

Lessons Gleaned for the Church and Family from Covid-19

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<https://www.concordiacenterforthefamily.org/>

Narrator: Rev. Dr. Rob Reinow, Visionary Family

Topic: What are lessons gleaned about families and the church from weeks of sheltering at home? Hear, long-time church worker in children's, youth and family ministry and retired professor in children's, youth and family studies point out key learnings for the church to ponder.

1. What can the church learn from Covid-19 about the church helping Christian families thrive for the sake of the Gospel?

Covid-19 has highlighted the vital and important role families have in our society. All of a sudden, an unseen predator, a virus, forced us to stay home. This took place as front-line workers saved lives in hospitals, food chain workers provided food for our tables, truckers brought good to our stores, civil servants cared for citizens and teachers and professors kept delivering on-line education.

Christian parents, many working from home, became not only teacher, baker, coach, music director, nurse but most importantly, for the Christian home, parents became the faith shapers. What I've been writing about, teaching, speaking and promoting for the last 25 years, God did overnight. He squarely, put parents as the primary teachers of faith and life at home, and the church as their partners.

Learning: I hope pastors and church workers have come to realize or remember that the institution called family, that God created, has an important role in the life of the church. When done right, this can impact the communities we live in for Christ.

I am sure church workers have seen how Covid-19 has impacted family relationship. Staying at home has strengthened some and stressed out others.

Rob questions Ben: How would you suggest Church workers approach family relationship issues during Covid-19?

I would ask them the following questions in the order listed:

- How has Covid-19 and the stay-at-home order affected
 - your children? How can I pray for you?
 - your parents and grandparents? How can I pray for you?
 - your neighbors? How can I pray for you?

- your relationship with your spouse? How can I pray for you?

Learning: Secondly, I hope we have learned or remembered the important role the church has in the life of families. Our job is to walk with families and equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to weather the inevitable storms of life.

Rob asks Ben: Ben, could you share some ideas for celebrating stay at home heroes?

The church needs to celebrate the front-line worker, but also the stay at home heroes. Maybe the church restarts or continues:

- With a Celebration Service for stay at home heroes.
 - Handing out “did my best” mom and dad awards
 - We survived as a couple award
 - We cared for our aging parents award
 - Teacher at home award
 - A “Stay Safe at Home” teacher of the faith award

Idea: As we celebrate stay-at-home heroes we plant the seed that the church has decided to better equip families in case this happens again.

- Followed by listening posts, to hear their covid-19 family stories
 - Maybe you offer a family Covid-19 story time as part of worship
 - Or capture video stories and share them on-line
- We need to celebrate new beginnings as well as heal family brokenness
 - Should we develop and show families how to confess when they have hurt one another and help them forgive each other
- Then, in the fall, if we are asked to “Stay Safe at Home” again, we need to make sure our homes are prepared for at home family worship and discipleship

Learning: I hope Covid-19 has taught pastors and church workers that if we want to have “thriving” and growing churches, we need “thriving” and growing Christian families. The family is the engine of exponential growth for the church. Therefore, it makes sense that churches are growing exponentially, because they believe family discipleship is key to kingdom growth and are equipping families for their discipleship role. Or, they are exponentially dying because they don’t believe family discipleship is Biblical.

2. What specific advice would you give to church workers to help Christians families thrive for the sake of the Gospel?

You can’t do what you don’t know.

- The vast majority of pastors and church workers have had little training in family life education and ministry. We have been trained in children’s ministry, youth ministry, men and women’s ministry, worship, discipleship, evangelism, stewardship but not family ministry.
- Here is my definition of Family Ministry:
 - Family Ministry equips individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to form positive relationships and healthy Christian marriages and families, who come to know and apply a Biblical, confessional, and theoretical perspective to forming Christian marriages and families; in order to build strengths and avert problems while recognizing the uniqueness of people and cultures. (Ben Freudenburg)

Until I did the research for my book *The Family Friendly Church*, I didn’t realize how much I didn’t know about helping marriages and families thrive. So, I went to get a Masters Degree in family life education at Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska. This prepared me to do family ministry in the church, to create the family life education academic program at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, and help establish the on-line Master’s program at Concordia University in Mequon, Wisconsin. See, you can’t do what you don’t know. That’s why in the U.S., in Africa and Asia I teach a class called FAM101 for pastors.

You don’t have to start with academic training. I would suggest church workers start by reading books, and if married, reading them with your spouse.

1. Rev. Dr. Rob Rienow’s, *Visionary Parenting – Limited Church: Unlimited Kingdom, Uniting Church and Family in the Great Commission*
<https://visionaryfam.com/storefront/>
2. Rev. Dr. Todd Bierman’s, *Handing Out Life*
<https://lifeingodsway.com/sample-page>
3. Rev. Dr. Scott Turansky and JoAnne Miller’s, *Parenting is Heart Work*
<https://lifeingodsway.com/sample-page>
4. Dr. PC Mathew’s, *Missional Family*
<https://urbanindia.org/>
https://www.rightnowmedia.org/home-2?utm_medium=adwords&utm_campaign=brand-kw&utm_source=google&utm_content=374546669887&utm_term=r
5. Clint and Penny Bragg’s, *Your Marriage God’s Mission*
<https://www.inverseministries.org/our-material>
6. Then dust off *The Family Friendly Church* and reread it
7. How about going to a D-6 Conference

3. Sometimes church workers become so overwhelmed with caring for other families that they end up neglecting their own family. Can you talk about that?

Stay home and minister to your own family first. I'll never forget when you, Rob, were at a D-6 conference talking about small group ministry and you said, "If you want authentic Christian Community, go home." You weren't saying, don't do small group ministry at church. Right? And when I say, stay home, I don't mean neglect your work at church, but make sure you have your priorities right. In other words, make sure your wife and family know you value them above your "work" at church - by the way you live out your life with them. (Don't miss Pastor Todd's webinar on Thursday, June 18 at 10:00 A.M. He nails what scripture says about relational priorities.)

Covid-19 has forced church workers to be home with their spouse and family. I pray this will change the way church workers balance work at church and being with family.

5 Covid-19 learning for Pastors and Church workers

For Pastors and Church worker families:

- Our marriages and families are our first priority after-Christ
- We must practice home discipleship as a model for our members,-and yes, it will take our time, but it is our work. We must keep our marriage healthy and teach faith at home as a priority.
- We must keep learning about marriage and family education. Attending training classes in marriage and family doesn't mean I've somehow failed, rather it is required to make sure our marriage and family thrives. This is part of the job.

For Your Congregations:

- Your church is important and has a significant role in providing support and training for families to be all God expects them to be.
- Your church has a great opportunity to help people regain or maybe stay in control of their families.

4. How can organizations like the Concordia Center for the Family help Pastors and Church Workers help families thrive for the sake of the Gospel?

This is a Kairos moment for the church. Many of us in family ministry wished the church could have a "start over" so we didn't have to fight the old paradigms **we** were responsible for building. Well, it's here. Covid-19 has provided an opportunity for a "start over." Will families, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, want the church to rethink how it supports them in being a Christian family?

Will they want the church to help them enrich their marriages, equip them as parents of the next generation and help them be the teachers and influences of the faith at home?

Organizations like CCF, Visionary Family, Family Time, Biblical Center for Parenting, Faith Legacy Marriage God's Way, Inverse Ministries and many more provide pastors and church workers

working in family ministry with a community to support and help each other master their ministry to families.

Remember, the conferences hosted by Group Publishing in Youth Ministry and Children's Ministry Conferences, or Jim Burns and Doug Field's Youth specialty Conferences.? Sitting at the feet of our heroes, rubbing elbows with those struggling just like us, talking and laughing and dreaming new dreams and visions.

Here is my challenge. I challenge those presenting and those listening, to come together with their spouses, if married, for a face to face conversation, not a planned conference, but engage in conversations about how we move the church forward in partnering with families for the sake of the Gospel. **A Family Matters Moment.**