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Garland book contains stories of family faith

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WACO—In today's world, where families face many uncertainties, what resource is better for understanding and dealing with challenges than the stories of other families who have had similar experiences?

Families with a strong faith connection and spiritual dimension seem to weather the storms of life in a particularly positive way, experts say.

And what about the experiences at the opposite end of the spectrum—times of joy and happiness? Just as families of faith weather storms more positively, they also reportedly meet times of joy and happiness with deeper rejoicing together.

In "Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families," author Diana Garland interviewed 110 "ordinary" families and used their stories to illustrate how faith shapes the way families live.

The stories are representative of all kinds of families—traditional nuclear, single-parent, remarried, blended, single adults and older adults who are both married and widowed. Their stories illustrate how the Bible and the overarching Christian story become the backdrop for living out faith in

ordinary, daily lives, observed Garland, director of Baylor University's School of Social Work.

She encourages families within congregations to connect their own experiences with what is holy and to share these stories within the community of faith, thereby offering strength for the journey to other families.

"My hope is that this book will encourage congregations to become communities for the telling of family stories—stories of family struggles and resilience and redemption, stories of family faith," she says.

The book offers practical suggestions about how congregations can nurture the faith life of families. It is designed to give families the tools for living their faith in daily life and developing their own "sacred" stories, strengthening not only their own lives, but also the lives of others to whom they tell their story.

Rather than adding new church programs, this type of nurture means looking at what the congregation is already doing from the perspective of the impact it has on individuals and families.

Garland suggests that churches:

- Look for family relationships beyond the "of-course" family.
- Seek the strength of all families.
- Encourage families to develop their own faith practices.
- Provide ways for families to serve and learn together at church.
- Offer opportunities for families to minister together.

- ✘ Use church conflicts as opportunities.
- ✘ Show how families can eat together or simply be together.
- ✘ Be a place that evokes and listens to family stories of faith.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.