are not gifted to meet all the needs of a member or family in crisis. But, without exception, congregations are gifted to

be a sustaining presence in solidarity with broken people, bearing their burdens with them. There is hope for care giving among God's people because God continues to sustain the community called church.⁷

As cultural forces change patterns of social life, the church is called by God to use its imagination to create new ways of becoming Christ's community of effective and loving care.

2. *U.S. Cultural Values*

a. *Materialism*

There is much to appreciate in the material and technological progress that many U. S. families enjoy. The progress in better housing and modern home appliances has contributed to saving time, reducing labor, and enabling more shared participation in household tasks by family members. Affordable and safer automobiles have contributed to greater mobility and comfort in family travel. An abundant supply of food makes better nutrition possible for most families. Greatly improved medical technology and new pharmaceuticals have made better health care a possibility for many families. Communication technology has contributed to increasing educational opportunities for the general population and significantly improved worker productivity. The enjoyment of this domestic material progress is related to family income and, therefore, not equally accessible to all families. The persistence of poverty in the midst of abundance is a matter of basic justice and should deeply challenge the church and society. An equally important challenge is the value system that surrounds our material abundance.

Most U.S. families experience the enormous and pervasive impact of materialistic values on family life. Materialism is a pervasive cultural belief system in which the accumulation of material things is given ultimate value, defining individual and family success. Materialism influences what we think is important, how we spend our time as well as our money, how we frame the goals of our lives, and how we judge the value of other persons. The pressure to be "successful" in the sense of achieving material symbols of economic success, or of providing ever-increasing material benefits to one's family and children, is often overwhelming. Many families, while well off by the standards of the world and even of this society, struggle to keep pace with the constant commodification and commercialization of middle- and upper-income U.S. lifestyles. Parents realize that doors open to their children depending on parents' abilities to afford lessons, equipment, and practice time for activities that become sources of community, of belonging, for children. Families in stigmatized groups are tempted to buy social acceptance by buying status-identified products and activities.

In a materialistic culture, no upper limit to the accumulation of things is recognized. Moreover, "needs" expand due to both technological advancements and the powerful and constant drive of the economy to produce and sell new products. Where once a typewriter was sufficient, now high-speed Internet connections for computers are a necessity. Where once children shared bedrooms, now houses are built to accommodate individual bedrooms and baths for each member. Where a vacant lot once served every season's sport, now scheduled participation in leagues is purchased along with the correct sport-specific attire and costly equipment.

Materialism tends to draw families into a more narrow and self-centered value system. While we may not agree with everything in his description, social ethics scholar Jack Nelson Pallmeyer puts the influence of materialism this way:

... we would all do well to assess our conduct in relation to values. If we did so honestly, I think it would become apparent that in our society things are more valued than relationships; money beyond essential needs is valued more than time with our children; ideological certainty more than diversity; individualism more than community; career more than family time; distorted masculinity more than peace in our homes and in our society; bombs more than schools; affluence isolated amid suburbs, gated communities, and guard dogs more than shared wealth and safer cities; and, perhaps most important, excessive consumption for some of our citizens is cherished more than social equality, the health of the environment, or the well-being of future generations.⁸

As Nelson-Pallmeyer indicates, the negative effects of materialism are multiple. Materialism tends to overshadow the important interpersonal values embedded in relationships based on care, love, mutuality, and loyalty. It can draw families away from cultivating among themselves and their children the values and pleasures that come from a non-calculating love of one another, community, knowledge, the arts, and even work. Materialism also tends to deny the social mandate of our faith that is rooted in God's gracious love for all of God's children: a

divine love that is expressed in our redemption and in God's passion for social justice. We confess God's claim on us to be a people who will embody the image of God in the way we live and relate to all others. Materialism may cause us to neglect what John Calvin called the "rule of love" for both neighbors and enemies that leads to the "rule of moderation," in which we practice a self-giving commitment for a common good.⁹

Many middle- and upper-income families wrestle with achieving a balance between what is necessary and what is enough. They wrestle with when to say "no" when cost is not at issue, but wasteful consumption is the issue. The crisis of affluent families goes deeper. It is a crisis that is spiritual and relational. Materialism sets before us false goals and false gods. It calls us to give our lives to work that rewards us with the financial power to own more things and gain more social status. It does not ask, nor does it want us to ask, the value of our work to meet the real needs of all families, communities, and the environment. Materialism may lead some families into an excess of things, overconsumption, in contrast to the virtue of frugality that Calvin taught. Frugality does not mean a devaluing of material goods. It is not a form of asceticism. On the contrary, frugality values the earth and all the material goods necessary for human fulfillment. It is a valuing rooted in God's love for all people.

The 1981 statement, "The Power to Speak Truth to Power," adopted by both the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., states in part: "God calls Christians living in affluence to develop a lifestyle of frugality which assists human fulfillment while releasing scarce resources for use by the poor."¹⁰ The 208th General Assembly (1996) also affirmed that church's commitment to the essential economic virtue of frugality in its statement, *Hope for a Global Future: Toward a Just and Sustainable Human Development*. That statement calls for "a basic reconception of the 'good life'" in less materialistic and more frugal terms. Fulfillment should instead be found "through the abundance of genuinely caring and mutually supportive community in Christ, and through adventurous faithfulness in response to God's call to restore creation, and discover the contemporary meaning of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God (Micah 6:8, NRSV)."¹¹ The statement further enriches the meaning of both frugality and the "contentment" of the good life:

Frugality denotes moderation, temperance, thrift, cost-consciousness, efficient usage, and a satisfaction with material sufficiency—similar to the "contentment" celebrated in the first letter to Timothy (6:6–10). As a norm for the economic activity of both individuals and societies, frugality means morally disciplined production and consumption for higher ends, such as the common good.¹²

Materialism may also distort our sense of time. Time is money, we are told. So there is little time for parents to discern and teach their own values, values that may run counter to those of a materialistic culture and economy. There is no time for the unproductive activity of being with children "wasting time" in play or prayer. There is little time for being neighborly or engaging in local participatory community building. When time is seen primarily as money, the time required for significant caregiving of dependent others or the time required for responsible citizenship takes valued time out of the workplace. The needs of children, families, and community are simply too expensive when time is money. Today in the U.S., the time needed to care for children, the elderly, neighbors, other dependent persons, and our intimate relationships receives little social support. Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West lament this loss of social support for the important work of parents. Their comments could also be extended to apply to families caring for any type of dependent person.

More than any other wealthy nation, the U. S. expects individual parents to foot the child-raising bill from childbirth all the way through college, and more than any other wealthy nation, America is facing profound and systemic child neglect. ... In an age that venerates the market, relying solely on parental altruism to underwrite the costs of raising children is risky for the nation and cruel for the child. Try as they undoubtedly do, millions of contemporary parents are simply too stretched and squeezed to do a stellar job.¹³

Job insecurity, inadequate wages, decreased corporate loyalty to employees, soaring compensation for executives, diminished health, vacation, and retirement benefits for employees, increasing job mobility, and mandatory overtime create immense time pressures and emotional stress on all types of families. Many U.S. families struggle to provide the bare minimum of shelter and sustenance for their members through long work hours, often at more than one job and at odd hours. A culture of materialism, by ignoring the balance Christians seek between overconsumption by some and the deprivation of others, threatens the human development and well-being of many people living on earth today as well as the many more who will be born into a depleted earth. The growth of inequality in income and wealth in the U.S. fragments our communities and our churches, divides our families, and

diminishes our capacity as children of God to be stewards of the common good. A culture of materialism threatens our very relationship with God, who is the source of all things.

b. *Consumerism*

Consumerism is one of the products of a materialistic culture. In consumerism, individuals and families come to understand themselves, and their purpose in life, primarily as buyers. We live to buy; we work to buy; we educate to enhance purchasing power. Leisure is often characterized by the pleasure of buying. Going to shopping malls has become a major source of entertainment. The negative impact of consumerism causes people to focus their sense of self around material consumption. It reduces the understanding of human freedom to a sense of individual freedom exercised by choosing what to consume based on what we believe to be personal preferences. Even the sense of responsibility for others is too often met through purchases. Expression of love between family members, as well as care for others, is too easily reduced to the purchase of things or services. Consumerism diverts human and financial resources from being invested to build up and transform human life.

Consumerism is undeniably promoted and shaped in profound and pervasive ways by mass media: television, radio, film, videos, music, and the Internet. Families are barraged daily with the message of consumption through commercial advertising, including billboards, school, television, internet connections, park benches, and even clothing. Mass marketing encourages people to believe that our personal value depends on buying and using the right products. It presents consumer goods and expensive activities as replacements for time spent together as a family so that, even in leisure, family members are pulled in separate directions. Christian ethicist Larry Rasmussen speaks about the loss of what he calls “manifold engagement.” This is the relational aspect of routine activities that family members once did together: cutting the grass, preparing meals, playing neighborhood-lot baseball, pursuing hobbies, visiting neighbors and friends, giving a helping hand to others. Through these activities, families practice the skills of human relationship. From a Christian perspective, these are the routine family activities in which family members model and practice the Christian virtues of hospitality, care for the least, compassion, the valuing of every person, sensitivity to the needs of others, and passion for social justice. Through manifold engagement the Christian family, first rooted in the gathering of Christian community, nurtures Christian character.¹⁴

The decline of the family meal in the U. S. is a particularly telling and troubling indication of the family’s fragmentation and the “outsourcing” of its formerly unifying functions. According to Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000), only 34 percent of American families indicate that they usually eat together, which is a drop from 50 percent twenty years earlier.¹⁵ This trend is all the more noteworthy in light of consistent research findings that eating together, regardless of family form, teens’ gender, and socioeconomic level, correlates with lower children’s rates of smoking, drinking, drug use, and sex at an early age and with higher rates of school success and healthy eating habits.¹⁶

The recovery of this crucial corporate connection should not be accomplished by burdening the woman of the household with the entire second shift of labor that precedes, accompanies, and follows family meals. Justice as well as charity should begin at home. Not only is the family table the primary grade of schooling for church membership and democratic citizenship; we can also learn there to share both the responsibilities and joys of being members of the same body (1 Cor. 12). As we consume food that we had a part in selecting, preparing, and maybe even growing or researching, and as we converse as critical consumers of the day’s news, the day’s media offerings, or the day’s class sessions, we cease to swallow whole what our culture feeds us. Instead, we partake as “companions” (sharers of the same bread). And if as families we welcome others to our tables or prepare meals together to take to the homeless, the hungry, or those in other crises, we also become “companions” of those who are missing meals against their will.

Christians cannot be defined primarily as consumers of material goods. We are first daughters and sons of God, redeemed by God’s love and called to participate in the building of God’s realm on earth. When we consume, then, we consume as children of a creating God who, having provided all the resources necessary for abundant life, intends that they be used to meet the needs of all God’s children, not just a few, while honoring the capacity of the earth to renew itself for future generations.¹⁷

c. *Individualism*

The North American prevailing culture highly values individualism, self-reliance, independence, and personal privacy—values that can stand in some tension with biblical concepts of a covenant community, responsibility for one another, and gratitude for the gracious gifts of a generous Creator. When individuality is understood to require respect and concern for the well-being of each person in all relationships, it reflects the biblical principle of God’s equal love for each person. In contrast to many other cultures, however, the predominant North American culture tends to treat the individual as the primary social unit rather than to emphasize the ties of kinship and community. This stress on the autonomy of individuals is sometimes expressed through our focus on the primacy of private property rights over community stake in a common good. Our consumer culture and its economic and social policies tend to promote an autonomous individualism that functions to fragment rather than strengthen families and communities. When individual rights become primary, communities and families are viewed as providers of services to an autonomous, self-interested individual, rather than as interdependent social units within which individual human character is formed. Family members may be treated as isolated individuals by employers, schools, social services, and even churches, rather than as interdependent members of a family and community.

The stress on individualism has had a particularly devastating impact on racial ethnic communities that practice different, group-based values. For example, in its report, “Family Preservation: Concepts in American Indian Communities,” the National Indian Child Welfare Association finds that the Eurocentric value system promoting nuclear families and individualism has fostered repression of native cultures. It has resulted in the implementation of policy that, in the words of the report, “fuels identity crises, family dysfunction, and community disintegration.” By contrast, the report observes, Native American cultures “do not separate individuals from family or family from community; community, tribal custom, language, religion, and cultural practice are fundamental to family preservation.” However, these community-oriented values were identified as “forms of socialism” by the dominant culture, and “the nuclear family lifestyle and an ethos of individualism were forcibly imposed in the effort to ‘civilize’ the Native American people.”¹⁸

The African American population, while suffering from long and deep social, economic and cultural discrimination, nevertheless brings to U.S. culture a history of vital and nurturing family ties in a supportive community context. The appreciation of family history, the vitality of extended family, long experience of mutual burden bearing, and intergenerational support are significant parts of African American family life. The centrality of the church in African American family and community life is a strong witness to Christian values of sacrificial service, compassionate caring, and human development. Black leadership in the historic struggle for overcoming the oppression of slavery, securing civil rights, and gaining economic opportunity is a powerful reality that has strengthened African American family life and brought vitality to the whole U.S. church and society. In contrast to these strengths, it must be emphasized that the influence of prejudice and the persistence of institutional racism continue to have negative effects on African Americans in every area of family life.

A Hispanic Presbyterian has written: “One of the few things that unite all Hispanic/Latin people (from all over—from all walks of life) is the strong belief in the family ties. However, we are losing those ties because of the values promoted by the broader society where we now live.”¹⁹ Her firsthand knowledge is supported by recent census data related to Hispanic immigrant families. The statistics consistently reflect low rates of divorce and of single-parent families among the first generation of immigrants, followed by striking increases in marital disruption over time in the U. S., particularly in later generations.²⁰

Immigrants from Korea find that their children absorb the U.S. culture and do not understand the Korean culture’s emphasis on “filial piety,” in which children are reared to have a sense of devotion and obligation to their parents. Instead, as these children become adults, they tend to relate to their elderly parents “on a more or less equal and voluntary basis.”²¹ Korean American families, in spite of the prevailing culture, tend to continue to maintain a strong sense of family tradition and loyalty.

For better or worse, the strong sense of individual freedom that pervades U.S. culture also enables persons to marry across cultural and religious lines without feeling constrained to remain within the traditions of their birth family. Consequently, the number of interfaith families is growing. They often experience both the richness of

new discovery and the stress of conflicting norms and assumptions. Rearing children in interfaith families creates difficult decisions regarding whose tradition will be carried into the future. Some families attempt to rear children with dual religious identities, while others attempt to avoid conflict by raising their children without any religious affiliation. Both responses may be problematic for the spiritual growth of children. To the extent that some persons enter an interfaith marriage with the intention to seek the conversion of a spouse, the positive value of individuality—that is, valuing all persons and their responses to God’s activity in their lives—is undermined and violated.²² For these and other reasons, many communities of faith regard interfaith marriages as problematic, as possibly causing religious syncretism, and as being destructive of people’s faithful adherence to their religious traditions. Presbyterians need to be aware of the attitudes of other religious traditions and of the possibilities and problems of such relationships before entering into or officiating at interfaith marriages.

Even within the Eurocentric tradition, many have raised growing concerns about the impact of individualism on families, communities, and the future of a democratic society. The now-classic research into the white, middle class by Robert Bellah and his four co-authors of *Habits of the Heart* found individuals who “had no grounds for moral commitments beyond self-referential ones, no strong moral reference points beyond their own therapeutic selves and the pain, often depression, those self-absorbed entities seemed endlessly to recycle.”²³ They found a society in which biblical and civic individualism, both of which tie personal identity to community membership, were no longer able to balance or counteract utilitarian and expressive individualism. Utilitarian individualism calculates everything in terms of economic and material pay-off, and it believes that the combination of everyone’s pursuit of economic well-being will automatically result in the best conditions for all. Expressive individualism, in turn, measures every relationship, association, and activity for its emotional pay-off. It eschews long-term commitments on the chance of finding more self-fulfillment elsewhere.

Larry Rasmussen describes what he calls “the middle-class child’s cultural catechism” as “Gather to yourself all you can—experience, knowledge, goods, skills. Make your own world, as you see fit, and enjoy it. Grow for all you are worth, in every way. Never close off any options.”²⁴ As a mantra of self-reliance, denial of interdependence, and a fear of dependence, this individualism is destructive of persons, families, and communities. It understands human freedom primarily as a right to be left alone, to be free from the needs and desires of others. It strips justice of any substance, limiting it to those procedures that protect the rights and privileges of individuals. Such radical individualism relinquishes social responsibility for significant issues that frame the quality of national life. It constantly works to reduce what used to be called a “social wage”; that is, the share of national resources distributed according to the needs of human community rather than by market forces (for example, public education, parks, transportation, museums, and the social support system). It tends to reduce social morality to individual politeness.

The spirit of individualism in U.S. culture (as distinguished from the religious value of individuality and the God-given dignity of each person) weakens understanding and appreciation of the important ways in which human life, in families and communities, is inevitably interdependent. It also weakens the valuable place that true forms of dependency and interdependency play in human relations. Everyone arrives in this world totally dependent. All of us will experience additional times of dependency throughout our lives, especially in our later years. The continuation of generations depends upon this flow of giving and receiving care. Therefore, contempt for the positive and essential roles that dependency and interdependency play in family and community life contributes to their fragmentation. At the same time, expressive and utilitarian individualism weakens public support for the kinds of services, resources, and public policies that families and communities need to resist these fragmenting pressures. Christian ethicist Emilie Townes characterizes this pattern as the error of “stressing personal responsibility while detesting dependency.” She points out that from the perspective of dispossessed communities, “the notion of uninhibited personal freedom remains a utopian folly.” Social policies that focus on individual responsibility while detesting the shared responsibilities of society reflect “a basic inability or unwillingness to recognize structural sins and/or inequalities.”²⁵ The mantra of individualism serves to hide from us our essential connectedness with others, those close to us as well as those affected by our choices that we never see.

Once again the media, in all their forms, play a significant role in shaping perspectives on human relationships: family, marriage, partnering, parenthood, and social responsibility. Much of what the media portray about relationships is trivializing or outright hostile. Fathers may be characterized as ridiculous and incompetent; mothers as inept and overly emotional. Marriage is both romanticized as totally fulfilling life’s purpose and at the same

time treated with contempt through routine portrayals of dysfunctional and manipulative behaviors in which each individual pursues his or her personal agenda. Casual sexual encounters are presented as the norm of adult sexuality; sexual activity is presented as the obsession of every adult life. Children cannot easily be protected from a daily consumption of distorted relations and hyper-individualism, consumerism, materialistic values, and gratuitous violence that is clearly inappropriate and may be developmentally harmful for some children at certain ages. Parental efforts to limit television and Internet access at home provide only partial control over a market-driven culture in which mass-marketed images appear everywhere. Concerns about the influence of media on families are reflected in long-standing positions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Specifically, the PC(USA) stands opposed to censorship and strongly supports the rights protected by the First Amendment. However, it also calls upon Presbyterians to develop strategies by which to condemn false values communicated through media and to influence what media present.²⁶

d. *Hedonism*

Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure or happiness as the purpose of life. It tends to be closely associated with the expressive individualism that is focused on personal fulfillment and self-satisfaction. It can be the driving motivation that leads people to seek pleasure in compulsive consumption of food, sexual gratification, high-risk adventure, and material possessions. Affluent societies are especially tempted by the culture of narcissism or self-love. Opportunities for pleasure seeking are abundant. Whole industries are built on selling pleasure through entertainment, alcoholic consumption, narcotic release from stress, instant material gratification using charge cards, and the exploitation of others for pleasure. Hedonism flourishes in cultures of materialistic consumerism. Hedonism fails to understand that happiness is a byproduct of positive and mutually fulfilling relationships.

In families, the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and happiness tends to create misuse of resources, competition for time instead of cooperative collaboration, pursuit of fulfillment away from home, and diversion of human energy from core relationships, resulting in internal distress and ongoing conflict. Of course there is need for personal relaxation, stress reduction, and wholesome vocational activity. Not all of one's activity can or should be with other family members; there is need for creative balance in life. It is the tendency for family members to go off on individualistic tangents seeking purely personal expression and pleasure that becomes dysfunctional in contemporary family life. This type of behavior contributes to the destruction of the family as a cohesive, nurturing, and supportive body. The church needs to create new ways for families to learn that in sharing we receive and that in responsible community our individuality can be transformed and affirmed.

3. *Church and Culture*

The church itself may unwittingly contribute to the fragmentation of families and communities in its own life and witness. When church practices and programs are primarily defined by age or gender, for example, the church appears to be replicating our culture's fragmentation of family members into individual consumers. In contrast, all church members need a variety of ways to build and sustain their identity with the whole family of God. Children need to see adults worship and to join them in worship. Adults need to bridge separations by age, gender, race, income, and family form that mirror social inequalities. Additionally, church programs may unintentionally serve the needs of certain forms of families over others. Families with special needs, families caring for dependent adults, families of children with disabilities, interfaith families, single people who live alone, couples with children and couples without children—all need intentional practices that support, include, and value them as families. Ronald Peters suggests that the analogy of the extended family, long practiced in communities of African-diasporan descent, could serve as a paradigm for local congregations. In their ministries with families and communities facing oppressive realities, the churches of these communities ministered as a "helping institution particularly in the areas of caring, education, nurture, economic development, political thought, as well as religious instruction." Peters argues that Jesus' response to family was to extend relational connections beyond blood and legal relations to include all who seek to do God's will, exercising inclusiveness across social divisions. As extended family, the church does not divide life into sacred and secular spaces, but "is inherently holistic in its approach to reality."²⁷

In summary, the gravest danger that faces all U.S. Christians is the corrupting influence of the popular American values of materialism, consumerism, individualism and hedonism on our theologies, ethics, liturgical prac-

tices, and church programs. The pursuit of happiness as our culture defines it can come to dictate the teachings and the daily practices of our church organizations, as well as in our times of worship. What do our organizational and liturgical practices communicate? To what extent do those cultural values that have served to divide us by race, gender, physical and mental abilities, and economic location also continue to divide the church family? The church does not exist as an end in itself. It is not a substitute community for the lack of community in U.S. society. Nor is it a haven for stressed people and their families. The church exists as a community of transformation that arises out of a different understanding of the meaning and purpose of human life. It exists as a larger community of faith, called into being by God to form “the people of the Way.” It exists to form our families, in all of their diversity, for journeying in discipleship together.

As the pace of life increases in speed, the challenges of life increase in complexity, and the gap increases between those with the means for leisure and those without the means for daily bread, the church—to be the church—must rediscover and newly proclaim the grace of the Sabbath gift.²⁸ In God’s creation of a day of rest, the greedy nature of human work to expand its purposes into every minute of every day is capped. As John Calvin said simply, “On the Sabbath, we cease our work so God can do God’s work with us.”²⁹ On Sabbath we are to become quiet in order to remember that we are not our own, that our life is not our own, that our possessions are not our own, that even our families are not our own. Being God’s, we learn to live in a world that is God’s among people who are God’s. When we receive Sabbath grace, we become prepared to walk as People of the Way, even when that Way sets us apart from the values of our culture. In reclaiming the meaning of the Sabbath gift, the church reclaims time and space for twenty-first century U.S. Christians. It seeks to become a fountain of alternative values flowing from communion with the living God: reclaiming rest for exhausted families, opening lives to God’s purposes, breathing thankfulness, and expanding our capacity to be a loving community of transformation. When the church is the church, Christian families of every form are known by the transforming power of their practices at home and in the wider society.

Prayer: Ever-loving Savior, who comes to us in our brokenness and transforms our lives through healing mercy, we confess to you that our nation is not always a healthy place for many of your families. Too often we have erred and gone astray, following after false cultural idols that whisper to us of security and success. Too often we have not encouraged families to dare to place the values of your Gospel above those of the prevailing culture. Too often we as a church have not spoken your prophetic word or acted your redeeming deed; we have instead remained silent, not daring to speak out against popular opinion. Forgive us, redeeming Lord, and renew our vision. Grant us the courage to place you and your love at the core of our family lives, and at the center of our communities and of our nation. Amen.

B. *Socioeconomic Context*

Study of sociological data helps to fulfill the mandate of the 209th General Assembly (1997),³⁰ stated at the beginning of this report, by discovering the current forms of U.S. families and the cultural and economic forces that shape them. From our biblical and confessional heritage, we know that Christian families face every age and culture with ambivalence—in some ways conforming to cultural family norms, yet striving to embody culture-transforming Christian identities. By helping us to understand why family life is changing, the social sciences contribute to the church’s development of authentic ministries for all families.³¹

First, we need to acknowledge who we are as Presbyterians.³² According to the “2003–2005 Background Report” of the Presbyterian Panel, although racial ethnic persons now comprise more than 20 percent of the U.S. population, 97 percent of the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) identify themselves as white. The 2000–2002 survey reported that 2 percent of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) members were those of African-diasporan descent, 2 percent were Asian and Pacific Islanders, and less than 2 percent were persons of Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish origin. (Census forms allow checking more than one racial ethnic identification.) This racial ethnic make-up has remained essentially unchanged for more than twenty years. The median age of our members has been slowly rising, from forty-nine years in 1973 to fifty-five years in 2003. Sixty-one percent of members are women, as are half of elders and 23 percent of pastors. About 52 percent of us are employed, while one-third of us are retired. Seventy-seven percent of members are currently married, as are more than 80 percent of clergy. At the time of the 2000–2002 survey, only 19 percent of the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) had been divorced (compared to 21 percent of the U.S. population).³³ The median annual family income of our mem-

bers is \$72,000 while that of our elders is \$71,600, placing the median family income of our families well above that of most U.S. families (\$51,407 in 2001).³⁴ Most Presbyterians, then, are members of white, middle- and upper-income families. As we look at the data describing the rest of the U.S. population, we need to recognize the differing circumstances of most U.S. families. Understanding cultural, racial, and economic differences may be a key to reversing the decline in Presbyterian membership as well as its cultural, racial, and economic homogeneity.

1. *What Remains the Same*

As we look at how families are changing in the U.S., it is important that we keep in mind how much remains the same. While concern is often expressed about the future of marriage, it is still true that most people in the United States express the desire to marry for life and to raise their own children to be healthy and competent adults. Strong majorities of U.S. teenagers continue to report that a good marriage and family life are extremely important to them.³⁵ Most marriages, 55–60 percent, do indeed last until death. Marriage remains a blessing for most people. Married people continue to report higher levels of happiness and health than do single individuals. They live longer, are less likely to engage in risky behavior, and show fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression. Marriage continues to provide an economic benefit as two adults share resources. Household incomes of married people are higher, on average, than those of single people. While it is likely that people who have already achieved a good level of health and financial stability are more apt to marry, research also suggests that marriage is a cause of many positive outcomes.³⁶ It is also true, however, that most individuals who remain single by choice or circumstance are able to pursue fully happy and complete lives as single persons.

It remains the case that most children are raised by their biological parents, and those biological parents are successful in raising their children. Fully 90 percent of their children become competent adults who are able to form lasting intimate relations and participate successfully in education and employment. It is also true that most single mothers and most stepfamilies are successful in raising healthy and competent children. Seventy-five to eighty percent of the children of single mothers and stepfamilies score in the normal range of achievement and adjustment tests.

2. *Marriage*

Marriage is extremely important to people in the U.S.: 90 percent marry at some point, and of those who divorce, 70 percent re-marry. Married couple households make up about 53 percent of all households. While this percentage represents a decline from 71 percent in 1970, it should be remembered that such households make up only one stage in the life cycle. Today the later age of first marriage and longer life expectancy contribute to more single person households. Research shows that marriage is associated with many positive outcomes for women and men. As noted above, married people are, on the whole, happier, healthier, better off financially, and more likely to be employed than are single people. Successful marriages do more than simply avoid divorce. Successful marriages share a commitment to marriage as an institution; achieve a mutually supportive relationship built on respect, liking, support, and mutual interests; and develop a sense of partnership in life. Good marriages build up a history of goodwill and trust, of remembered joyful events and shared sorrows that enable couples to handle new problems as they arise.³⁷ Moreover, family research provides strong evidence that, on average, children do better in healthy, intact, two-parent (biological) families than they do in stepfamilies, adopted families, or single-parent families. Specifically, 90 percent of children in first marriage families score within the normal range of achievement and adjustment outcomes.³⁸ Thus, the vision of family life and marital mutuality found in the Confession of 1967 reflects an arrangement of intimate life that is profoundly good and an accurate expression of a great many people's hopes and expectations.

3. *Divorce*

The U.S. also has the highest divorce rate in the world. Today, within a forty-year period, almost half of first marriages end in divorce, as do more than half of second marriages.³⁹ Divorce rates, which had increased gradually since the 19th century, rose steeply in the second half of the 20th century, plateaued around 1988, and fell slightly thereafter. While there is no consensus in explaining the divorce rate, social scientists name several factors:

a. *Transitions in Gender Role Expectations*

One of the most striking changes in U.S. families has been the entrance of most wives and mothers into the workforce. In 1951, only 19.9 percent of wives worked in paid labor; by 1999, 47.6 percent did.⁴⁰ The sharpest increase occurred in the employment of white wives and mothers. In 1950, white women's labor force participation rate was less than 30 percent. By 2000, it was 59.8 percent. In comparison, the labor force participation rate of women of African-diasporan descent has consistently exceeded that of white women: 41 percent in 1900 and 63.2 percent in 2000.⁴¹ By the turn of the 21st century, working mothers and, in married-couple families, two working parents are a norm that includes:⁴²

- 75 percent of all mothers with children under the age of 18,
- 60 percent of mothers in married couple families with children under the age of six,
- 68 percent of single mothers with children under six,
- 57 percent of all mothers with children under the age of 3, and
- 51 percent of all mothers with children younger than one year.

Certainly one reason for this striking change in families is the success of the women's movement in gaining more education and more equal opportunities for women. However, research indicates that changes in gender role expectations have an impact on marital accord as couples renegotiate patterns of family life that once could be taken for granted.⁴³ In addition, while men are still the primary earners in most families, most women, even career women, experience marriage as a double shift. That is, women continue to have primary responsibility for children, other dependent persons, and domestic work while also being employed.⁴⁴ Some men respond by taking on more household tasks and creating more egalitarian relations. Others respond with an even greater emphasis on rigid gender roles. But studies confirm that employed women work more hours a week and have less leisure time than their husbands.⁴⁵ Consequently, many of today's marriages are sites of an imbalance of power and work responsibilities that is accompanied by increased conflict. Although three-fourths of women workers earn less than \$25,000 annually, women's increased potential to support themselves may be a factor in allowing women and men to consider leaving conflicted marriages.

Gender roles are also affected by economic stress (discussed below). Studies show that declining male wages and women's engagement in wage work undermine some white men's traditional self-identity as the providers of their families.⁴⁶ Racial ethnic communities do not escape gender tension. For example, while most wives in South Korea do not work outside the home, most married Korean women in the U.S. do in order to assure the economic survival of their families. Yet many of these women would agree that it is best if a mother does not have to work for income. Consequently, Korean women in the U.S. are likely to work outside the home while holding more traditional gender beliefs and bearing almost all the responsibility for household tasks since such work is not what men traditionally do in Korea. In the U.S., Korean men face the frustrations of lost economic status and the inability to support their families with their work. This clash of traditional Korean gender roles with economic reality in the U.S. may contribute to the higher rate of divorce among Korean women and men in the U.S. than in Korea.⁴⁷

b. *Economic Stress and Deprivation*

For most families, economic need sent wives and mothers into the workforce. Between 1979 and 1995, real hourly wages fell for the bottom 70 percent of wage earners.⁴⁸ For the median wage male worker, the wage decline amounted to about 15 percent. The share of workers earning poverty-level wages increased from 27.1 percent in 1979 to over 30 percent in 1995 before dropping back to 25 percent in 2000.⁴⁹ As a result, between 1979 and 1998 middle-income families would have seen a significant loss in income if wives had not added their paid work.

In addition to wages, an entire web of security once linked to men's employment is unraveling. United States families face lost or reduced employer-sponsored health insurance coverage, rising employee contributions and co-payments, and longer waiting periods before eligibility. The percentage of employees covered by defined-

benefit pension plans has dropped significantly. While 401Ks offer greater employment flexibility, they require larger employee contributions and are subject to the fluctuations of the stock market. Economic pressures cause U.S. families to spend more time in the workplace. Between 1970 and 1990, the average American worker added 164 hours of employed work—a month of work—to their work year. In 2000, the average number of hours worked by U.S. workers exceeded that of any other industrialized nation.⁵⁰ In the last thirty years, middle-income, married-with-children families have added twenty more weeks of work time mostly through wives' employment.⁵¹ Most U.S. families deal with declining real wages and benefits and increasing fears about job instability by adding more workers to the workforce and by spending more time at work. Insufficient time and economic insecurity are major sources of stress in many U.S. families.

Three decades of research substantiate the claim that economic stress and deprivation increase marital conflict and the likelihood of divorce.⁵² Divorce rates are generally higher among lower-income families and less educated people. They are higher for couples of African-diasporan descent than for white couples (see statistics below). Researchers point to the economic conditions that plague the daily life of low-income families: higher rates of unemployment, greater job instability, inadequate income, insecure and inadequate housing, and less access to health care, transportation, and other needs. Studies that look at the relationship between deteriorated economic contexts and marriage rates find that marriage rates drop when men experience high unemployment and low earnings.⁵³ Other studies show that earnings stability and income levels correlate positively with rising marriage rates.⁵⁴ Recent studies of the impact of welfare reform have found that when two-parent families were supported by a combination of work, income supplements, and work supports (childcare, transportation, etc.), they were almost 40 percent less likely to separate or divorce.⁵⁵

c. *New Expectations for Marriage*

Research indicates that men and women have developed new standards by which they evaluate marriage today. With the availability of safe and effective birth control, marriage is no longer an automatic indication of the intent to have children. With or without children, women and men expect marriage to be companionate; that is, an emotionally satisfying relationship that provides for individual development in a context of relational security.⁵⁶ Some interpret this change in expectations as evidence of an increasingly secularized view of marriage—marriage as a contract based on self-interest—rather than marriage as a covenantal relationship. The cultural emphasis on self-fulfillment may be replacing the covenantal emphasis on mutual commitment. Others point out that the egalitarian assumptions that underlie the theological concept of covenant were not met by the unequal gender roles in traditional marriages. From this latter perspective, it may be that the full promise of marriage as a covenantal relationship among equals has not been lost, but still lies in our future.

d. *Response to Infidelity*

Adultery has long been acknowledged as a legitimate reason for divorce. In the past, however, a sexual double standard, economic dependency, and social stigma often required wives to look the other way when husbands had affairs and supported mistresses. While it is extremely difficult to measure accurately the prevalence of adultery, current data suggests that about 50 percent of husbands and 30 percent of wives have had an affair in the course of their marriages. However, due to today's emphasis on the companionate marriage and gender equality, both women and men are much less willing to tolerate spousal infidelity. Monogamy remains an important norm in marriage.⁵⁷

e. *Erosion of Relationship*

The decision to divorce is not easily arrived at for most people. Divorce is typically the result of a painful disintegration of a shared vision of marriage and family that occurs over a long period of time, preceded by long periods of conflict between spouses and lonely isolation. Women, who usually initiate divorce, think about it for a long time before arriving at this decision. In one study, half of the mothers thought about divorce for more than five years before finally deciding to file.⁵⁸ On the other hand, a majority of couples in low-conflict marriages, who once considered divorce but decided to remain married, report very happy marriages five years later.⁵⁹ This finding suggests that the church has a significant role to play in developing and providing marriage enrichment opportunities for couples in low-conflict marriages.

f. *Domestic Violence*

Research indicates that violence and the threat of violence play a role in about one-third of divorces. Physical violence was twice as high in families where the husband was unemployed as in families with an employed husband.⁶⁰ Serious and frequent quarreling was reported by another 30 percent of divorced parents.⁶¹ According to the General Assembly policy statement, *Turn Mourning into Dancing*, we know that “domestic violence is of epidemic proportions. . . . [It] occurs in all types of family configurations and in every region of the United States, whether urban, suburban, or rural.”⁶² In marital or intimate partner violence, most of the victims are women, and most of the abusers are men.⁶³ Recognizing the deep and long-lasting harm done to the victims of abuse and to those family members who witness abuse, the PC(USA) has recognized that reconciliation depends upon “the certainty and evidence that coercion and violence are no longer part of an abuser’s repertoire.”⁶⁴ Where that change is not evident, the church recognizes that the relationship has been lost.

4. *Divorce and Children*

Research literature on divorce indicates that concern for the well-being of children is often a central issue for those contemplating divorce. This concern is appropriate since studies show that children often experience divorce as “cataclysmic and inexplicable.”⁶⁵ To a child, a world that seemed safe and dependable suddenly became fearful and unstable. Family research presents convincing evidence that, on average, children do better in healthy, intact, two-biological-parent families than they do in stepfamilies, adopted families, or single-parent families. Specifically, 75–80 percent of children who have experienced divorce and 90 percent of children in intact families score within the normal range of achievement and adjustment. This leaves a significant 10–15 percent difference.⁶⁶ Research also shows that divorce and high levels of marital conflict among parents can be associated with a greater likelihood of divorce and lower marital quality among their offspring.⁶⁷ Knowing that children are most likely to do well in intact-families, many parents try to sustain marriages “for the sake of the children.” Today somewhat more than half of U.S. children live with both of their biological parents, less than 20 percent live in a stepfamily, and about one in four lives with a single (typically divorced or separated) parent.⁶⁸

Concern for children may also be a reason for divorce. Research shows the long-term negative consequences for children who experience persistent marital discord.⁶⁹ Moreover, since children often begin to exhibit the difficulties associated with divorce a year or more before a divorce actually occurs, the negative effects usually associated solely with divorce may be, in fact, negative outcomes of disruptive behavior in deteriorating families.⁷⁰ However, if children move from a conflicted situation to one that is more harmonious and stable, they can become better adjusted than they were before the divorce. Researchers suggest that a stable environment is important for children following divorce. Parental love is important, and also “firm but responsive discipline” that teaches a child self-control.⁷¹

Because divorce is usually stressful and painful for children, researchers suggest ways to address and mitigate this pain. Judith Wallerstein points to three psychological factors that are protective for children of divorce as well as for children in intact families: reasonably harmonious and supportive relations between parents, the commitment and sensitivity of each parent to the child, and the maturity and morality of the parents. She writes:

Within the well-functioning two-parent or one-parent family, these three protective aspects of family life come together to provide an environment that is conducive to the healthy development of child and adult alike, a human environment that continuously changes to support the ever-changing needs of all family members.⁷²

Divorce, through its trajectory of pre-divorce conflict, the period of the actual break-up, and the post-divorce adjustments, may well assault the protective factors that children need at any point along this process. Wallerstein advocates flexibility in policy responses to divorcing families that reflects the varying needs of children. She also advocates a one-year waiting period in which community resources are provided to families to help them shape divorce in ways that protect children.

Sara McLanahan’s research has documented that half of the 10–15 percent difference in outcomes between children raised by two biological parents and those raised by single mothers or stepfamilies was due to the low income of single-parent families. The other half was due to the effects of frequent residential moves experienced

by single-parent and stepfamilies. Frequent relocation keeps families from establishing a stable community of friends and connections.⁷³ Having identified economic insecurity as the primary component in the disadvantages of single parenting, McLanahan strongly advocates public policies that would reduce the economic insecurity of children.

Mavis Hetherington points out that there is a good deal of variability in how individuals respond to the experiences of marital transitions. As she states, “Divorce does not inevitably produce permanent scars.”⁷⁴ For example, being caught in the middle of hostile parents or losing contact with the noncustodial parent can have significant negative effects on a child. She finds that providing a consistent, warm, supportive, and firm but responsive discipline buffers children from many of the stresses of divorce. For Hetherington, it is important to emphasize that, as was stated earlier, 75–80 percent of children from divorced families function as well as 90 percent from intact families.⁷⁵

The question of the impact of divorce on children is a complicated one. Individual families differ, and individual cases cannot be accounted for by aggregate data. From the perspective of family researchers, the task is to account for the poorer performance of these children. Clearly, a warm, loving family of any form is a better environment for a child than a hostile, conflicted family of any form. The vast majority of children of intact families and a lesser majority of children of single-parent families, step-or-blended families, and adoptive families become well-adjusted adults. The church has a clear role in helping divorced parents to understand and address the special concerns of their children and in advocating public policies that reduce poverty.

5. *Stepfamilies*

Stepfamilies are created when one adult enters a relationship with another adult who is already a parent. Remarriage rates are high for divorced people: between 66–75 percent for women and between 70–80 percent for men. As a consequence, about a third of the U.S. population is now composed of “step-somethings”: stepparents, stepchildren, stepsiblings, and other steprelatives. More than half will experience being a step-something during their lifespan. However, divorce rates and problems in children’s adjustment are higher in remarriages than in first marriages.⁷⁶ Some social scientists have argued that because stepparents do not have a genetic investment in stepchildren, they are less likely to provide essential social investments.⁷⁷ Others point to the greater difficulties in negotiating the relationship between stepparents and stepchildren, the continuation of behaviors that undermined the first marriage, unrealistic expectations, and the remarried adults’ recognition that divorce can be survived if necessary.⁷⁸

As was stated earlier, McLanahan attributes 60 percent of the different outcomes between children who have not experienced divorce and children in a stepfamily to the greater residential mobility that stepfamilies experience.⁷⁹ Mobility greatly weakens connections to friends, neighbors, and community resources. Hetherington and Kelly note that the creation of stepfamilies when children are younger than ten or older than fifteen has a higher success rate.⁸⁰ Ministry with stepfamilies should recognize that gender, parental, and extended family relationships within stepfamilies do not and cannot mirror the same patterns found in first-marriages. Ministry that respects flexibility and diversity in family roles and is informed by the practices of successful stepfamilies will be more effective in supporting stepfamilies.⁸¹ From a theological perspective, stepfamilies and adoptive families remind us that blood kinship, or genetic investment, does not define the boundaries of our capacities to love and care for one another.

6. *Single-Parent Families*

A troubling change in U.S. families has been the dramatic rise in single-parent families. While statistical data may provide an overcount of single-parent families, the increase is undeniable.⁸² It is estimated that about half of U.S. children will spend some of their childhood in a single-parent family, the vast majority of which are female-headed (94 percent in 1998). In 2000, while only 9 percent of all households were single parent-families, they comprised 31 percent of all families with children under 18. According to the 2000 census, 35 percent of single-mother families were the result of divorce, 18 percent were the result of separation, 4 percent were the result of death, and 43 percent were the result of nonmarital birth.⁸³

a. *Nonmarital Births*

Nonmarital births accounted for one-third of all births in 1998.⁸⁴ However, to understand what this means, we need to distinguish between the rate of births to unmarried women and the proportion of births to unmarried women. Rate measures the number of unmarried births per one thousand women in a given year. Proportion is the percentage of all births that are to unmarried women. This latter figure is affected by the increase or decrease in marital fertility. It is possible, then, for a nonmarital birth rate to fall while the proportion of nonmarital births increases. In fact, this is the case for 1994–2000. The birth rate for unmarried women in the U.S. fell from 46.9 (per one thousand women) to 45.2. However, the percent of all births that were to unmarried women actually rose from 32.6 percent to 33.2 percent, reflecting a decrease in marital births.

b. *The Teen Birth Rate*

The teen birth rate has also declined steadily from 1991 to 2000, reaching a record low of 43 births per 1,000 women 15–19 in 2003 (see Figure 1 below).⁸⁵ In addition, the actual number of births to teens has declined 10 percent since 1991 (see Figure 2 below). There are not more “babies having babies” today, but teenaged mothers are much less likely to be married today. The marital teen (15–19) birth rate in 1960 was 531 per 1,000 women; today it is 311. The nonmarital birth rate was 15 in 1960; today it is 44 (see Figure 3 below). Whereas social values once expected pregnant teenaged women to leave school and get married, today, cohabiting and single parentings are options.

Figure 1

The Falling Teen Birth Rate⁸⁶

(Births per 1,000 females aged 15–19)

1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000
89.1	68.3	53.0	59.9	56.8	48.7

Figure 2

The Declining Number of Births to Females Under Age 20

1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000
93,746	656,460	562,330	533,591	512,115	479,067

Figure 3

Falling Marital and Rising Non-Marital Teen Birth Rates, Ages 15–19

(Marital births per 1,000 married females and nonmarital births per 1,000 non-married females)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Marital	531	444	350	420	311
Non-Marital	22	26	29	44	44

Despite these downward trends, the U.S. continues to have one of the highest teen pregnancy rates and teen birth rates among all of the developed countries, regardless of race/ethnicity. Whether in the U.S. or in Europe, most teen mothers are poor. In the U.S. more than 80 percent of the teenaged women who become mothers are living in poverty, or in near-poverty, before they become pregnant. Kristin Luker, citing the report of the National

Academy of Science, *Risking the Future*, concludes, “At every step of the process that leads to early childbearing, social and economic disadvantage plays a powerful role. Poor kids, not rich ones, have babies as teenagers, and their poverty long predates their pregnancy.”⁸⁷ Therefore, one explanation for these high rates in the U.S. is that the proportion of the U.S. population that is poor is significantly larger (at least two-thirds larger) than that of other developed nations.⁸⁸ In addition, the use of effective contraceptives by sexually active teenage women is lower in the U.S. than in other developed countries.⁸⁹

As noted in the section on divorce and children, we know that poverty plays a significant role in explaining the 10–15 percent of children with worse than average outcomes and that the poverty rate for single-mother families is much higher than for other family types. There are several reasons for this. The first is that there is only one employable adult in the family at a time when most families need to be supported by two. In addition, the lack of affordable and accessible childcare, flexible work hours, and transportation further limits opportunities for single mothers to do income-producing work as well as the work of parenting.⁹⁰ When single mothers are employed, they may not have access to the type of work that could raise a family out of poverty. In 1998, 58 percent of the single mothers who received any welfare assistance also worked. Of those who worked full-time, almost 40 percent earned poverty-level wages.⁹¹ In 1993, more than 70 percent of working single mothers was in female-identified, service occupations that are typically low-wage, no benefit jobs.⁹²

7. Cohabitation

In the U.S., more than half of all first marriages formed in the 1990s began as cohabitation, half of all married stepfamilies began as cohabitation, and about half of the under forty population has lived with an unmarried partner.⁹³ In 2000, according to the Census Bureau, cohabitating couples represented 3.7 percent of all U.S. households. Approximately one-third of these were same-sex couples.⁹⁴

There appear to be several causes of heterosexual cohabitation. Both parental conflict in non-divorced families and parental divorce appear to increase the possibility that offspring will cohabit. The need for emotional intimacy joined with an unease concerning marriage may cause some to see cohabitation as an alternative to marriage.⁹⁵ However, research shows that cohabitation is not the equivalent of marriage. On average, cohabiting unions are less stable, lasting an average of two years with only about half ending in the marriage of the couple. Moreover, marriages formed by formerly cohabiting couples have a higher rate of divorce than that of marriages formed without cohabitation. Cohabiting couples report higher rates of relationship problems, including less happiness, less commitment, more likelihood of physical violence, and greater relationship instability than do married couples. They are also less likely than those married to be sexually faithful, share economic resources, or receive help from extended family.⁹⁶

For many cohabiting couples, economic conditions seem to play a role in their decision to cohabit. The loss of manufacturing jobs and increased employment in service industries means that many young people are entering jobs with low wages and benefits. In 1999, real entry-level wages for high school graduates were well below what they had been in the 1970s.⁹⁷ Entry-level hourly wages for young men and women just out of college also declined between 1973 and 1995, and rose after 1995 to a level only slightly higher than in 1973. For most young people, the road to economic self-sufficiency that signals adulthood has gotten longer and harder. To compensate, young adults postpone marriage, plan future family life around two adult earners, and reduce marital fertility rates. The average age at first marriage has risen to 25.1 years for women and 26.7 years for men. Yet the average age for first sexual intercourse is 17.4 years for women and 16.9 years for men. Thus, young men and women spend on average eight to ten years between their first sexual activity and their entrance into marriage.⁹⁸

For middle- and upper-income persons, cohabitation during this time is often a testing ground for an anticipated marriage put off by education and career steps. For low-income people, who have a greater likelihood of cohabiting, it serves as a hopeful step toward a marriage that is put off until greater economic stability is achieved. Sara McLanahan’s recent study of low-income, urban, unwed mothers found that unmarried parents and their children functioned as family units held together by emotional commitment, whether living together or not. Most of these couples hoped to marry in the future. However, they associated marriage with financial stability, something that neither could provide the other. In fact, the loss of employment opportunities for men with low-skills, particularly in urban areas, has mirrored decreases in marriage rates for these communities. Studies show that co-

habiting men who are higher paid, more educated, and employed full-time are much more likely to marry their partners than are men with lower earnings.⁹⁹ McLanahan's conclusion is that low-income, unmarried parents need the support of social policies to reach a level of economic self-sufficiency in which marriage becomes possible.¹⁰⁰

Couples who have definite plans to marry, who are in this sense truly betrothed, present a different profile from that of those who simply decide to live together. These "betrothed" couples tend to think and act in ways that are similar to those of married couples with regard to health habits and attitudes toward divorce, marriage, leisure, and money. In fact, some researchers note that when the relational qualities, attitudes, and values, and past family experiences of cohabitants are taken into account, the disparity in subsequent marital divorce rates virtually disappears.¹⁰¹ For these couples, churches may have an important pastoral opportunity to assist them in evaluating their relationships and moving toward healthy marriages.

Within the church today, there are also couples who have chosen to form deep, committed, and faithful relationships, but have no plans to marry. For some, especially the elderly, the reasons may relate to Social Security, pension benefits, and commitments to adult children. For others, the legal ramifications of marriage are viewed as unwelcome burdens on their mutual commitment. In such cases, the church has an opportunity to acknowledge the commitment in the relationships and to assist the couples in building on their strengths.

While cohabitation has increased in the U.S., it is a far more pronounced trend both in Latin America and in Europe.¹⁰² Almost half the children born in Norway in 1999 were born to unwed parents. In Britain, the figure was 38 percent, in France, 41 percent.¹⁰³ Faced with changing families, many European nations have developed social policies that provide all children with the same social protections and benefits regardless of the marital status of parents, making child poverty rates in Europe much lower than in the U.S. In fact, using the international standard measure, the U.S. has the highest child poverty rate of all modern, industrialized countries.¹⁰⁴

8. *Same-Sex Families*

In 1978, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted a policy statement, "The Church and Homosexuality."¹⁰⁵ The statement called upon the church to treat homosexual persons with "the profound respect and pastoral tenderness due all people of God." It found fear, hatred, and contempt of such persons inconsistent with Christian faith and called the church to "welcome homosexual inquirers to its congregations." At the same time, the statement declared, "Homosexuality is not God's will for humanity." Rather, it stated that "homosexuality is a contradiction of God's wise and beautiful plan for human sexual relationships revealed in Scripture and affirmed in God's ongoing will for our life in the Spirit of Christ." The statement expressed the belief that through the grace of God, homosexual persons "can receive God's power to transform their desires or arrest their active expression." In subsequent statements over the last two decades, the church has expressed its support for civil and legal rights of homosexuals. It has challenged itself to be open to "more light on what goes into shaping one's sexual preferences" and to continue to study this issue.¹⁰⁶

An August 2000 survey by the Presbyterian Panel reported the beliefs that Presbyterians hold about homosexuality.¹⁰⁷ When asked if homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle, 58 percent of members and 58 percent of elders disagreed or strongly disagreed; 28 percent of members and 28 percent of elders agreed or strongly agreed. 50 percent of pastors and 27 percent of specialized clergy disagreed or strongly disagreed; 41 percent of pastors and 61 percent of specialized clergy agreed or strongly agreed. A similar pattern was found in responses to questions concerning whether gay partners who make a legal commitment should be entitled to the same rights and benefits as couples in traditional marriages, whether Presbyterian ministers should be prohibited from performing a ceremony that blesses the union between same-sex persons, and whether it was appropriate for same-sex couples to hold a union ceremony in a Presbyterian church. In general, members and elders oppose or strongly oppose positions that would be seen as affirming same-sex unions; pastors tend to be divided, with about half opposing and another 40 percent supporting such measures, and specialized clergy generally approving such measures by 60 percent or more.¹⁰⁸

The 2000 census found that same-sex families constitute about 1.6 percent of U.S. families and have many similarities with married couple households. For example, more than 30 percent reported having at least one child. Median household income was \$60,000.¹⁰⁹ However, there is much less social science data about same-sex fami-

lies and their children than there is about heterosexual families. From the studies that have been conducted over the past twenty years, no significant differences have been found between children reared by homosexual parents and children reared by a traditional set of heterosexual parents. A recent review of the existing studies has concluded that some slight differences exist in attitudes and behaviors. Children of same-sex families were less likely to hold to traditional gender stereotypes regarding behavior and roles. They were emotionally close to their parents, regardless of biological relationship, and also tended to be more expressive of their feelings.¹¹⁰ Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association support gay and lesbian parenting.¹¹¹ Despite lack of agreement among Presbyterians regarding same-sex families, children of such couples need the same advocacy, protection, and respect that we encourage for all other children.

9. *Impact of Race/Ethnicity and Economic Location*

Families of African-diasporan descent and non-white Hispanic families are disproportionately represented among those who have experienced single-parent families and poverty. Fifty-two percent of families of African-diasporan descent are single parent families. Fifty-three percent of children of African-diasporan descent live with a single parent, as do 30 percent of non-white Hispanic children. Thirty-seven point four percent of single mother families of African-diasporan descent live in poverty, as do 37.8 percent of non-white Hispanic single mother families.¹¹² Whereas 90 percent of the U.S. population will marry at some point, it is estimated that only 75 percent of people of African-diasporan descent will ever marry.¹¹³ Sixty-nine percent of births to women of African-diasporan descent and 41 percent of births to Hispanic women are nonmarital births.¹¹⁴ However, the teenage birth rate for women of African-diasporan descent has shown a sharp decline of more than 40 percent since 1991, reaching a new low of 43 births per 1,000 in 2003.¹¹⁵ A considerable amount of controversy surrounds attempts to explain these patterns. The proportion of nonmarital births has clearly been influenced by a sharp decline in marital births. Researchers also focus on the loss of marriageable, meaning adequately employed, men due to the greater negative impact of economic changes on communities of color. As opportunities for stable employment recede, the basis for stable relationships recedes, and temporary commitments—already a trend in the larger society—become more plausible.¹¹⁶ For decades, communities of both Hispanic and African-diasporan descent have lived under recession-level economic conditions. For example:

Unemployment Rates, Spring 2002¹¹⁷

- 9.6 percent persons of African-diasporan descent
- 7.1 percent Hispanic
- 4.9 percent white

Poverty-Level Wages¹¹⁸

- 31.2 percent of workers of African-diasporan descent
- 40.4 percent of Hispanic workers
- 20.1 percent of white workers.

Employer-Provided Health Insurance Coverage

- 60.2 percent of workers of African-diasporan descent
- 44.8 percent of Hispanic workers¹¹⁹
- 67.2 percent of white workers.

Studies of families of African-diasporan descent reveal that discrimination in the housing market reduces housing options for families of color and contributes to “hypersegregation”; that is, to an intense racial isolation. As a consequence, African American and Latino communities are usually poorer than predominantly white communities, resulting in inadequate staffing and funding for schools and other community resources that contribute to the success of families.¹²⁰

In addition to hypersegregation, the disparate racial impact of the criminal justice system’s “war on drugs” is essential to any credible consideration of families of African-diasporan descent. As James Lanier documents, African Americans account for only 13 percent of the nation’s drug users, but 35 percent of its drug arrests and 52 percent of all drug convictions.¹²¹ Consequently, for every male of African-diasporan descent who graduates from college, one hundred others are in prison or jail; and African American children are roughly nine times as likely to

have a parent in prison as white children are.¹²² With more than a half million males between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine incarcerated, at ages critical to starting careers and families, the loss to communities and families of African-diasporan descent is immeasurable.¹²³ As one pastor put it:

Of course the family structure breaks down in a place like the South Bronx! Everything breaks down in a place like this. The pipes break down. The phone breaks down. The electricity and heat breaks down. The spirit breaks down. The body breaks down. The immune agents of the heart break down. Why wouldn't the family break down also?¹²⁴

Achieving middle-income status is more difficult for African-diasporan families and Hispanic families. The average hours worked by middle-income, married-couple African American and Hispanic families with children exceeded that of white families in 1979 as it does today. According to statistics from 1998, the average middle-income, married-couple, African American family with children worked 489 more hours (twelve weeks) per year than a white family of comparable income.¹²⁵ Similarly, most Korean immigrants, regardless of their professional education, begin small family businesses in the U.S. in which husbands, wives, and children work long hours for economic survival.¹²⁶ The added stress of insufficient family time and economic insecurity for families of color may help to explain the higher divorce rates for lower-income families, less educated people, and families of color.

10. *Economic Inequality*

Several economic factors in the second half of the 1990s served to help families. An extremely low unemployment rate increased family income for both low- and middle-income families. In fact, the most vulnerable families (young families, minority families, and single-mother families) benefited the most from rising wages. After a period of relatively slow growth, from 1973–1995, productivity grew more rapidly in the late 1990s, resulting in growth in both living standards and wages.¹²⁷ Home ownership reached a record high of 68.4 percent in 2003.¹²⁸ However, as described above, most U.S. families continue to experience economic stress. Wage gains of the '90s still left the median male wage in 2000 lower than it was in 1979. Families continued to add more hours of paid work to their work year. And recession conditions that increased unemployment developed in late 2000.

While it is true that divorce can initiate a fall into poverty, especially for white women, and that single mother families are more likely to be poor than two-adult families, poverty and economic stress have been shown to be causal factors in divorce rates, nonmarital births, teen-pregnancy, cohabitation, and the worse outcomes of some children of single-parent families. Economic changes have been the main force affecting the poverty of families of African-diasporan descent.¹²⁹ Marriage by itself does not solve the problem of inadequate incomes. Almost half of all low-income families in 1999 were married-couple families, and about 47 percent of low-income children live with married parents.¹³⁰ Concern for the creation and maintenance of families must include a strong concern for economic well-being. Thus, when productivity grows but median compensation does not, or grows more slowly, attention must be paid to the increase in economic inequality in the U.S.

In the last three decades, despite increasing educational levels, the unequal distribution of income and wealth in the U.S. has hit historically high levels, surpassing all other modern industrialized nations (see Figures 4 and 5 below). In 1999, approximately 50 percent of the after-federal-tax income of American families went to the bottom 80 percent of families while the other 50 percent went to the top 20 percent. In 1998, the wealthiest 1 percent of households controlled 38 percent of the nation's wealth while the bottom 90 percent of households owned 29 percent of the nation's wealth.¹³¹ This trend marks a shift in the distribution of productivity gains away from most workers and toward the wealthiest 20 percent of U.S. families. As noted above, most U.S. workers have experienced stagnant and declining real wages, while having to take on more of the cost of health care and pension benefits.

Growing inequality creates a number of problems both for Christians and for citizens of a democracy. As we have seen, most U.S. families have struggled to maintain their economic well-being by adding more workers and more working hours. Yet in 1999, the average annual compensation for chief executive officers increased by 23 percent to \$11.9 million.¹³² This example illustrates that most U.S. workers are not being rewarded by the growth in the economy. In fact, between 1978 and 1998, the poorest grew poorer in actual income—\$900 less in average annual earnings. Lack of access to adequate income has devastating impact on health, education, family formation

and stability, and even mortality rates for the poor. While it is true that the poor in the U.S. are typically better off than the poor in underdeveloped countries, we need to remember that those poor who live in the U.S. must be able to afford food, clothing, housing, education, and medical care and to compete for jobs with more affluent people in the U.S.

In addition, some economists argue that, as inequality increases, those who are most affluent have less interest in the public goods that sustain middle- and lower-income families.¹³³ In fact, there has been a decline in government support for programs that once promoted education, family-well-being, and home ownership for young adults, especially among low-income people. For example, the Pell Grant program, intended to help low- and middle-income students go to college, once covered 80 percent of the cost of public college tuition. Today it covers about 40 percent.¹³⁴ Today, the government spends about one-third of what it spent twenty years ago on employment and training programs.¹³⁵ Half of the cost of the federal mortgage interest deduction now goes to households making more than \$100,000 annually.¹³⁶ Housing affordability has worsened over the past twenty-five years as the incomes of the lower 40 percent of households have remained flat, but housing prices and rents have increased faster than general price inflation. Therefore, about one-third of U.S. households have significant housing affordability problems. Federal support for subsidized housing programs nevertheless fell more than 80 percent between 1978 and 1988. In 1995, for the first time in more than twenty years, no new Section 8 certificates or vouchers were made available, and since 1995, no new public housing units have been built. Today 5.3 million people qualify for affordable housing but cannot get it.¹³⁷

Figure 4

Distribution of Family Income, 1999¹³⁸
(Upper limit of each 20%; in 1999 dollars)

Top fifth:	Above \$88,082
Fourth fifth:	\$88,082
Middle fifth:	\$59,400
Second fifth:	\$39,600
Lowest fifth:	\$22,826
Median family income in 1999: \$48,950	

Figure 5

Distribution of Household Wealth¹³⁹
("Wealth" is defined as all household assets minus debts.)

	1962	1983	1998
Percentage of household wealth held by:			
Top 1%	33.4%	33.8%	38.1%
Top 20%	81.0%	81.3%	83.4%
Fourth 20%	13.4%	12.6%	11.9%
Middle 20%	5.4%	5.2%	4.5%
Second 20%	1.0%	1.2%	0.8%
Lowest 20%	- 0.7%	-0.3%	-0.6%

11. Summary of Family Forms

While shifts in family forms are not new, today's generations have been living through a period of rapid transition related to specific economic forces, demographic changes, and changing social attitudes. Below we chart these changes in family forms. Please note that this data uses Census Bureau definitions that may not reflect the understandings of a community of faith.

Changing Family Forms: (% of all households) ¹⁴⁰	1970	2000
Family Households	81.2%	68.5%
Married couple with own children	40.3%	24.1%
Married couple without own children	30.3%	28.7%
Single mothers (children under 18)	4.6%	7.0%
Single fathers (children under 18)	<1.0 %	1.7%
Other family households	5.0%	7.0%
Nonfamily Households	18.8%	31.2%
Men living alone	5.6%	10.7%
Women living alone	11.5%	14.8%
Non-Family Households (includes unrelated persons and cohabitation)	1.7%	5.7%
Changing Family Forms: (% of all families with own children)		
Married couple	87%	69%
Single mother	12%	26%
Single father	1%	5%

12. Summary of Socioeconomic Context

- The benefits of marriage are clear, and most people in the U.S. and most U.S. teens desire to marry and raise their own families. In fact, 90 percent of people in the U.S. will marry at some point in their lives, and more than half of those marriages will last until death. However, the U.S. has a troublingly high divorce rate and a growing rate of cohabitation. More attention is falling on the significant minority of marriages characterized by unhealthy patterns of domination and withdrawal, contempt, verbal and physical violence, and other forms of abuse. However, most adults who experience the pain of divorce manage to adapt and adjust positively to their new situations.

- Lengthened life spans mean that children are more likely to be raised by two living parents and that spouses are more likely to enjoy longer marriages together. However, today divorce and nonmarital births, not death, are more likely to cause childhood experiences of single-parenting.

- Most children are raised by their own biological parents, and 90 percent of them score within the normal range of adjustment and achievement tests. However, an increasing proportion of children will spend some time in a single parent home or stepfamily. While the majority of these children also score within normal ranges on adjustment and achievement tests, 20–25 percent of them do not. With proper support, a greater majority of children in stepfamilies, adopted families, and single-parent families can grow through difficult times and achieve normal adulthood.

- Greater opportunities for women have allowed more marriages to achieve a covenant of mutuality between equal partners. Many couples are developing flexible patterns of dividing household tasks. However, many women still experience marriage as a double shift in which they carry, in addition to their employment, heavier domestic responsibilities than husbands.

- The income of U.S. families has increased over the past three decades. However, due to declining real hourly wages, increased family income has depended upon wives entering the paid work force and more hours spent in paid work. Gains from rising productivity have benefited the highest income families, disproportionately causing an increase in economic inequality. Consequently, most families continue to experience insufficient time at home and increased economic insecurity. The lack of adequate health insurance coverage and retirement income weighs heavily on many families.

- The strength of racial ethnic minority families is shown in their long histories of coping with harsh economic conditions and racial discrimination through strategies that include two working parents, extended family supports, and increased hours spent in wage work. However, ongoing recession-like economic conditions continue to place a heavy burden on these families.

- The increasingly common practice of cohabitation, when accompanied by values more typical of married couples, sometimes results in successful marriages. However, cohabitation tends to be a relationship characterized by lower-levels of commitment and typically does not produce the same personal and social benefits associated with marriage.

Prayer: O God, whose infinite splendor is reflected in the immense variety of your created world, we give you thanks for the many ways in which families have shaped themselves to care for one another. We also give thanks for the great variety of ways in which your congregations minister to the diverse needs of families in their communities. Help us, as congregations, to celebrate and support your love wherever caring is found in families.

In a society that values personal fulfillment and individual rights over interdependence and caregiving, help us learn how to give primary place in our lives to caring for one another in your name. As members of families, called both to give and receive, grant us the gratitude to value the unique contributions each of us makes to family life. Grant us, as well, the wisdom to discern when to place the needs of others before ourselves and when to receive nurturing so that we might in turn be of service to others. Amen.

Postscript

The 207th General Assembly (1995) approved “God’s Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation” (*Minutes*, 1995, Part I, pp. 424–42). That report responded to “changes in technology, productivity, and demographics that are redefining work” in a global economy. It offered an understanding of “good work” in light of a theology of vocation. It defined vocation both as “the total, inclusive purpose of a person’s life” in response to God’s grace in Jesus Christ as we participate in church and community and as the way we do our daily work in covenant with God and neighbor. In describing “good work” as full, fair, sustaining, and participatory employment, it challenged both providers of work and performers of work to live up to this covenantal vocation.

In a way, we have done it again—this time relating a theology of vocation to changing families and changing social structures that affect families positively or negatively. Just as our church sought a better understanding of “good work,” done in a covenant of mutual responsibility and service, in the earlier study, we seek here a better understanding of “good family life.” And a covenant of mutual responsibility and service is again relevant. Once again, we are surrounded and saturated with cultural and socioeconomic realities that militate against good family life even as they militate against finding, providing, enjoying, and moderating good work. And once again, we are called both to see our vocation as more inclusive than family life but most certainly as inclusive of family life. Our Christian calling includes vocation as family members to each other and as families to seek justice and well-being for other families and the common good.

Just as work is put in its place, transformed, and made transformative by the gracious power of God, so too family relationships are put in their proper place, transformed, and made transformative by the grace, love, and communion of the Triune God. As we strive to fulfill our covenantal vocation as Christians in both work and family life, we struggle with the difficulties of balancing the two and of bringing about conditions in our society that are truly family friendly and that recognize the great value of reproductive, nurturing, and caregiving work. As a church we are aware of the failings of our families and our resistance to the covenantal obligations entailed in being parts of families, and we are also prompted by our encompassing vocation to reach out to each other as actual or potential family members and to families of all kinds, especially to children and others who are most vulnerable, with compassion and justice.

Endnotes

1. See Rationale, B. Socioeconomic Context, “2. Marriage” and “4. Divorce and Children.”
2. An example is the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary.
3. Overture adopted by the 205th General Assembly (1993), *Minutes*, 1993, Part I, p. 884.

4. 211th General Assembly (1999) Resolution on “Managed Care,” *Minutes*, 1999, Part I, p. 341.
5. For example, Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, eds. *The Changing Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989).
6. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland, “Congregational Caregiving,” *Church & Society*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (March/April 2002): 42.
7. *Ibid.*, 55.
8. Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Families Valued: Parenting and Politics for the Good of All Children* (New York: Friendship Press, 1996), 174.
9. John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles, trans., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 720–23.
10. *Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1981, Part I, 298.
11. Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, *Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 1996), 12.
12. *Ibid.*, 85.
13. Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West, *The War Against Parents: What We Can Do for America’s Beleaguered Moms and Dads* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 94.
14. Larry Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 80.
15. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster 2000), 100.
16. “Centurymarks,” *Christian Century*, Vol. 120, No., 19, Sept. 20, 2003, 7 and www.casafamilyday.org.
17. General Assembly Statement, *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice*, 1990.
18. John G. Red Horse, Cecilia Martinez, Pricilla Day, Don Day, John Poupart, Down Scarnberg, “Family Preservation: Concepts in American Indian Communities,” National Indian Child Welfare Association (December 2000), available at www.nicwa.org.
19. Email communication to editing team.
20. R.G. Rumbaut, “Ties that Bind: Immigration and Immigrant Families in the United States,” in *Immigration and the Family: Research and Policy on U.S. Immigrants*, eds. Alan Booth, Ann Crouter and Nancy Landale (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 27.
21. Pyong Gap Min, *Changes and Conflicts: Korean Immigrant Families in New York* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 99, 26–28.
22. For resources on these issues, see *Reflections on Interreligious Marriage: A Joint Study Document* (The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches, 1997; John Bush and Patrick Cooney, *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope* (Louisville and Washington, D.C.: Westminster John Knox Press and the NCCB, 2002); *Interfaith Marriage: A Resource by Presbyterian Christians* (Louisville: Global Mission Ministry Unit, 1992). See also the 1980 PCUS statement, “Christian Marriage.”
23. Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments: 105*. Rasmussen is describing Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
24. *Ibid.*, 88.

25. Emilie Townes, "Response to 'Social Science, Christian Ethics and Democratic Politics: Issues of Poverty and Wealth by Mary Jo Bane,'" *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (2001): 41.
26. *Minutes*, 1993, Part I, p. 884.
27. Ronald E. Peters, "The Extended Family: A Heritage of the African-American Congregation," unpublished. Dr. Peters is associate professor of Urban Ministry, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.
28. See "An Invitation to Sabbath," Report of the Work Group on Sabbath Keeping to the 212th General Assembly (2000), *Minutes*, 2000, Part I, pp. 172ff, Louisville: Office of Spiritual Formation, 2000.
29. Cited in "An Invitation to Sabbath."
30. *Minutes*, 1997, Part I, pp. 44, 536.
31. It is important to note, however, that such data is dependent on who gets counted, who is available to fill out surveys, who is more accessible to researchers. The result often is most representative of white, middle- and upper-income residents of the U.S. Stories from other social groups in the U.S. help us to realize the differences that exist among us.
32. Data available at www.pcusa.org, "Who We Are."
33. According to the Presbyterian Panel Background Report, the fact that Presbyterians are much less likely to have ever been divorced is primarily a result of the older age of this population. Trends toward divorce and cohabitation are more common among younger adults (16). For the national percentage, see www.okmarriage.org/.
34. Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Heather Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002/2003* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 49.
35. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Davide Popenoe, "The State of Our Unions 2003," National Marriage Project at www.marriage.rutgers.edu. See also "Changes in Teen Attitudes Toward Marriage, Cohabitation and Children 1975–1995" at the same Website.
36. Paul Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in a Generation of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), 84–85. For positive outcomes related to happy marriages, see Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, *For Better or for Worse: Divorce Reconsidered* (New York: Norton, 2002), 273.
37. Hetherington and Kelly, 41–42.
38. Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.
39. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 183. Still due to greatly increased life expectancy, U.S. couples who marry today actually have a better chance of celebrating their fortieth wedding anniversary together than did those who married a hundred years ago when marriages were more likely to be interrupted by death.
40. Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and John Schmitt, *The State of Working America 2000–2001* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 47.
41. *Ibid.*, 227; Teresa Amott and Julie Mattaei, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-cultural Economic History of Women in the United States*, rev. ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 190; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Civilian Labor Force 2000," available at <http://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/ep/labor.force/mlrtab2000-03.text>.
42. The following data are from www.uscensusbureau.gov. See also Jody Heyman, *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It* (New York: Basic Books, 200), 4.
43. Amato and Booth, *A Generation at Risk*, 12.

44. Joy Raatz, "Who Are the Caregivers?" *Church & Society*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (March/April 2002):10. Lillian "Rubin, *World's of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); John Scarzoni, *Sexual Bargaining Power: Power Politics in the American Marriage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz, *American Couples* (New York: Pocket Books, 1983); Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Divorce Talk* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Demi Kurtz, *For Richer, For Poorer: Mothers Confront Divorce* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
45. Sharlene Hess-Biber and Gregg Lee Carter, *Working Women in America: Split Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 180–81.
46. Terry Arendell, *Fathers and Divorce* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995).
47. Pyong Gap Min, *Changes and Conflicts: Korean Immigrant Families in New York* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 39. Approximately 80 percent of Korean immigrants are either self-employed or work for a Korean-owned business. Pyong Gap Min argues that this economic segregation of the Korean workforce has important implications for family life, 51–57.
48. Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmidt, *The State of Working America 2000/2002*, 96. "Real Wages" refers to wages adjusted for changes in the cost of living. The wage decline was greatest among young workers and workers without a college degree—75 percent of the workforce.
49. Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002/2003*; 135.
50. See Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 30–32. More recently, a report by the International Labor Organization, a UN agency, stated that U.S., workers were steadily increasing the number of hours spent in employed work while the workers of other industrialized nations were decreasing their employed hours. In 2000, U.S. workers worked, on average almost nine full weeks more than European workers. Steven Greenhouse, "Report Shows Americans Have More 'Labor Days,'" *New York Times*, 5 September 2001: A6.
51. Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002/2003*, 16.
52. For numerous references to this research, see Demi Kurtz, *For Richer, For Poorer*, 22, and footnotes 21 and 22; Gay Kitson, *Portrait of Divorce: Adjustment to Marital Breakdown* (New York: Guilford Press, 1992), 115–16; Amato and Booth, *A Generation at Risk*, 12; Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West, *The War Against Parents* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), Chapter 5.
53. Blau, Francine, Lawrence Kahn and Jane Waldfogel, "Understanding Young Women's Marriage Decisions: the Role of Labor and Marriage Market Conditions," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 53, #4 (July 2000), 624–48; Diane McLaughlin and Daniel Lichter, "Poverty and the Marital Behavior of Young Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 59, #3 (1997): 582–94.
54. Larry Bumpass and James Sweet, "Marriage, Divorce, and Intergenerational Relationships, in Arland Thornton, ed. *The Well-Being of Children and Families* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 299.
55. Ron Haskins and Wendell Primus, "Welfare Reform and Poverty," a Brookings Institute Publication available at www.brookings.edu/wrb/publications/pb/pb04; see also "How Children Fare in Welfare Experiments Appears to Hinge on Income," Children's Defense Fund (August 2001) available at www.childrensdefense.org/Fairstart.
56. Amato and Booth, 12.
57. Annette Lawson, *Adultery* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
58. Abigail Stewart, Anne Copeland, Nia Chester, Janet Maley, and Nicole Barenbaum, *Separating Together: How Divorce Transforms Families* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 50; See also Karla B. Hackstaff, *Marriage in a Culture of Divorce* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1999). Hetherington and Kelly, *For Better or for Worse*, 40, 42.
59. Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, 138.
60. Hetherington and Kelly, *For Better or Worse*, 10.
61. Amato and Booth, *A Generation at Risk*, 220.

62. *Minutes*, 2001, Part I, 236, paragraph 25.057.
63. "Intimate Partner Violence: A Special Report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics," May 2000; available at www.ncadv.org.
64. *Minutes*, 2001, Part I, 261.
65. Hetherington and Kelly, *For Better or Worse*, 10.
66. Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, 1. Yet, it is also true that a large proportion of children who have experienced divorce scores higher on such tests than the average score from children in intact families. And a large proportion of intact families scores lower than the average score from children who have experienced divorce. See Paul Amato, "Life-Span Adjustment of Children to their Parents' Divorce," *The Future of Children*, Vol. 4, #1 (Spring 1994): 147. See also Paul Amato, "Children's Adjustment to Divorce," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 55 (1993); Paul Amato and Bruce Keith, "Parental Divorce and the Well-Being of Children: A Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* Vol. 110 (1991). This is a review of almost every quantitative study done on divorce. The authors found lower levels of well-being for children of divorce but found that these were not large. The more carefully controlled the studies were, the smaller the differences found.
67. Amato and Booth, "A Generation at Risk" 108–11; Hetherington and Kelly, "For Better or for Worse" 240–42; "The Transmission of Marital Instability Across Generations: Relationship Skills or Commitment to Marriage?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 63(4) (November): 1038ff.
68. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 79. The remaining 5 percent live in other family situations.
69. Paul Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk*, 219; McLanahan and Sandefur, 30; see also Karla Hackstaff, *Marriage in a Culture of Divorce*.
70. E. Mavis Hetherington, Tracy Law, and Thomas O'Connor, "Divorce: Challenges, Changes and New Chances," in Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, *Family in Transition*, 11th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 228. See also Ronald Simons, et. al., "Explaining the Higher Incidence of Adjustment Problems Among Children of Divorce Compared with Those of Two-Parent Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 6 (November 1999): 1020–33. These authors point out that, while parental divorce is correlated with a modest increase in child adjustment problems, the specific mechanics to explain this link are not well understood. Their research reaches the conclusion that the link between family form and child development issues is due to the increased likelihood that parents are "less likely to engage in competent parenting and are more likely to engage in parental conflict . . ." (1031); Yong Min Sun, "Family Environment and Adolescents' Well-Being Before and After Parents' Marital Disruption: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (August 2001) available at www.ncfr.org/aboutus/ipressreleases.asp.
71. Hetherington and Kelly, *For Better or Worse*, 158.
72. Judith Wallerstein, "Children of Divorce: A Society in Search of Policy," in Mary Ann Mason, Arlene Skolnick and Stephen D. Sugarman, eds., *All Our Families: New Policies for a New Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73.
73. Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent*, 78–94.
74. Hetherington and Kelly, 158, 7–8
75. Hetherington and Kelly, 127, 158, 253. See also Kathryn Robinson, "The Divorce Debate: Which Side Are You On?" *Family Therapy Networker* (May/June 1994): 20.
76. Hetherington and Kelly, 166.
77. David Popenoe, "The evolution of marriage and the problem of stepfamilies: A biosocial perspective," Paper presented at the national Symposium on Stepfamilies, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa., October 13–15, 1993, cited in Anne C. Bernstein, "Reconstructing the Brothers Grimm: New Tales for Stepfamily Life," *Family Process*, Vol. 38, No., 4 (1999): 415–29. See also Don Browning, et. al, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

78. Hetherington and Kelly, Chapter 8.
79. McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, 131.
80. Hetherington and Kelly, 197.
81. Anne C. Bernstein, "Reconstructing the Brothers Grimm: New Tales for Stepfamily Life," *Family Process*, Vol. 38, No.4, 1999: 415–29.
82. There has been an increase in the practice of co-habitation that makes it difficult to distinguish unmarried, two-parent families from single-parent ones. For example, in 1998, when about one-third of all births in the U.S. were to unmarried women, almost 40 percent of these births were to cohabiting couples, many of whom expressed their intention to marry in the future. For nonmarital birth rates, see "U.S. Births Rise for First Time in Eight Years; Births to Teenagers Still Falling," *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 32, #5 (Sept/Oct 2000) at www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3226300.html. Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, "Trends in cohabitation and implications for children's family context in the U.S." Working paper #98-15, 1999, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Similarly, when the number of years a child will spend in a single-parent family is compared to the number of years spent in a married couple family, the trend appears to be an increase in the years a child will spend in a single-parent family. However, when cohabiting couples are included, not just married couples, the number of years a child will spend in a single-parent family have actually been decreasing. Larry Bumpass, "The Declining Significance of Marriage: Changing Family Life in the U.S.," (Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, NSFH Working Paper #66, 1994), 9. Available at www.ssc.wisc.edu/cde/nsfh66.pdf
83. Data from Table FG6 at www.census.gov
84. Determining exact figures is difficult. The Census Bureau estimated that a large majority of the statistical increase in unmarried births identified in the early 1980s was due to more refined survey procedures introduced at that time. In the past, unwed mothers were more likely to tell a census worker that they were separated. Some states assume that a couple is unmarried if a woman's name differs from that of the father on the birth certificate. Steven Rawlings, *Household and Family Characteristics: March 1993* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, June, 1994). To determine if there has been an increase, and how much, also requires a comparison—compared to when? It may surprise us to learn that in the twenty years leading up to U.S. independence, one-third of the children born in Concord, Massachusetts, were conceived out of wedlock. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 184.
85. 2003 figure from Linda Villarosa, "More Teenagers Say No to Sex, and Experts Aren't Sure Why," *New York Times*, 12/23/03: D6. Other figures from Child Trends, "CTS Facts at a Glance," available at www.childtrends.org/TBRate2002.asp
86. "CTS Facts at a Glance," August 2001; available at www.childtrends.org
87. Kristin Luker, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 1996), 108.
88. Susheela Singh, "Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Adolescent Women's Sexual and Reproductive Behavior: The Case of Five Developed Countries," at www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3325101.html.
89. Jacqueline E. Darroch, "Differences in Teenage Pregnancy Rates Among Five Developed Countries: The Roles of Sexual Activity and Contraceptive Use," at www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3324401.html.
90. Heymann, *The Widening Gap*, ch. 3.
91. Mishel, Bernstein, Schmitt, *State of Working America*, 292, 16, 324.
92. Randy Albelda and Chris Tilly, *Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Pits: Women's Work, Women's Poverty* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 66.
93. Larry Bumpass, "The Declining Significance of Marriage: Changing Family Life in the U.S."
94. "America's Families and Living Arrangements: Population Characteristics," U.S. Census Bureau, (June 2001): 12. What is called "cohabitation" today is, of course, related to the not uncommon practice of informal marriage, self-marriage,

or common-law marriage that was part of U.S. society in the past, particularly among poorer families and families living in isolated areas. Then, if couples looked and acted as though they were married, their communities and the courts tended to accept them as such. Today legal support for such relationships is more tenuous. Cohabitation is against the law in a few states. Most state courts will not provide the same property rights to cohabiting persons that married persons have without proof that the cohabiting persons had agreed to share property as though married. Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 39–40, 203–4, 207–8.

95. Amato and Booth, 118.

96. Ibid., 88; Waite and Gallagher, chapter 3. The extent to which these disparities are due to a self-selection factor in that those less committed to marriage may be more likely to enter cohabitation while those highly committed to marriage may be less likely to cohabit is debated. Additional resources for cohabitation include Susan Brown, “Union transitions among cohabitants: the significance of relationship assessments and expectations,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 62 (2000): 833–46; Larry Bumpass, “Family-Related Attitudes, Couple Relationships, and Union Stability,” (Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, NSFH Working Paper #87, 2000); John Defrain and David H. Olsen, “Contemporary Family Patterns and Relationships,” in Sussman, Steinmetz and Peterson, eds., *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* (New York: Plenum Press, 1999), 313–14; Susan Brown and Alan Booth, “Cohabitation versus marriage: a comparison of relational quality,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 58 (1996): 668–78; Hilda Rodriguez, “Cohabitation: A Snapshot,” found at http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1011885243.62/cohabitation_snapshot.pdf.

97. Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt, *State of Working America 2000–2001*:157–58. In 1999, about two-thirds of the labor force did not have college degrees; another third were college graduates or had advanced degrees. For a young man high school graduate, the drop in entry-level hourly wages was 28.5 percent between 1979 and 1995. For a young woman high school graduate, the drop was 17.5 percent. See also Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West, *The War Against Parents*, Chapter 3.

98. Dierdre Wulf, *In Their Own Right: Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of American Men* (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2002), 8–9; available at . http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/exs_itorintl.pdf.

99. Christina Gibson, Kathryn Edin, and Sara McLanahan, “High Hopes But Even Higher Expectations: The Retreat from Marriage Among Low-Income Couples,” Center for Research on Child Wellbeing Working Paper #03-06-FF. Avis Jones-DeWeever, “Marriage Promotion and Low-Income Communities,” *Briefing Paper #D450*, Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

100. Sara McLanahan and Irwin Garfinkel, “Single-Mother Families and Social Policy: Lessons for the United States from Canada, France, and Sweden,” in K. McFate, R. Lawson, and W. J. Wilson, eds., *Poverty, Inequality and the Future of Social Policy: Western States in the New World Order* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995), 367–83; Sara McLanahan, Irwin Garfinkel, and Christina Norland Audigier, “New York, New York, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Baseline City Report,” available at <http://crcw.princeton.edu>.

101. Larry Bumpass and James A. Sweet, “Cohabitation, Marriage, and Union Stability: Preliminary findings from NSFH2,” (Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Working Paper #65, 1995), 8. Available at www.ssc.wisc.edu/cde/nsfh65.pdf.

102. The highest proportion of women-headed households—35 percent—is in the Caribbean. Migration is the main cause of the rise in female-headed families throughout the developing world. *The Women’s Women 1995 Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995) 5–6; Jeanne Vickers, *Women and the World Economic Crisis* (London: Zed books, 1994), 25.

103. Sara Lyall, “For Europeans, Love, Yes; Marriage, Maybe.” *The New York Times*, 24 March 2002: A1, 8.

104. Mishel, Bernstein, Schmitt, *State of Working America 2000–2001*, 392. The international standard methodology for measuring poverty defines the poverty rate as 50 percent or less of the median household income of a country.

105. The following quotations are taken from this document, which can be found at www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/church-and-homosexuality.pdf.

106. *Minutes*, Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1980, Part I, 213.

107. “Ministries to Families and Same-Sex Issues in Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” August 2000, at www.pcusa.org/research/panel/family.htm.
108. Specific data is available from the Presbyterian Panel Research Services. In only one instance, the question of whether it was appropriate for same-sex couples to hold a union ceremony in a Presbyterian church, did specialized clergy agree and strongly agree at a percent less than 60 percent—at 54 percent.
109. Robert Gebeloff and Mary Jo Patterson, “Gays, straights: Much in common,” *Detroit Free Press*, 11/28/03, 9A; see www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/samesex.html.
110. Erica Goode, “A Rainbow of Differences in Gays’ Children,” *New York Times*, 17 July 2001: D1, D7.
111. Erica Goode, “Group Backs Gays Who Seek to Adopt a Partner’s Child,” *New York Times*, 4 February 2002: A1, A21.
112. www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p.60-219.pdf; www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p.20-541.pdf.
113. Andrew Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 95.
114. www.hhs.gov/as/testify/T990629b.html. Note that nonmarital birth rates have dropped significantly in the 1990s while the proportion of births that are nonmarital has risen due to dropping fertility rates among married women.
115. Linda Villarosa, “More Teenagers Say No to Sex, and Experts Aren’t Sure Why,” *New York Times*, 12/23/03. D.6.
116. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Random House, 1996), ch. 4.
117. Vicky Lowell and Heidi Hartmann, “Unemployment Watch—How Are Women and Families Faring in the Recession?” *Quarterly Newsletter*, Institute for Women’s Policy Research (Winter/Spring 2002): 7.
118. Figures on poverty-level wages and employer provided health insurance are from Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002/2003*: 102, 136, 146.
119. From 1979 to 2000, Hispanic workers suffered the sharpest drop in health insurance and pension coverage.
120. Leland Ware and Antoine Allen, “The Geography of Discrimination: Hypersegregation, Isolation, and Fragmentation Within the African American Community,” in *State of Black America 2003* (Urban League, 2003), 70. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University reports that “black and Latino students are how more isolated from their white counterparts than they were three decades ago . . .” (*New York Times*, 1/21/03, A14).
121. James R. Lanier, “The Harmful Impact of the Criminal Justice System and War on Drugs on the African American Family,” in *State of Black America*, 2003, 170.
122. Robert B. Hill, “The Strengths of Black Families Revisited,” in *The State of Black America 2003*: 125–26.
123. Lanier, “Harmful Impact,” 160.
124. Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995), 180–81.
125. Mishel, Bernstein and Schmitt, *The State of Working America 2000/2001*, 34, 132, 140. For the PC(USA) definition of racism see the General Assembly’s 1999 report, *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community*, 6–7.
126. Pyong Gap Min, *Changes and Conflicts: Korean Immigrant Families in New York* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 39. Approximately 80 percent of Korean immigrants are either self-employed or work for a Korean-owned business. Pyong Gap Min argues that this economic segregation of the Korean workforce has important implications for family life (17).
127. Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey, *The State of Working America*, 156–57.

128. www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/hvs/historic/histt14.html.

129. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 139; Andrew Cherlin, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, 114; Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt, *The State of Working America 2000/2001* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 305–11.

130. Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson, “Assessing the Relationship between Welfare Policies and Changes in Living Arrangements of Low-income Families and Children in the late 1990s,” (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2002), 17–18.

131. Mishel, Bernstein, Schmitt, *The State of Working America 2000/2001*, 61, 258, 260. For international comparisons, see 387–97.

132. David Leonhardt, “Order of Compensation Universe Reflects Pull of New Economy,” *The New York Times*, 4/2/2000; BU 1.

133. Nina Bernstein, “Study Finds Gap Between Rich and Poor Growing Most in New York,” *New York Times*, 1/19/00: A-21. See also Edward Wolff, *Top Heavy: A Study of the Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America* (New York: New Press, 1996).

134. Editorial, *New York Times*, 10/29/03; Katherine Hutt Scott, “Pell Grants reduced by tax revisions; New table would halt funding for 84,000 students,” *Lansing Star Journal*, 10/6/03.

135. Coontz, *The Way We Really Are*, 144.

136. Hewlett and West, *The War Against Parents*, 108. These authors, using the G.I. Bill as a comparison, discuss government retreat from a number of family-supporting programs.

137. More than 30 percent of U.S. households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. The average hourly wage at which a worker can afford a two-bedroom house at fair market rent is now \$15.21, a 37 percent increase over 1999. During the 1990s, the net annual addition of units of assisted rentals fell to just 16 percent of what it had been in the 1970s. Data available from the National Housing Institute at www.nhi.org, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Out of Reach 2003: America’s Housing Wage Climbs,” at www.nlihc.org; and the Joint Center on Housing at Harvard University at www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/homeownershp/W02-8,Bratt.pdf.

138. Mishel, Bernstein, Schmitt, *The State of Working America 2000/2001*, 53.36.

139. *Ibid.*, 260.

140. Data from “America’s Families and Living Arrangements: Population Characteristics,” U.S. Census Bureau (June 2001): 3, 7. The U. S. Census Bureau uses the following definitions. “Household” refers to one or more people living in a housing unit. “Households” may be further described as “family” and “nonfamily.” A family household has at least two persons who are related either by blood, marriage, or adoption. A nonfamily household is a person living alone or a householder who shares a housing unit with only nonrelatives (roommates or boarders, for example). “Own children” refer to biological, step, or adopted children under the age of eighteen who have never married. Some data calculated from Households by Type: 1940 to Present” at www.census.gov/population/socdem/hh-fam/tabHH-1.txt.

Appendix A

Suggested Resources for Ministries with Families Congregational Ministries Division, PC(USA) Office of Family and Single Adult Ministries

Active Parenting Now for the Faith Community: A Biblical and Theological Guide by Freda A. Gardner, revised by Bruce and Carolyn Gillette (Atlanta: Active Parenting Publishers, 2003). This revised guide contains scriptural references and Christian-based discussion points for each session of the secular Active Parenting Now course.

Family, The Forming Center: A Vision of the Role of Family in Spiritual Formation by Marjorie Thompson (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1996). Thompson emphasizes the importance of families as the context for Christian spiritual formation and as a place to see God's presence in ordinary family life. Includes suggestions for keeping family rituals and celebrations and each chapter includes reflection questions. Can be used by individuals or for small group study.

Family Living in Pastoral Perspective book series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press). Titles in this series include:

Becoming Married, by Herbert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite

Leaving Home, by Herbert Anderson and Kenneth R. Mitchell

Living Alone, by Herbert Anderson and Freda A. Gardner

Regarding Children, by Herbert Anderson and Susan W. Johnson

Promising Again, by Herbert Anderson, David Hogue, and Marie McCarthy

Family Ministry by Diana Garland (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999). A comprehensive and up-to-date guide defining the field of family ministry. A wonderful resource for anyone who ministers to families by covering the theory and practice of family life ministry in practical terms.

Forming Ministries with Families: A Planning Guide for Congregations (Louisville: Office of Family and Single Adult Ministries, 2004). PC(USA) Item #70-250-03-209. A guide designed to assist churches in planning their ministries with the families of their congregation and community. Six sections are included to aid congregations in evaluating, visioning, planning, defining, and redefining these important ministries. Also included are stories of PC(USA) congregations, studies of biblical families, and helpful resource pages such as a planning grid, resource list, and commissioning service.

Leaving Home with Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth by Elizabeth F. Caldwell (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002). An exploration of themes faced by adolescents, their families, and their congregations. Includes helps for teaching and a wealth of resources.

Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children by Elizabeth F. Caldwell (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000). Guidance for parents in taking an active role in the faith development of their children, this book can be used by individuals or by groups using the discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

A New Day for Family Ministry by Richard P. Olsen and Joe H. Leonard Jr. (The Alban Institute, 1996). With information about modern families and how they are changing, this book addresses how congregations can adapt to meet these needs.

The Power of God at Home: Nurturing Our Children in Love & Grace by J. Bradley Wigger (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003). This book, a part of the Families and Faith Series from Jossey-Bass Publishers, helps the entire family become aware of God's presence in everyday life.

Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families: Living the Faith in Daily Life by Diana R. Garland (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003). Compiled from hours of interviews with ordinary families, Garland explores the importance of a spiritual dimension in family life in order to weather the storms and deepen the joy. This book is a part of the Families and Faith Series from Jossey-Bass Publishers.

AM/FM Audio Magazine for Family Ministry. Audiotape of interviews with national leaders in family ministry, music, feature stories, and resource reviews. Available in tape or CD format. www.family-ministry.org

Family Ministry: Empowering Through Faith. Quarterly journal with articles, book reviews, and research findings on family ministry. www.femf.org

Center for Congregations and Family Ministries. Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; J. Bradley Wigger, director; 1044 Alta Vista Rd.; Louisville, KY 40205; www.lpts.edu

Center for Family and Community Ministries. Baylor University; Diana Garland, director; P.O. Box 97320; Waco, TX 76798-7320; www.family-ministry.org

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Family and Single Adult Ministries. Martha Miller, associate; 100 Witherspoon St. Louisville, KY 40202; 888-728-7228 ext. 8013; www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle

Presbyterian Families. A covenant organization of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Peter and Lyn Pizor, national executive secretary; 2657 Windmill Parkway #182; Henderson, NV 89074; (702) 269-4438; www.presfam.org

Youth & Family Institute. Dick Hardel, director; 1401 E. 100th St.; Bloomington, MN 55425; www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org

Appendix B

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Appendix C

The Development of the Proposed Policy Statement on Families

Charge and Purpose

The Task Force on Changing Families was appointed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) in response to a referral the committee received from the 209th General Assembly (1997) "to examine the issue of changing families and changing social structures that affect families, particularly focusing on the effects of these on children...." (*Minutes*, 1997, Part I, pp. 42, 44, 536).

Members of the Task Force

The Task Force on Changing Families represented the breadth and depth of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Equally divided between clergy and lay, men and women, young and old, this racially diverse group also represented the broad spectrum of theological views of the Church.

Members of the task force included Clarence Page, parish clergy, military chaplain, Lumberton, North Carolina; Sarah Reyes, parish clergy, San Leandro, California; Marnie Abraham Russell, parish clergy, juvenile court judge, Jeannette, Pennsylvania; Lois McLendon Stroman, elder, retired educator, Dublin, Georgia; Jeanne Choy Tate, elder, Ph.D. candidate, children's spiritual formation, San Francisco, California; Bernice Thompson, elder, hospital-based clinical social worker, Chesterfield, Missouri; William (Beau) Weston, elder, associate professor of sociology, Danville, Kentucky; and Robert White, clergy, synod executive and social ethicist, Syracuse, New York. The task force was chaired by Barbara J. Gaddis, clergy, marriage and family therapist, from Boone, Iowa. Three members of the task force resigned for personal reasons. They were: Nancy Becker, pastor, Portage, Indiana; Jeffrey K. Light, clergy, Kansas City, Missouri; and Amanda Miller, other, New York, New York. Rodney J. Hunter, clergy, professor of pastoral theology, Atlanta, Georgia, served as the task force consultant. Belinda Curry, clergy, associate for policy development and interpretation, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), Louisville, Kentucky, staffed the task force.

The Task Force Process

Our work was structured by first writing a study guide on the issue of changing families, and distributing it in the winter 2000 for feedback from the church at large. This process helped us focus on issues of agreement and disagreement regarding the church's social witness about families.

The task force met six times, over a period of two years (1999–2001) at various locations around the country. Because the topic of families and family values inspires such strongly held opinions, we were concerned to hear from people in a variety of church settings, suburban, urban, rural, ethnic minority, and ethnic majority, and to hear from policy makers at the national level. In each meeting we attempted to make use of the resources available at that location resulting in visits to local churches and presentations by local and national experts.

Louisville, Kentucky—September 1999: Orientation to the work of the task force took place through examination of the prospectus, discussion of the problems and opportunities facing families and presentations by J. Bradley Wigger, director of the Center for Congregations and Family Ministries and associate professor of Christian Education, Louisville, Kentucky, and task force consultant Rodney J. Hunter. The task force outlined the work ahead, appointing a churchwide study guide steering committee and electing a chair.

Fort Worth, Texas—March 2000: Work proceeded on the churchwide study guide.

Phoenix, Arizona—May 2000: The task force met with Martha Sadongei, clergy, and staff affiliate for Native American Ministries Committee of Grand Canyon Presbytery to learn about the unique issues facing Native American families both on and off the reservation. Work on the churchwide study document continued.

Chicago, Illinois—September 2000: Time in Chicago was spent visiting local churches, their pastors and members. First we met with Jerry Andrews and members of the First Presbyterian Church of Glen Ellyn, Illinois to help us understand the issues facing families in a suburban environment. Next we met at the Fourth Presbyterian Church with John Wilkinson, staff and members to understand some of the ministries a large urban church offers. Also in the city we met with Jeff Doan and members of the Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church. Finally we traveled to Park Ridge, Illinois to meet with Yunchun Han and members of the Evergreen Presbyterian Church in order to gain insight about Korean American families.

Washington, D.C.—March 2001: Our perspective broadened to a national picture in meeting with the staff of the Presbyterian Washington Office to hear the issues they perceived to be of utmost importance for families. Rebecca Davis, Religious Networks Coordinator of the Children's Defense Fund and Susan Orr, Director of Marriage and Family Care of the Family Research Council, presented us their organizations' policy concerns and objectives. At this meeting we received the document "Strengthening American Families: Reweaving the Social Tapestry" from the Ninety-seventh American Assembly, and wrestled with the issues it presented and the points it raised.

Kansas City, Missouri—May 2001: We visited with Keith Harris from St. Paul Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, Missouri to help us understand African American families and their needs. We spent the bulk of the meeting reviewing the final draft of the proposed policy document and making policy recommendations.

In addition to its work as a task force the chair and several members of the task force shared in a presentation of its work to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) at a fall meeting in 2001. At that meeting the ACSWP thanked the task force for its work and referred the proposed draft policy report to an editing committee consisting of Ray Anglin, pastor, from Plantation, Florida; Sue Dickson, pastor, from El Paso, Texas, and Nile Harper, retired chaplain, from Ann Arbor, Michigan; Gloria Albrecht, clergy, professor of Religious Studies, from Detroit, Michigan, served as the editing team consultant; and Barbara J. Gaddis, chair of the task force. Belinda M. Curry, associate, and Peter A. Sulyok, coordinator, ACSWP, staffed the team.

The first meeting of the Changing Families Editing Team was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in late February 2002. The team developed a timeline for completion of its work on the draft changing families policy statement. The editing team presented a revised draft of the proposed changing families' policy statement to the ACSWP at the committee's summer 2002 meeting held in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Members of the editing team shared presentations of its work to a synod consultation on the proposed policy statement on "Living Faithfully with Families in Transition" jointly sponsored by the General Assembly Council (GAC) and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) in Louisville, Kentucky, on October 11–13, 2002. The feedback from this synod consultation was received by the ACSWP at its fall meeting in El Paso, Texas. The committee voted to send the proposed policy statement on "Living Faithfully with Families in Transition" to the 215th General Assembly (2003). Members of the Changing Families Editing Team and ACSWP staff shared in a presentation on this report to the commissioners to the 215th General Assembly (2003) in Denver, Colorado.

The 215th General Assembly (2003) referred a majority and a minority report on the proposed policy statement on "Living Faithfully with Families in Transition" back to the ACSWP "for further work to strengthen the policy statement" in consultation with the Office of Theology and Worship (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 56, 58, 458). In the summer of 2003, the ACSWP appointed a Changing Families Panel to respond to the referral from the 215th General Assembly (2003). The committee also requested the Office of Theology and Worship to draft a proposed theological statement for consideration by its Changing Families Panel.

The members of the Changing Families Panel included Gloria Albrecht, professor of religious studies from Detroit, Michigan; Sue Dickson, pastor, vice-chair, ACSWP, from Ashland, Ohio; Barbara J. Gaddis, marriage and family therapist and chair of the Task Force on Changing Families, from Boone, Iowa; Nile Harper, retired chaplain, chair, ACSWP, from Ann Arbor, Michigan; C. Eric Mount, professor emeritus of religion, commissioner to the 215th General Assembly (2003) and a drafter and signer of the minority report; Scott Williamson, associate professor of theological ethics, Louisville, Kentucky; William J. "Beau" Weston, sociologist and member of the Task Force on Changing Families, from Danville, Kentucky; Alan Wisdom, vice-president, Institute on Religion and Democracy, director of Presbyterian Action for Faith and Freedom, and a drafter of the majority report; and Marjorie A. Working, pastor, commissioner to the 215th General Assembly (2003) and a drafter and signer of the majority report. Belinda M. Curry, associate, ACSWP; Joseph Small, coordinator, Theology and Worship; Peter A. Sulyok, coordinator, ACSWP; and Charles Wiley, associate, Theology and Worship, staffed the team.

The Changing Families Panel met at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky on September 23–24, 2003, and received a preliminary "rough" draft developed by the Office of Theology and Worship and instructed them to make revisions for the panel's second meeting at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary on December 12–13, 2003. At the December meeting of the panel, by consensus the members changed the proposed policy statement on "Living Faithfully with Families in Transition" to "Families in Transition."

Members of the panel shared presentations of its work to the ACSWP on the proposed policy statement on "Families in Transition" when the committee met in Louisville, Kentucky, on January 20–24, 2004. On February 25, 2004, the committee voted to send the proposed policy statement on "Families in Transition" to the 216th General Assembly (2004). Members of the Changing Families Panel, ACSWP staff, and Office of Theology and Worship staff shared in a presentation on this report to the commissioners to the 216th General Assembly (2004) in Richmond, Virginia.

Study & Action Guide for *Transforming Families*

Prepared by Bruce and Carolyn Gillette

Introduction to the Guide

“The 209th General Assembly (1997) called for an examination of changing families and social structures that support families, focusing especially on their effects on children, in order to develop principles and recommendations to strengthen the church’s ministry to contemporary families in both the church and society in the 21st century” (p.1). [All page references are to the *Transforming Families* report unless otherwise stated.] The title, *Transforming Families*, refers both to the families of the church in the process of being transformed by God and to these families and the church family being agents of transformation in the society for the well-being of all families.

The purpose of this study and action guide is to introduce the content (biblical-theological reflections with cultural and socioeconomic analysis) of the *Transforming Families* report that was approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004). Quotes from *Transforming Families* in this study are included to make it easy for the group discussions, but participants are urged to read the whole report and not just the selected quotes found in this guide. The study and action guide seeks to assist congregations in exploring ways they might implement the recommendations of *Transforming Families* in their ministries with today’s families within their churches, in their surrounding communities and in our nation.

Four Sessions

This study and action guide is designed to have four sessions. Each session has many ideas for discussion; leaders may want to select from the exercises depending on the size of the group and how much group discussion is expected. Each congregation needs to determine the best meeting day and time for these sessions. Sunday mornings during church school might reach the most participants, but might also exclude church school teachers who are often parents who are very interested in families and family ministry. The four sessions in this study and action guide are organized around four themes:

1. Families and the Family of Faith: This first session looks at *Transforming Families*’ biblical-theological reflections on families after giving opportunities for sharing personal family stories.
2. Families Are Struggling: All families face pressures and challenges. The second session examines *Transforming Families*’ cultural and socioeconomic analysis and the local context of participants.
3. Families Are Strong: The third session includes *Transforming Families*’ strengths about today’s families.
4. Serving Families: The study concludes by exploring how to implement *Transforming Families*’ recommendations in the participants’ congregations.

Preparation for Leaders

Please take some time now to review the homework assignment at the end of Session Three and the “Leader Preparation” section at the beginning of Session Four. You will want to read Appendix A of *Transforming Families* (p. 44) and the study and action guide’s appendix, “*Transforming Families*’ Recommendations with Resources for Congregations’ Ministry with Families.” Using that list of resources, order samples of the various video-based and print materials now, in order to have them ready to lend to people at the end of Session Three. These resources may be borrowed from presbytery/ecumenical resource centers or neighboring churches, or they may be purchased.

In addition, you may need to contact the resource people described in Session Four well in advance of that final session. Read the “Leader Preparation” section at the beginning of Session Four now as you consider which guests it might be most helpful to invite.

Classroom Setup

The classroom should be set up in a way that allows class participants to see each other and to interact with each other throughout the sessions. Class members need to be able to rearrange their chairs easily for small-group discussions. The leader should make sure that there are Bibles, hymnals, copies of *Transforming Families*, pens/pencils and paper available for all participants. The classroom should have newsprint, an easel, and markers to be used in writing summaries and comments related to class discussions.

Sensitivity to All

Discussions about faith and family are conversations about some of our most strongly held beliefs. It is important to show sensitivity to all, and to establish a climate in which participants feel they can speak honestly and openly. Sometimes congregations, their leaders, and their members have caused hurt to families and individuals. Sometimes not all families and individuals have felt welcomed or heard by congregations. All participants need to be encouraged to listen with love and sensitivity, and with a willingness to learn from others, as together participants seek to hear what God is saying to the church today about families.

Resources Beyond the Study and Action Guide

Too often, excellent General Assembly study documents like *Transforming Families* that have taken years to complete, are rarely discussed beyond the national meetings of our denomination. To encourage people to read, discuss, and implement this document, two resources have been included that might be used by local congregations. These added resources can be used to help publicize this important report, encourage its study, and implement its recommendations. “You Formed Us in Your Image, Lord” is a hymn inspired by the biblical themes in *Transforming Families*. Congregations may use it in Sunday worship services, but are asked to include the copyright information and reference to where *Transforming Families* can be found online at www.pcusa.org/oga/publications.htm#reso. “Presbyterian Report on Transforming Families” is a summary that could be used in a church newsletter. Both the hymn and the newsletter summary may be used by themselves and/or prior to the start of a church discussion group on *Transforming Families*. The hymn and the newsletter summary are in the appendices of this study and action guide.

Background on Study and Action Guide’s Writers

Bruce and Carolyn Gillette are the co-pastors of the [Limestone Presbyterian Church](http://limestonepresbyterian.org/) < <http://limestonepresbyterian.org/>> in Wilmington, Delaware. Bruce and Carolyn are the grateful parents of John (17), Catherine (14), and Sarah (12). They wrote the worship and educational resource for PC(USA)’s [Christian Family Week 2005](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/index.htm) < <http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/index.htm>> . Their article “[Faithfully Disciplining Our Children](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/faithfullydisciplining.pdf)” < www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/faithfullydisciplining.pdf> in the January/February 2004 issue of PC (USA)’s [Church & Society](http://www.pcusa.org/churchsociety/) journal < <http://www.pcusa.org/churchsociety/>> was later reprinted in the 2004 Domestic Violence Congregational Packet of [Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.htm) < <http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.htm>> . The Gillettes wrote the [revised edition](http://www.activeparenting.com/Magazine/fall04_9.htm) < http://www.activeparenting.com/Magazine/fall04_9.htm> of Freda A. Gardner’s *Active Parenting Now for the Faith Community: A Biblical and Theological Guide* (2003), a supplement to the popular video series Active Parenting Now. They have a collection of [favorite Web sites and books](http://www.activeparenting.com/FaithResources.htm) < <http://www.activeparenting.com/FaithResources.htm>> on parenting and family ministry on the Active Parenting Web site. The hymns written by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette have been sung in many churches as well as at regional and national church meetings, and can found on denominational and ecumenical Web sites. Geneva Press has published a collection of her hymns titled [Gifts of Love: New Hymns for Today’s Worship](http://www.wjkacademic.com/Details.asp?BookID=0664501346) (Geneva Press, 2000) < <http://www.wjkacademic.com/Details.asp?BookID=0664501346>> .

Session 1: Families and the Family of Faith

Session Focus

What are our family stories? Why does the church speak about families and family issues? What does the Bible say about families?

Opening Prayer

If possible, sing together the hymn, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (*Presbyterian Hymnal* #438) or have someone read the words aloud, and ask God’s blessing on the class as you begin.

Sharing Our Family Stories

Spend some time as a group introducing yourselves to each other. Tell your name and who is in your family (those living in your household or extended family members who are central in your life).

In small groups of three or four, or with the whole study group if it is small, share one family tradition—past or present—that has been important to you. Does your family always go to the late-night Christmas Eve service together? Do you go to a certain place every year on vacation? Do you have a special bedtime routine with young children? What do you do that makes your family feel special and unique?

In the same small group, tell one brief family story (from your own family or from one you know) that illustrates the best of what families can and should be.

Transforming Families points out that the role of families in society has changed and continues to change: “The 209th General Assembly (1997) called for an examination of changing families and social structures that support families, focusing especially on their effects on children...” (p. 1).

How has your own extended family changed over your lifetime? It has “grown up” as family members have gotten older—but how has your family changed in deeper ways, reflecting society’s changes? For example, maybe your family used to spend Sunday afternoons together, but now family members are busy or scattered; or it used to be that your father was head of the household, and now family members relate differently; or you have a different economic/education level than you had before.

Transforming Families states: “The sovereign love of God, the gracious lordship of Jesus Christ, and the empowering fellowship of the Holy Spirit ground our lives as Christians; yet we are also rooted in family structures that evidence the corrosive pressures around and within us, as well as the failed relationships among us, even as they remain sites of God’s gracious presence and activity. Our family lives, like the other spheres of our existence, need transformation by the Holy Spirit; and our world needs the transformative agency of families that understand the breadth of their vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ” (p. 1).

After reading this quote, discuss with the whole group: What does this document say about why we study families as part of our Christian faith? Do you agree? Does your own experience in family confirm or challenge the statement? Would you modify it in any way?

Bible Study and Reflection

Transforming Families examines how the Bible looks at the meaning of “family.” Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Have each pair or group read one of the biblical texts below and the corresponding comments from *Transforming Families*. What does each text say about God’s ordering of society into families? Briefly

summarize your assigned scripture reading and the accompanying reflections from *Transforming Families*, as you share with the larger group.

Marriage: Read Genesis 2:24. *Transforming Families* says, “This Genesis passage portrays the committed, enduring relationship between a man and a woman as foundational for married interpersonal life” (p. 4). You may also want to skim the various sections on marriage in pp. 4–6 as time allows.

Households: Read Ephesians 5:21–6:9. Another group may read Colossians 3:18–4:1. *Transforming Families* offers this insight: “Households are prominent in the New Testament as well. Several epistles counsel families and households concerning their responsibilities” (p. 6). The study points out that while traditional family patterns are retained, they are relativized and reordered. In other words, even in the context of the social patterns of the day, God was working new surprises—lifting up new ways of being together as families—ways that included mutuality and service to one another.

Single Persons: Read Luke 20:34–35. *Transforming Families* states: “Marriage is one of God’s good gifts within human life; it is not the ultimate form of relationship within the age to come” (p. 6).

Adoption: Read Galatians 4:4–7. *Transforming Families* reminds us: “Adoption is such a powerful witness to the extension of kinship bonds to those outside of biological relationship that it becomes a primary way of speaking of our relation to God, especially in the New Testament” (pp. 6–7).

Extension of familial relationship: Read Deuteronomy 10:17–19. *Transforming Families* tells us: “This inclusion is dramatically apparent in the constant scriptural refrain of care for the widow and orphan and the strangers among us” (p. 7).

Children: Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. “The well-being of children also entails being shaped by the transforming love of Jesus Christ so that children come to love neighbors and seek justice, becoming people who can give and receive love. ... The nurture of children is not a distraction from service to God; it is an integral aspect of service to God” (p. 7).

Jesus’ words: Read Luke 14:26. *Transforming Families* states: “Jesus honored his family, but he also challenged deference to family authority with the shocking words” [of Luke 14:26] (p. 2).

More words from Jesus: Read Matthew 12:49–50. *Transforming Families* states: “Furthermore, he called people to new family ties that went beyond biological ones” (p. 2).

There are many experts talking about the family in society today. Brainstorm, and make a list of where people get advice on what it means to be a family and to have healthy family relationships—TV psychologists, talk-show hosts, self-help books, newspaper columnists, educators, sociologists, local and national celebrities. What is unique about the church’s message regarding families?

Families and Idolatry

How many times have you heard someone compliment another person by saying, “Nothing is more important than ‘family’ to him,” or “She puts family above everything else”? While Christians do lift up the importance of family, we believe our first allegiance is to God. Read Exodus 20:2. *Transforming Families* states: “In the Scriptures and the Reformed tradition, family loyalty stands under primary loyalty to God. The Ten Commandments begin with an expression of God’s covenantal sovereignty: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’ (Ex. 20:2). The first three commandments make it clear that no human authority, including family ties, should command our ultimate allegiance” (p. 2).

What are ways that people in our society tend to make an idol of “family”? How do we make family commitments and interests a priority over our faith in God? For example, some youth sports teams meet on Sunday mornings, and many families regularly choose sports over church. What other examples can you think of? How is this a kind of brokenness?

God Sends Us to Serve

What is one specific way that you as an individual, or as part of a family, can share the good news of God’s love with a specific family—your own or another—this week?

Tell someone you love a family story about something that makes your family unique.

Homework for Next Session

Each day, pray for families in your church, by name if you can. Pray for the families who sit near you in the sanctuary for worship, for those you talk to at fellowship time, for children you see coming out of church school classrooms.

- Read Luke 15:1–2, 11–32.
- Read *Transforming Families*, especially the Rationale, pp. 14–35.
- Bring a current newspaper (one from this coming week) to your next class session.

Closing Prayer

Eternal God, our creator,
 you set us to live in families.
 We commend to your care
 all the homes where your people live.
 Keep them, we pray, free from bitterness,
 from the thirst for personal victory,
 and from pride in self.
 Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge,
 moderation, patience, and godliness.
 Knit together in enduring affection
 those who have become one in marriage.
 Let children and parents have full respect for one another.
 Bind together in communities those who live in singleness,
 and light the fire of kindness among us all,
 that we may show affection for each other;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(*Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 749, adapted in *Transforming Families*, pp.14–15)

~Notes~

Session 2: Families Are Struggling

Session Focus

All families face pressures and challenges—cultural, socioeconomic, etc. Different families face different types of pressures and challenges. What are these challenges? How are they different for different families? How do these pressures and challenges affect us as we seek to be the people, families, and society that God wants us to be?

Opening Hymn

Sing the hymn, “You Formed Us in Your Image, Lord” (see this study guide’s Appendix Two, p. 72), or take turns reading the stanzas as an opening prayer.

Sharing Our Family Stories from the Community and World

In small groups of three or four, or with the whole study group if it is small, look through the past week’s newspapers. Make a list of articles that illustrate the challenges that families face today. Be creative. Don’t list only the obvious ones such as severe child abuse. Look in the “styles” section (society’s pressures, consumerism), business section (unemployment), help-wanted ads, obituaries (grief and loss), crime page, school sports pages (pressures on kids and families). After a few minutes, make a list of the small groups’ findings on newsprint.

Bible Study and Reflection

Read Luke 15:1–2, 11–32. While this parable describes God’s relationship with people, it also reminds us that brokenness in families is not something new. Describe the family relationships in this parable. In what ways is there brokenness? How do we see similar kinds of brokenness in our communities and world? How can God’s reconciling love change families? What gets in the way of this love? What do you make of situations that don’t have such a redemptive, reconciled ending?

Reflections on Transforming Families

Have different individuals or small groups read brief sections of the study *Transforming Families*, listed below, that describe problems/challenges/concerns facing families today. How does each of these problems/challenges/concerns specifically affect children?

- Materialism, pp. 16–18
- Consumerism, pp. 18–19
- Individualism, pp. 19–21
- Hedonism, p. 21
- Single Parent Families, pp. 27–28
- Cohabitation, pp. 29–30
- Same Sex Families, pp. 30–31
- Impact of Race/Ethnicity and Economic Location, pp. 31–32

Have each person or small group give a very brief summary for the whole group. Add ideas to your newsprint list of challenges facing families today. Do you agree with the analysis in *Transforming Families* of these situations? Which of these are of major concern to you? To this congregation?

Divorce

Read the following quotes from *Transforming Families*, and discuss the questions that follow them:

“The U.S. also has the highest divorce rate in the world. Today, within a forty-year period, almost half of first marriages end in divorce, as do more than half of second marriages. Divorce rates, which had increased gradually since the 19th century, rose steeply in the second half of the 20th century, plateaued around 1988, and fell slightly thereafter” (p. 23).

What do you think the church’s responsibility is to those whose families have experienced separation and divorce?

“Because divorce is usually stressful and painful for children, researchers suggest ways to address and mitigate this pain. Judith Wallerstein points to three psychological factors that are protective for children of divorce as well as for children in intact families: reasonably harmonious and supportive relations between parents, the commitment and sensitivity of each parent to the child, and the maturity and morality of the parents” (p. 26).

How can your church work to encourage growth in all three of these areas to benefit children of divorced parents?

Economic Justice and Families

“A troubling change in U.S. families has been the dramatic rise in single-parent families. While statistical data may provide an overcount of single-parent families, the increase is undeniable. It is estimated that about half of U.S. children will spend some of their childhood in a single-parent family, the vast majority of which are female-headed (94 percent in 1998)” (p. 27).

“For most families, economic need sent wives and mothers into the workforce. Between 1979 and 1995, real hourly wages fell for the bottom 70 percent of wage earners. For the median wage male worker, the wage decline amounted to about 15 percent. The share of workers earning poverty-level wages increased from 27.1 percent in 1979 to over 30 percent in 1995 before dropping back to 25 percent in 2000. As a result, between 1979 and 1998 middle-income families would have seen a significant loss in income if wives had not added their paid work” (p. 24).

How do the economic struggles of families affect their children? How can the church support families who are struggling to make ends meet?

“...we know that poverty plays a significant role in explaining the 10-15 percent of children with worse than average outcomes and that the poverty rate for single-mother families is much higher than for other family types. There are several reasons for this. The first is that there is only one employable adult in the family at a time when most families need to be supported by two. In addition, the lack of affordable and accessible childcare, flexible work hours, and transportation further limits opportunities for single mothers to do income-producing work as well as the work of parenting. When single mothers are employed, they may not have access to the type of work that could raise a family out of poverty. In 1998, 58 percent of the single mothers who received any welfare assistance also worked. Of those who worked full-time, almost 40 percent earned poverty-level wages” (p. 29)”

How can churches support single parents and children, especially those living in poverty?

Also, look at The Confession of 1967 (Inclusive Language Version, italics added below for emphasis) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

“The church calls all people to use their abilities, their possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to them by God for the *maintenance of their families* and the advancement of the *common welfare*. It encourages those forces in human society that raise ... hopes for better conditions and provide people with opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God (*The Book of Confessions*, 9.46).

Note: The concern of the Confession of 1967 is for our individual families and the “common welfare” of all persons. What word does the church have to offer society about economic justice for all?

Final Thoughts

Are the cultural, socioeconomic, and spiritual problems facing families overwhelming? Are they getting worse or better, or are they about the same as they have been for the last few decades?

God Sends Us to Serve

Tell a family member, “I love you” or “I forgive you.”

Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, or write a letter to a leader in government (local, state, national), sharing your concern about a societal problem facing families and encouraging action.

Consider finding a concrete way to help a church school teacher or youth group leader in your congregation—by offering words of encouragement, praying for the teacher or youth leader, volunteering to help with a special project, or donating needed supplies for the class. Make the job a little bit easier for someone called to do the important work of nurturing children and youth in the faith.

Homework

Read the whole *Transforming Families*, especially pages 11–12, “A Vision of Transforming Families.”

Closing Prayer

Ever-loving Savior, who comes to us in our brokenness and transforms our lives through healing mercy, we confess to you that our nation is not always a healthy place for many of your families. Too often we have erred and gone astray, following after false cultural idols that whisper to us of security and success. Too often we have not encouraged families to dare to place the values of your Gospel above those of the prevailing culture. Too often we as a church have not spoken your prophetic word or acted your redeeming deed; we have instead remained silent, not daring to speak out against popular opinion. Forgive us, redeeming Lord, and renew our vision. Grant us the courage to place you and your love at the core of our family lives, and at the center of our communities and of our nation. Amen. (*Transforming Families*, p. 22)

~Notes~

Session 3: Families Are Strong

Preparation for Leaders

As noted in the introduction to this study, you will want to have a variety of print/video resources as well as web site addresses ready to send home with class participants. Read again the guide appendix, “*Transforming Families’* Recommendations with Resources for Implementation by Congregations,” page 71. Consider the interests and size of your study group and your congregation. Gather the books, articles, video resources, web site addresses, and other information that you will assign as homework at the end of this third session.

Session Focus

Transforming Families describes strengths in today’s families.

Opening Prayer

“O God, whose infinite splendor is reflected in the immense variety of your created world, we give you thanks for the many ways in which families have shaped themselves to care for one another. We also give thanks for the great variety of ways in which your congregations minister to the diverse needs of families in their communities. Help us, as congregations, to celebrate and support your love wherever caring is found in families.

“In a society that values personal fulfillment and individual rights over interdependence and caregiving, help us learn how to give primary place in our lives to caring for one another in your name. As members of families, called both to give and receive, grant us the gratitude to value the unique contributions each of us makes to family life. Grant us, as well, the wisdom to discern when to place the needs of others before ourselves and when to receive nurturing so that we might in turn be of service to others. Amen” (p. 35).

Sharing Our Stories

Divide into groups of three or four. Let each group member briefly describe a positive value that has been passed down through family members or one that the group member hopes to share with other loved ones. Share a story of when your family (or church member) was there for you in a time of real need.

Read the following quote from *Transforming Families*: “Without discounting the contemporary cries of alarm concerning family life, we cannot accord the last word to the laments. We would be belying the faith, hope, and love we profess if we did. The grace of God has not lost its determination to reconcile. The love of Jesus Christ has not lost its ability to include. The communion of the Holy Spirit has not lost its power to transform. Our faith should enable us not only to be honest about the depth of our dilemmas as families, but also to be visionary about the scope of our vocation as Christians living in families and bound together in the Body of Christ.” (p. 1).

Again in small groups, answer the following questions related to the above paragraph:

- How have you seen God’s grace doing something surprising in your family or in the life of another family you know?
- How have you seen God’s love reconciling family members?
- How can vocation—of families, for families, and with families—be understood in less individualistic terms?
- How did you see God’s Spirit at work empowering and transforming a family, helping them to overcome a significant challenge or obstacle? What makes some families strong even in the face of great obstacles?

Bible Study and Reflection

Transforming Families has several very thoughtful statements on baptism as it relates to family life and to Christian vocation of families. Read these statements, and share your reflections on them in small groups or with the group as a whole.

“Christian identity is formed in baptism and shaped in the continuous practice of discipleship within the covenant community. The identity given us at baptism takes precedence over family origins, ethnicity, social identity, or gender; for all are one in Jesus Christ. . . . Our incorporation into the body of Christ through baptism is sheer grace, regardless of our personal qualities, the character of our families, or anything else that we bring. By grace, we belong to the sovereign God who ‘claims us, and seals us to show that we belong to God.’ We receive a new identity, and with it a new ultimate allegiance” (p. 2).

How are you identified? What are your roles? Are you a parent, a child, an aunt, an uncle, a grandparent? Are you a homemaker? A boss? A co-worker? A church member? Make a list of all your roles.

What does Galatians 3:27–28 have to say about your role in family, church, and society? What does baptism mean for us? What do you know about your own baptism? Do you remember it? Were you an infant? Why were you baptized? What role has it/does it play in your life?

“The congregation makes a specific pledge to the baptized, to guide and nurture them ‘by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Christ’ (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 406). When members of the congregation make this commitment, they do so regardless of their own age or station in life. Everyone in the church is commissioned to a vocation that nurtures newly baptized members of the community. We are called to help each other ‘grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’ (Eph. 4:15). This commitment to God and one another defines the basic Christian vocation” (p. 3).

Discuss the promises made by your congregation when a child is baptized—promises to nurture the child in the faith.

Make a list of concrete ways that your church ministers to and nurtures children and their families (special mailings to a “cradle roll” of baptized infants, [child-friendly worship services](http://www.pcusa.org/today/archive/features/feat9909a.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/today/archive/features/feat9909a.htm>>, church school, youth groups, scouts and civic/service groups, parenting classes, mentors for young single mothers, etc).

Transforming Families includes a brief section on same-sex couples and concludes: “Despite lack of agreement among Presbyterians regarding same-sex families, children of such couples need the same advocacy, protection, and respect that we encourage for all other children” (p. 31). Presbyterians welcome all people who profess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord into church membership, including people who are homosexual (*Book of Order*, G-5.0103). Church members are to present their children for baptism (*Book of Order*, W-2.3014). How can your congregation be supportive of the baptized children of same-sex couples?

“The church must encourage enduring covenantal relationships between couples, sealed by public promises to each other that are made before God, marked by the fruit of the Spirit’s presence. As the Apostle Paul writes, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things’ (Gal. 5:22–23). Moreover, recovery of God’s ordering of interpersonal life offers possibilities for marital and family life that open toward a rich web of interpersonal relationships extending beyond the marital-biological family (pp. 5–6).

While this *Transforming Families* talks about the challenges facing families, we also need to remember how God’s Spirit can work through families. Many times, people see the “fruit of the Spirit” most clearly in their fami-

lies, and we find strength in our families to serve others in the church, community, and world. Discuss how healthy families can bear the fruit of the Spirit within the family, and in serving in the church and the world:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Generosity
- Self-control

The Importance of Marriage

The following quote from *Transforming Families* begins with bad news, but it ends with a positive word about how monogamous marriage is valued in our society:

“While it is extremely difficult to measure accurately the prevalence of adultery, current data suggests that about 50 percent of husbands and 30 percent of wives have had an affair in the course of their marriages. However, due to today’s emphasis on the companionate marriage and gender equality, both women and men are much less willing to tolerate spousal infidelity. Monogamy remains an important norm in marriage” (p. 25).

What would it take to help prevent adultery? Why is it so prevalent? Why is it so destructive?

How does an expectation of gender equality in marriage create an expectation of faithfulness?

What are creative ways that the church can speak a word for fidelity in marriage today?

What else encourages faithful relationships?

“... a majority of couples in low-conflict marriages, who once considered divorce but decided to remain married, report very happy marriages five years later. This finding suggests that the church has a significant role to play in developing and providing marriage enrichment opportunities for couples in low-conflict marriages” (p. 25).

Where do people turn for marriage enrichment opportunities? To the church? To community groups? To counselors? To self-help books? What is your congregation doing in this area? What could it do?

God Sends Us to Serve

If you have the opportunity this week, share with a child (your own, a grandchild, a niece or nephew, or a child in the church) memories of the child’s baptism. Think about how your own baptism has given you a new identity and a new family/community in the church.

Homework

Pray for families in your church and community and those who are serving them. Pray for openness to the Holy Spirit’s leading, as your group seeks to discern what might be new ways of serving families.

When the group gathers for Session Four, participants (individually or in pairs) will make brief presentations on resources they reviewed as to their possible usefulness for your local congregation in implementing the recommendations of *Transforming Families* (pp. 12–14). These suggested resources may be found in Appendix A of *Transforming Families* (pp. 44–45) and this guide’s Appendix One on “*Transforming Families’* Recommendations with Resources for Congregations’ Ministry with Families” (p. 71). In your review of resources this week (online or through printed materials, videos, teaching resources, etc.), think about ways for individuals, families, and the local church to be involved in God’s work of transforming families.

Participants can also be responsible for contacting possible local resource people to speak briefly with the group during Session Four, if these resource people have not yet been contacted.

Closing Prayer

Eternal God, without your grace no promise is sure.
Strengthen each family with patience, kindness, gentleness,
And all other gifts of your Spirit,
so they may fulfill the commitments they have made.
Keep them faithful to each other and to you.
Fill them with such love and joy that they may build
a home of peace and welcome.
Guide them by your Word to serve you all their days.
Help us all, O God, to do your will in each of our homes and lives.
Enrich us with your grace so that, supporting one another,
We may serve those in need and hasten the coming of peace, love and justice on earth,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(*Book of Common Worship*, Christian Marriage Rite I, p. 849 (adapted))

Session 4: Serving Families

Advance Preparation for Leaders

As noted in the introduction to this study, you may want to invite one or two resource people to speak briefly (suggest a time limit for each speaker with sensitivity to the number of presentations by guests and participants during this session). You may know a pastoral counselor, high school guidance counselor, social worker, advocate for poor families (from the [Children's Defense Fund](http://campaign.childrensdefense.org/) < <http://campaign.childrensdefense.org/>> , [Bread for the World](http://bread.org/) < <http://bread.org/>> , etc.) or public school administrator who would have ideas about community resources and opportunities for involvement by your congregation.

Or you may want to invite someone from your own church or from a neighboring church who has done creative family ministry—a parenting class teacher, marriage enrichment leader, divorce recovery group leader, etc.

Invite one or two of these resource people to share their ideas with you during this session. This hour will go quickly, and there are many resources (people and print) to be shared, so you may need to streamline parts of this session to allow for the things that are the highest priority for your group.

Session Focus

This session will be a brainstorming session about “next steps”—ways your local church can do ministry with families.

Opening Prayer

Loving God,
 you nurture and guide us like a father and mother.
 We pray for the families of this congregation
 and all Christian families everywhere.
 Give them strength to honor you in their homes,
 and to love and serve each other.
 Help all who have been baptized in your name
 to live in peace and unity
 as sisters and brothers in the household of faith,
 and to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.
 (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 417, #418)

Bible Reading and Reflection

Read 1 Corinthians 13. This famous chapter is often read at weddings when we celebrate the beginning of a new family. God's gifts of faith, hope and love are for all.

How should families aspire to nurture these gifts? What are ways the church can help families use God's gifts more fully?

Read Luke 4:16–20. *How might this reading by Jesus speak to families today? How does Jesus' concern for the poor, captives, hurting, and oppressed relate to the church's need to address conditions faced by families?*

Discussion

Read together the conclusion to *Transforming Families*:

“As a church we are aware of the failings of our families and our resistance to the covenantal obligations entailed in being parts of families, and we are also prompted by our encompassing vocation to reach out to each other as actual or potential family members and to families of all kinds, especially to children and others who are most vulnerable, with compassion and justice” (p. 35).

The church is called to reach out to family members and to families. Your congregation may already be doing this in exciting and creative ways. These ministries need to be celebrated and supported. Or, this may be an area where you would like to strengthen your church’s ministry. This fourth session gives your study group the opportunity to dream and to look ahead at the future of family ministries in your congregation.

Guest Resource People

If you have previously invited one or more community resource people to meet with you, give them an opportunity to answer this question: What are ways that our congregation can work with you to care for families in our community?

If you have invited people from within your congregation to share, ask them: What is our congregation doing in creative family ministry? How can we support your work?

If you have invited someone from a neighboring congregation who has done creative family ministry, ask the person to briefly summarize what that church has done.

Review of Family Ministry Resources

After hearing from any invited guests, spend some time reviewing the online, print, and video-based resources you sent home with class participants at the end of Session Three. Let participants briefly summarize the materials they reviewed from Appendix A of *Transforming Families* (pp. 44–45) and this guide’s Appendix One on “*Transforming Families’* Recommendations with Resources for Congregations’ Ministry with Families” (p. 71). Please note that there are other popular resources on families and marriage used by churches; these need to be evaluated to determine if they support the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s teachings about mutual submission in marriage, gender equality, and concern that corporal punishment can sometimes lead to child abuse before they are recommended for use by congregations.

Brainstorming Next Steps

Are there one or more exciting ideas you would like to share with your Christian Education Committee, deacons, pastor(s), and/or session? What time, talents, and skills can you—personally or as a group—offer them as they look at these ideas? *Forming Ministries with Families: A Planning Guide for Congregations* (Louisville: Office of Family and Single Adult Ministries, 2004) PC(USA), PDS order #70-250-03-209, is the denominational resource and it would be very helpful to have for this discussion.

Examples are:

- Offering a parenting class
- Giving single parents a break
- Having a program/celebration where 25th or 50th anniversary couples talk about “why they stuck it out” together over the years

- Offering a program that connects grandparents with “adopted” grandchildren
- Exploring ways to include single persons in families and the congregation
- Contacting the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Washington Office for information on advocating for government policies that support families
- Participating in a continuing education seminar on family ministries, such as those offered by Louisville Seminary’s [Center for Congregations and Family Ministries](http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Programs/Center_Congregations-Family.asp) http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Programs/Center_Congregations-Family.asp and [other seminaries](http://www.pcusa.org/links/schools.htm#seminary) [<http://www.pcusa.org/links/schools.htm#seminary >](http://www.pcusa.org/links/schools.htm#seminary), at [Presbyterian conferences and camps](http://www.pcusa.org/links/schools.htm#seminary), and at synod schools.

Future Study and Action

Families do not exist in a vacuum, but are affected by what is going on in the world around them. Our General Assembly has done a number of excellent reports on a variety of issues that directly or indirectly affects today’s families. These studies are worth careful discussion and action by congregations. Here are a few examples:

[Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the United States with Study Guide](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/immigrant-legal.pdf), 216th General Assembly (2004), <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/immigrant-legal.pdf>, PDS order #68-600-05-001

Resolution on “Violence, Religion and Terrorism,” 216th General Assembly (2004); [Faithfully Living in a Time of Violence and Terrorism: A Study Guide on the Resolution on Violence, Religion, and Terrorism](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/pubs/pubs.htm#web/rtv.book.pdf), [<http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/pubs/pubs.htm#web/rtv.book.pdf>](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/pubs/pubs.htm#web/rtv.book.pdf), PDS order #70-270-04-025

[Iraq: Our Responsibility and the Future](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/iraq-responsibility.pdf), 216th General Assembly (2004), <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/iraq-responsibility.pdf>, PDS order #68-600-05-002

[Turn Mourning Into Dancing! A Policy Statement on Healing Domestic Violence](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/dancing.pdf), 213th General Assembly (2001), <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/dancing.pdf>, PDS order #OGA-01-018

[Resolution on Advocacy on Behalf of the Uninsured](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/uninsured.pdf), 214th General Assembly (2002), PDS order #68-600-02-004

[Resolution on the Ministry of Caregiving in Relation to Older Adults](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/olderadults.pdf), 213th General Assembly (2001), PDS order #68-600-02-01

[Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/racism.pdf), 211th General Assembly (1999), PDS order #OGA-99-033

[Building Community Among Strangers: A Report on Racism, Social Class Divisions, Sex-based Injustices, and Religious Intolerance and Conflict](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/racism.pdf), 211th General Assembly (1999), PDS order # OGA-99-028

[Gambling](http://www.pcusa.org/social/gambling.htm) 208th General Assembly (1996), <http://www.pcusa.org/social/gambling.htm>, [Gambling and Christian Faith](http://www.pcusa.org/social/gambling.htm) (study guide), PDS order # 72-620-98-001; and Resolution on “Gambling and Christian Faith,” 212th General Assembly (2000), *Minutes of the General Assembly*, 2000, Part I, pp. 51, 231–33

[Hope for A Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/globalfuture.pdf), 208th General Assembly (1996), PDS order #OGA-96-013

God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation, 207th General Assembly (1995), PDS order #OGA-95-012

Pornography: Far from the Song of Songs (study paper), 204th General Assembly (1992), PDS order #OGA-88-105

Resolution on Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, 202nd General Assembly (1990), PDS order #OGA-90-002

[Life Abundant: Values, Choices and Health Care](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/life-abundant.pdf), 200th General Assembly (1988), <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/life-abundant.pdf>, PDS order #72-660-03-001

The Church and Serious Mental Illness, 200th General Assembly (1988), Contact the National Health Ministries, (888) 728-7228, ext. 8011, to obtain a copy or download a copy at http://www.pcusa.org/health/national/policies/thechurch_and_mental_illness.htm

[Alcohol Use and Abuse: The Social and Health Effects](#), 198th General Assembly (1986), PDS order #500-87-001

[Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/peacemaking.pdf), 192nd General Assembly (1980), <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/peacemaking.pdf>, PDS order #OGA-88-047

Resources Available to Help Teach Children of All Ages About Sexuality

God's Gift of Sexuality: A Study for Young People in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Leader's Guide, PDS order # 096210

God's Gift of Sexuality: A Study for Young People in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Parents' Book, PDS order #096213

God's Gift of Sexuality: A Study for Young People in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Older Youth Guide, PDS order #096212

God's Gift of Sexuality: A Study for Young People in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Younger Youth Guide, PDS order #096211

God's Plan for Growing Up Amazing Stuff (grades 4–6), PDS order #064003

God's Plan for Growing Up: Helping Your Child Learn about "God's Plan for Growing Up" Parents' Guide, PDS order #064004

God's Plan for Growing Up: Wonderfully Made (grades 2-4), PDS order #064002

In God's Image, PDS order #064008

God's Plan for Growing Up: Leader's Guide, PDS order #064001

*Resources listed with PDS order #s may be purchased from the Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS), 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396, or by calling 1-800-524-2612.

Closing Prayer

Eternal God,
you call us to ventures
of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Book of Common Worship, p. 501)

~Notes~

Appendix One

**Transforming Families*’ Recommendations (Selective) with Resources for Congregations’ Ministry with Families

The Recommendations of the *Transforming Families* report are in bold type. Explore the resources and ideas for implementing them in the regular type (those with blue lettering have hyperlinks to online resources). Please contact the PC(USA)’s Office of Family and Intergenerational Ministries for the most current resources (100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202, Telephone: 888-728-7228 ext. 8013) Email: mmiller@ctr.pcusa.org Web site: <http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/> .

Please note that Appendix A of *Transforming Families* is an excellent annotated bibliography of “Suggested Resources for Ministries with Families by the Congregational Ministries Division, PC(USA)’s Office of Family and Single Adult Ministries.” Study participants are encouraged to borrow or buy these resources for their local churches. Many of these resources and those mentioned below are available from Presbytery/Interfaith Resource Centers; see the online directory: <http://www.pcusa.org/resourcecenters/directory.htm> .

“a. That all church members and their families seek to embody biblical and confessional teachings about God’s intentions for families

“(1) by practicing family-strengthening virtues and habits in their own lives;” (p. 12).

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s [Christian Family Week 2005](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/) <<http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/index.htm>> online resources include [Practices for Living Out Christ’s Presence in the Family](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/practices.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/practices.htm>> , which are based on *Growing in the Life of Christian Faith* <<http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/growing.pdf>> recommended to the church for information and study by the PC(USA)’s 201st General Assembly (1989). The Christian Family Week 2005 resource includes [Living the Practices: Ideas for Families](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/living.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/living.htm>> and [Christian Family Week and Beyond: Resources for the Practices](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/resources.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/christianfamilyweek/2005/resources.htm>>.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Office of Spiritual Formation has a [web page](http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/disciplines.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/disciplines.htm>> of three different books’ lists of spiritual practices that can be adapted for families.

Getting it Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family, and Work by Carol A. Wehrheim (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002) is a helpful book by a Presbyterian Christian educator.

[Nurturing Faith through Life Transitions](http://www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/lifetransitions) <http://www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/lifetransitions> is an excellent collection of brief online articles on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s web site.

“(2) by extending the bonds of kinship beyond their own marital-biological families; and” (p. 12).

Invite singles, couples, grandparents, parents, and children to join your family for times of worship, learning, fellowship, and service.

“(3) by undertaking at least one family-extending relationship, such as being mentors, adoptive grandparents, foster parents, big brothers/sisters, and other programs” (p. 12).

[National Mentoring Partnership](http://www.mentoring.org/) <<http://www.mentoring.org/>> is an online clearinghouse about mentoring and opportunities for mentoring in communities.

Presbyterians Today magazine’s December 2002 did a cover story [The Word Became Flesh: Adoption Puts a Human Face on God’s Love](http://www.pcusa.org/today/cover/dec02/cover.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/today/cover/dec02/cover.htm>> that is available online.

[Ways to Affirm Adoption in Your Congregation](http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/newsletter/affirmadoption.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/familyandsingle/newsletter/affirmadoption.htm>> is a helpful online resource from the PC(USA) Office on Family and Single Adult Ministries.

Nurturing the Children of God: The Call to Foster Parenting and Adoption, by Lois Rifner, clinical child psychologist and President of the Presbyterian Health and Welfare Association (PHEWA). Published by Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO). Call 1-800-524-2612 to order; \$6; item [PDS order #72-650-00-001](#)

Presbyterians Pro-Life have a number of [online resources](#) <<http://www.ppl.org/adoptcor.html>> (worship bulletin inserts, a poster, articles, a church packet “God Gives Us Life Through Adoption,” and links).

Big Brothers/Sisters have a helpful [web site](#) <<http://www.bbbsa.org>> .

“b. (1) Commit themselves to a program of comprehensive support for loving, lasting, egalitarian marriages. [This program might include marriage and parenting education, use of an intensive pre-marital inventory that challenges couples to examine their relationships, marriage mentoring and marriage enrichment events, readily accessible counseling during marital crises, and connections to divorce recovery groups. All of these kinds of support need to be available to all family groupings including single parents, with the necessary adaptations to the circumstances of each.]” (p. 12).

[Marriage Enrichment Program Evaluation](#) <<http://www.fmef.org/>> by Judith Balswick and Jack Balswick is a helpful overview on the web site of Louisville Seminary’s *Family Ministry* journal.

Growing in Marriage: Experiences in Marriage Enrichment for Use in Congregations by Trudy and Del Vander Haar is a PC(USA) resource that assists pastors and leaders in ministry to married couples. Offers complete suggestions for leading courses and includes a copy of all participants’ worksheets. PDS order #092005

Family Living in Pastoral Perspective book series edited by Herbert Anderson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press) is an excellent collection (see the titles in Appendix A of *Transforming Families*). These books should be donated to every church and public library.

Active Parenting <<http://www.activeparenting.com/>> offers video-based courses for the parents of [preschoolers](#), [elementary school age children](#), and [teens](#). A [church guide](#) for very popular *Active Parenting Now* for the parents of children ages 6–12 was written by three Presbyterians. These resources can be ordered on an examination basis.

[Prepare/Enrich](#) <<http://www.lifeinnovations.com/>> offers an excellent pre-marital inventory for couples that is used by many pastors and counselors. A [training program](#) <<http://www.lifeinnovations.com/>> for marriage mentors is offered by Prepare/Enrich.

Starting Again: A Divorce Recovery Program by Sandra Scott [United Methodist Church’s Discipleship Resources (800) 685-4370] can be used individually or as a group.

[Making Marriage Last](#) <<http://www.pcusa.org/today/archive/features/feat0008.htm>> was the August 2000 cover story of *Presbyterians Today* magazine with stories of how different congregations are supporting marriages with the list of these helpful organizations that offer many resources:

Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, L.L.C.; 5310 Belt Road, N.W. Washington, DC 20015-1961 Tel. (202) 362-3332 www.smartmarriages.com

Marriage Savers
9311 Harrington Drive Potomac, MD 20854 Tel. (301) 469-5870
www.marriagesavers.org

National Marriage Project
25 Bishop Place New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1181 Tel. (732) 932-2722
marriage.rutgers.edu

Presbyterian Marriage Encounter (PME) (Presbyterian Expression of Worldwide Marriage Encounter)

For local contacts and information: Tel. 888-763-3263 www.presby-me.org

“(2) Designate committees or individuals to review the congregation’s programs and practices, with a view to making them more family-friendly. [Questions to be asked include: Do the programs and practices welcome all families and singles, or do they implicitly exclude some? Do they tend to separate family members or bring them together? Do they make it easier or harder for families to spend time together at home?]” (p. 12).

Forming Ministries with Families: A Planning Guide for Congregations (Louisville: Office of Family and Single Adult Ministries, 2004, PDS order #70-250-03-209. This excellent guide is ideal for helping congregation plan ministries with families in their churches and communities. Stories of PC(USA) congregations, studies of biblical families, and helpful resource pages such as a planning grid, resource list, and commissioning service are included.

Nurturing Faith in Families: 425 Creative Ideas for Family Ministry, Jolene L. Roehlkepartain, (Abingdon Press, 2002) Roehlkepartain has a gift for looking at the latest research related to children and youth and then offering very practical ideas for families and churches.

A New Day for Family Ministry by Richard P. Olsen and Joe H. Leonard Jr. (The Alban Institute, 1996). With information about modern families and how they are changing, this book addresses how congregations can adapt to meet these needs.

“c. That presbyteries, clusters of churches within presbyteries, or particular congregations consider approaching local church bodies of other denominations about the possibility of joining in a community marriage policy consistent with the values affirmed in this policy statement and in community efforts on behalf of those fleeing domestic violence and abuse. [Such policies would help churches of different denominations in common support for marriage and family life. Such policies should not detract from ministries to single parents and other forms of families undertaken by particular congregations or groups of congregations.]” (p. 13).

Marriage Savers (9311 Harrington Drive, Potomac, MD 20854, Telephone: (301) 469-5870, <www.marriagesavers.org>) has been helping many churches and communities develop local marriage policy statements.

“d. That presbyteries and synods supply their churches with information on area organizations that deliver education on marriage, parenting, and singleness; hold marriage and family enrichment events; offer marital and family counseling; assist people needing refuge from family oppression; sponsor divorce recovery programs; and facilitate adoption and family-extending relationships” (p. 13).

See above mentioned resources as well as the following:

American Association of Pastoral Counselors (9504A Lee Highway, Fairfax, Virginia 22031-2303, Telephone: 703-385-6967, E-Mail: info@aapc.org Web site: <<http://www.aapc.org/>>) has an online directory of certified pastoral counselors.

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (112 South Alfred Street; Alexandria, VA 22314-3061 Telephone: (703) 838-9808, Email: central@aamft.org Web site: <http://www.aamft.org/index_nm.asp>) has an online directory of certified marriage and family therapists.

Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202, Telephone: 888-728-7228 ext. 5800, Email: ntroy@ctr.pcusa.org Web site: <<http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.htm>>.

Faith Trust Institute (formerly Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence) offers many resources for congregation wanting to develop programs assist people who are victims of domestic abuse. 2400 N 45th Street #10, Seattle, WA 98103 Telephone: (206) 634-1903, Email: info@faithtrustinstitute.org Web site: <<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>>.

National Domestic Violence Hotline <<http://www.ndvh.org/>> 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) 1-800-787-3224 (TDD) is the national organization for people in crisis.

“h. That synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians in their own lives, occupations, and communities urge employers to offer more flexible work hours; more paid leave for the care of dependent persons and child-related activities; health insurance for all family members; telecommuting options; more possibilities for part-time jobs with prorated wages and benefits; family-supporting wages for all workers; and more available, affordable, and flexible child-care programs” (p. 13).

PC(USA) Washington Office has a “Women & Families Issues Network” (100 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002. Telephone: 202-543-1126) <<http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/wf.htm>>.

“i. That General Assembly entities, synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians “bring the church’s influence to bear so that the media will act to strengthen moral values.” Inaccurate and demeaning pictures of family life, which encourage materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism, should be contested. More attention should be paid to the nobler sides of singleness, marriage, parenting, adoption, and other family-extending relationships” (p. 13).

The PC(USA)’s [Electronic Great Awakening](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/aboutus.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/ega/aboutus.htm>> provides resources for families on how to become faith-empowered critics of the media culture including [movies](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/movies.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/ega/movies.htm>> [TV](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/tv.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/ega/tv.htm>>, [music](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/music.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/ega/music.htm>>, [Internet](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/internet.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/ega/internet.htm>>, and [news](http://www.pcusa.org/ega/news.htm) <<http://www.pcusa.org/ega/news.htm>>.

“j. That the 216th General Assembly (2004) urge synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians to advocate for local, state, and federal legislation that might strengthen family life ...” (p. 13).

PC(USA) Washington Office has a “Women & Families Issues Network”:
<<http://www.pcusa.org/washington/issuenet/wf.htm>>.

The Presbyterian Hunger Program promotes the work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families. 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202 • ph: 410-547-6600 Web site: <<http://www.aecf.org/>>.

Presbyterian Urban Ministries Office promotes the work of National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) 1012 Fourteenth Street NW, Suite 610, Washington, D.C. 20005 202/662-1530; Fax 202/393-1973; Email: info@nlihc.org Web site: <http://www.nlihc.org/about/index.htm> *Out of Reach* <<http://www.nlihc.org/oor2004/>> is NLIHC’s annual report on housing affordability in every jurisdiction in the country. NLIHC reports that the typical worker must earn at least \$15.37 a hour, nearly three times the federal minimum wage, to be able to rent a two-bedroom apartment. More than a quarter of our population earns less than \$10 an hour. In only four of the nation’s 3,066 counties could a full-time worker making the federal minimum wage afford a typical one-bedroom apartment.

****Disclaimer***

The resources selected for inclusion in this study guide’s Appendix One represent a diverse group of programs and organizations currently addressing issues of concerns related to families. These programs and organizations were included in this document because they provide services consistent with the values affirmed in the policy statement on *Transforming Families*, which may be helpful to local presbyteries, congregations, and individuals.

Appendix Two

A hymn celebrating God's gift of families

You Formed Us in Your Image, Lord

GREENSLEEVES 8.7.8.7 with refrain (Presbyterian Hymnal, # 53)

You formed us in your image, Lord; You call us your own children.
In you, each one is loved, adored—Unique among the millions.
Bless, Lord, the families Who know the joy: Christ claims and frees!
Bless, too, the ones who weep, Forgetting that you love them.

You made our homes to honor you With love the strong foundation.
In serving God and neighbor too, We find our life's vocation.
Bless families large and small Who love and serve you when you call.
Bless, too, the ones who fear— Whose trust and love are shattered.

Christ loved and honored family, Yet showed us what is greater.
He taught a higher loyalty To God our good Creator.
Bless, Lord, the ones who long To build up homes where faith is strong.
Bless children, women, men Who risk to serve your kingdom.

In home and church our faith is formed; We learn your love and caring.
From here we're called to face the storm, Your love and justice bearing.
Each day your Spirit sends! We go to strangers, neighbors, friends.
Peace, justice, joy we bring To all your human family.

Biblical texts: Genesis 1:26–27; Galatians 3:26–27, 5:1; Acts 16:30–34; Ephesians 4:15; Mark 3:32–35; Matthew 6:33; 2 Timothy 1:5; and Acts 2.

Tune: English ballad, 16th century. Arr. *Christmas Carols New and Old*, 1871. (“What Child Is This”)

Text: Copyright © 2004 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved. This hymn was inspired by the *Transforming Families* report approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This report is available online at www.pcusa.org/oga/publications.htm#reso.

Appendix Three

Information for Congregational Newsletters, Worship Bulletins, and Web Sites

Pages 77–78 are designed to help congregations publicize the *Transforming Families* report; this information can be used as a worship bulletin insert, an article in a congregational newsletter, or as information for a congregational web site.

The first page, *Presbyterian Report on Transforming Families*, can be printed on its own as a half-sheet insert for a worship bulletin or as one full page for a church newsletter.

The second page, *A Vision of Transforming Families*, is designed to be an optional second full page for a church newsletter that could be printed on the other side of the *Presbyterian Report on Transforming Families*.

This information can be used at any time by a congregation, but ideally would be used in publicizing a group that is planning to discuss and act on the General Assembly report using its study and action guide.

This material could also be used in May when Presbyterian churches celebrate Christian Family Week (starting on the second Sunday in May that is traditionally Mothers' Day).

The information could also be posted on a congregation's web site with links to the online posting of the General Assembly report on *Transforming Families* and some of the many hyperlinks to the online resources suggested in the report's study and action guide. The congregation's use of this material on its web site would make it easily available to its members and would also serve as a witness to visitors about the congregation's concern for families.

Presbyterian Report on Transforming Families

One concern that all congregations have is caring for families. After seven years of study, discussions, and revisions, the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved a major report titled *Transforming Families*. The report's introduction explains that the "209th General Assembly (1997) called for an examination of changing families and social structures that support families, focusing especially on their effects on children, in order to develop principles and recommendations to strengthen the church's ministry to contemporary families in both the church and society in the 21st century..."

"The resulting task force was to pursue its work with the understanding that there is a variety of families. Answering this call requires attention to the cultural and socioeconomic contexts of today's families, and it is of primary importance that we lift up the theological commitments that we bring to this endeavor. The church's reflection on families in contemporary society begins with theological affirmations grounded in the Bible and our Reformed confessions, is informed by the cultural and socioeconomic realities of our common life, and issues in a vision of transforming families."

The report begins with theological reflections about families; major topic headings include Loyalty to God, Christian Vocation, Marriage and the Family, Beyond the Basic Structure of Human Relationships, The Nurture of Children, Resistance and Transformation in Family Life, and Hope for the Future.

The cultural influences on families in the United States that the report addresses are materialism, consumerism, individualism and hedonism. The report also looks at social and economic contexts: trends in marriage and divorce (especially its impact on children), stepfamilies, non-marital births (including teen birth rates), same-sex families, the impact of Race/Ethnicity and Economic Location, economic inequality. The Census Bureau data is used to show changes in the past thirty years: Married couple with own children 1970: 40.3% 2000: 24.1%; Single mothers (children under 18) 1970: 4.6% 2000: 7.0%; Men living alone 1970: 5.6% 2000: 10.7%; Women living alone 1970: 11.5% 2000: 14.8%; Changing Family Forms (% of all families with own children): Married couple 1970: 87% 2000: 69%; Single mother 1970: 12% 2000: 26% and Single father 1970: 1% 2000: 5%.

Transforming Families offers a wide range of recommendations for congregations to do ministry with and for families in the church and society, in order "that all church members and their families seek to embody biblical and confessional teachings about God's intentions for families

- (1) by practicing family-strengthening virtues and habits in their own lives;
- (2) by extending the bonds of kinship beyond their own marital-biological families; and
- (3) by undertaking at least one family-extending relationship, such as being mentors, adoptive grandparents, foster parents, big brothers/sisters, and other programs.

Congregations are encouraged to commit themselves to programs that support loving, lasting, egalitarian marriages. They are invited to consider working ecumenically in their communities to develop community marriage policies consistent with the values in the policy statement and in community efforts on behalf of those fleeing domestic violence and abuse.

Synods, presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians are encouraged in their own lives, occupations, and communities to "urge employers to offer more flexible work hours; more paid leave for the care of dependent persons and child-related activities; health insurance for all family members; telecommuting options; more possibilities for part-time jobs with prorated wages and benefits; family-supporting wages for all workers; and more available, affordable, and flexible child-care programs"

Presbyterians are also encouraged to "bring the church's influence to bear so that the media will act to strengthen moral values." Inaccurate and demeaning pictures of family life, which encourage materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism, should be contested. More attention should be paid to the nobler sides of singleness, marriage, parenting, adoption, and other family-extending relationships.

The church is urged to advocate for local, state, and federal legislation that might strengthen family life.

A Study and Action Guide has been published with the *Transforming Families* that offers a wide range of print and online resources to help congregations in their ministries with and for families (OGA-04-093). The *Transforming Families* report with its Study and Action Guide is also available online at www.pcusa.org/oga/publications.htm.

A Vision of Transforming Families

The *Transforming Families* report of the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) lifts up the following vision: “The church affirms a vision of families being transformed by God and being agents of transformation in society. We envision a church and society in which persons freely devote themselves to building up one another within their families, and families freely devote themselves to the will of God and the welfare of others.

We envision a church and society that welcomes and nurtures all persons, regardless of their family circumstances. Both single persons and married persons should be respected and honored, in the community and in the family of God. We look toward a society in which all members of the family are valued equally, with special attention to children and others who are more vulnerable. The church rejects attitudes or practices that value some more highly than others based on gender, age, class, ability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or any outward condition. It opposes the forces of racism and sexism, which cause great suffering in families and widespread blindness to that suffering.

We envision a society in which families assume primary responsibility for the care and guidance of their own members, supported by other citizens, members of faith communities, and social institutions. It is preferable that those institutions with the best combination of knowledge of the family situation and adequate resources respond to family needs.

We envision a society in which marriage is honored by the church and society as a basic social relationship of unique importance. The church commits itself and calls others to make coordinated efforts to prepare couples for marriage, assist couples in their marriages, reconcile their conflicts where possible, avoid divorce in non-destructive marriages, and seek healthy outcomes for all who experience divorce.

We envision a society in which the well-being of every child is nurtured and supported. In light of sociological data indicating that a loving, lasting marriage of the mother and father is the most successful (90 percent) context for children’s flourishing and that children who experience divorce flourish in a smaller, though significant, majority of cases (75 -80 percent), the church urges both parents or guardians to be active in the nurture of children and recognizes the important assistance that congregations and other family support systems can offer. The church commits itself to give special attention to those families where the well-being of children is most at risk. With support from church and other institutions, even at risk families can successfully move through difficult times and their children can grow into healthy adulthood.

We envision a society in which adoption is honored, supported, and promoted. A variety of other family and family-extending relationships should also be encouraged, insofar as they fulfill the functions of family in a way that demonstrates and nurtures godly character.

We envision a society in which families have sufficient time together at home to nurture relationships, to care for children and other dependents, and to worship God together. Likewise, families need access to sufficient economic resources to support the household and care for dependents. Universal health-care coverage is imperative for family well-being. We reaffirm the call of the 207th General Assembly (1995), in its policy statement “God’s Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community, and Christian Vocation,” that “all conditions of paid employment, including compensation and working conditions, should sustain and nurture the dignity of individuals, the well-being of households and families, the social cohesiveness of communities, and the integrity of the global environment.”

We envision a society in which families, faith communities, and other institutions work together to promote virtues and habits that make for healthy and stable families and communities. Coordinated efforts must be deployed against violence and abuse in the home, which shatter the bonds of family trust. We reaffirm the call of the 213th General Assembly (2001), in “Turn Mourning into Dancing! A Policy Statement on Healing Domestic Violence,” to “hear the voices of victims and survivors and respond to their calls with the following goals: first, to protect the victims from further abuse; second, stop the abuser’s violence and hold the abuser accountable; and third, restore the family relationship if possible or mourn the loss of relationship.”

The church, along with other political, social and economic institutions, should cooperate to reduce the influence of powers that exalt family-distorting values of materialism, consumerism, individualism, and hedonism. We reaffirm the call of the 204th General Assembly (1992), in its policy statement “Pornography: Far from the Song of Songs,” for Presbyterians to “oppose pornography as defined by the report and support constitutional protection of free speech.”

This vision of transforming families presents a challenge to the church at every level. We call on the whole church to transform its own life in relation to the well-being of families and to renew its ministries to families and single adults. When Christian vocation is understood to encompass our lives together in families and our concern for the well-being of all families, it follows that the church must look to other social institutions to play important roles as well. This challenge of strengthening and transforming families will require wide collaboration and a multitude of co-laborers. The task is daunting, but the power of God can make more of our imperfect efforts than we could ask or think.