

# Ministering to Nontraditional Family Units: Discerning who is not served and how to reach out to them

The Bridge Builders - *Psalm 145:4*

*One generation shall laud Your works to another and shall  
declare Your mighty acts.*

LUMC Team 4 -

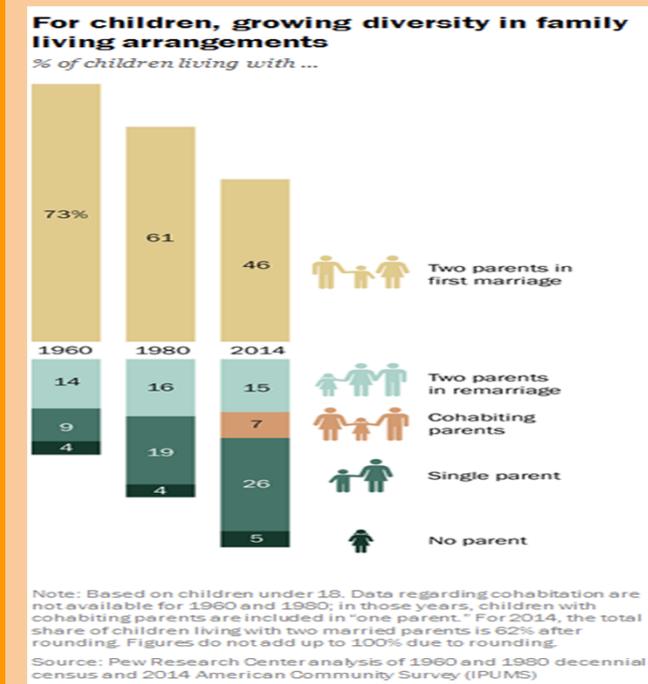
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# Introduction

In today's modern age there is no dominant family form. Two parent family households are on the decline while divorce, remarriage and cohabitation are on the rise. Along with the changes to family form there are changes to gender role assignments. One in four women are now the breadwinners in the home. With the legalization of same sex marriage you will also see 2 dad and 2 mom homes.

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>

This constant state of change in the fabric of the family requires the church to reevaluate the language it uses in marketing, and serving people groups. Opportunities for connection, learning, and service must be conveyed in language that is irrespective of familial status, and avoids isolating people. Everyone wants and needs to be in community so churches should regularly survey church attendance to identify groups not being served well.



## Applying a Few Strategies Can Have a Wide Impact.

- ❖ Marketing can have the unintentional effect of creating exclusivity.
- ❖ Everyone wants and needs to be in community. Our strategies are about seeing people, disciplining them, and leveraging their gifts without imposing a deficit mindset toward any non-traditional family unit.

# Who Is Not Being Served?

- ❖ Regularly evaluate and assess church attendance to address this question.
- Childless Singles
- Childless Couples
  
- Divorcees
- Blended families
- Single parents
  
- Widows and orphans
  
- Groups alienated by disagreement within church

## Providing Opportunities Irrespective of Familial Status

- ❖ Work to make at least 50% of learning opportunities to be unrelated to the life stage.
  - Avoid the “age out” dilemma (e.g., “Young Adults”) or marketing based on life circumstance (e.g., “Single Adults”).
  - This will allow people to evaluate for themselves whether or not they are still in the right place.
  - People like options. This will remove the belief that

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one must attend the “misfit class” or that there are not options available that fit their demographic.

- ❖ For groups based on life stage, ask if classes and/or groups are willing to broaden definition
  - Can a “couples class for 20s and 30s” become an “adult class for 20s and 30s”?
- ❖ Balance curriculum options
  - Example: Offer equal numbers of curriculum options that will address familial needs and general topics

## Providing Opportunities Irrespective of Familial Status

- ❖ Consider alternatives to traditional learning communities
  - Encourage ministry teams (e.g., music, volunteer, etc.) to incorporate learning activities and social activities into the work of the ministry
  - Affinity/interest groups
- ❖ Promote intergenerational opportunities for ministry
  - Example: Pray4Me--an intergenerational prayer partner ministry. Program utilizes a prayer guide and matches youth with prayer champions from each of three adult age bands.

## Providing Opportunities Irrespective of Familial Status

- Example: Mentorships
- ❖ Continue to offer special events for people based on life stages, but avoid building programs around them.
  - People in each life stage do share common experiences, such as grief, loneliness, or parenting challenges, and that should not be ignored.

## Serving Divorcees, Single Parents, and Blended Families

- ❖ All inclusive language
  - Be aware of language that can be isolating
    - Ex. “Singles’ Ministry”
  - Host special holiday gatherings to combat loneliness  
ie. Valentine’s Day/Christmas
  - Scheduling with Foresight
    - Be aware of the whole church calendar to avoid dual conflicts.
    - Kids ministry series versus one-off ideas

## Serving Divorcees, Single Parents, and Blended Families

- ❖ Leaning Into Grief Stages - what the church can do
  - Develop a mindset of “Healing and Restoration” within the church body
  - Recruit and train ministry partners
  - Identify those that have experienced death, separation, divorce, or other losses
  - Host/house Healing Ministry Formats
    - Pre-marital counseling/counseling/Marital coaching
    - Grief Share and Divorce Care
    - Celebrate Recovery
    - Healing Rooms

## Serving Divorcees, Single Parents, and Blended Families

- Ministries for individuals who are separated, in the process of divorce or living divorced.
  - Identify the needs of the separated, divorcing/divorced person
  - Introduce a ministry servant to meet with the identified individual or member to connect them to offered ministry and services
  - Provide wrap around programming relevant to addressing the identified needs like communication skills development or finance training

## The Lonely and Often Overlooked: Widows and Orphans

- ❖ Birthday Club
- ❖ Adopt a Foster Family
  - Pizza night
  - Movie night
- ❖ Big Brother/ Big Sister Mentorships
- ❖ Financial Sponsorships
  - Sports team or other extracurricular activities
    - Registrations/Memberships
    - Uniforms
    - Retreats and field trips

## Addressing Marginal Groups with Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness

It is paramount, at this time, to understand as we minister to the LGBTQI community that the vote at the GC2019 does not say that the UMC looks down on or hates LGBTQI individuals. On the contrary, it states, all are part of God's family and are in constant need of His grace and mercy. The part that seems often to get missed is that we are all sinners in need of grace and mercy. The question then is HOW do we minister to this group of people.

## Addressing Marginal Groups with Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness

- ❖ We must invite them to our churches and associated gatherings. We treat them just like we treat any other person walking into our church, and then, we wait on the Holy Spirit to guide all parties as to what the next steps are.
- ❖ Love, acceptance, and forgiveness are words that we need to once again become familiar with and put into our vocabulary when it comes to these issues. I believe these words are the key to ministering effectively to all people.

## Summary

- ❖ We must find common ground with any individual that we are attempting to minister to.
- ❖ We must love all people no matter where they are in their faith walk.
- ❖ We must accept people as they are and encourage them to actively work towards sanctification, the process of being made holy, or finding perfection in Christ.

## Summary Continued

- ❖ We must forgive people even when their beliefs do not line up with our personal beliefs.
- ❖ We must have Spiritual Partners who help us to understand that we are all broken but have been redeemed by Christ and that with time and effort through our spiritual disciplines we will all be perfected in Christ.

# Continuing the Conversation

As leaders, ask within your church..

- ❖ Who is not plugged in outside of worship? Is it because we are presenting programs in a way that excludes them?
- ❖ Do we honor individuals in the language we use?
- ❖ Are we seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit in our relationships so that we will see the needs of those within our reach?