

Church: Help families cope

March 17, 2006

Posted: 3/17/06

Church: Help families cope

Many people bring their family to church with one question in mind, said Bo Prosser of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship—“Can your Jesus help us cope?”

“Our job as ministers is to help people be connected enough that God can work in their lives,” Prosser said at Family Ministry 101, a recent training event at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas.

Prosser, CBF coordinator of congregational life, and Diana Garland, dean of Baylor University’s School of Social Work, led the one-day workshop. Family Ministry 101 is one of three workshops being offered in the newly launched Family Ministry Academy, a continuing education opportunity provided by the School of Social Work’s Center for Family and Community Ministries.

Churches may need to examine their schedules to ensure they are drawing families together instead of pulling them apart, Garland said.

Age-graded Sunday school classes and class names that label members as single adults or place them in other categories may need to be revisited, she added.

Garland, author of *Family Ministry and Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*, described family as a set of relationships that endures over a lifetime despite life’s separations. Through families, people attempt to meet

their needs for belonging and attachment, meet those needs in others and share life purposes, help and resources.

Belonging is a sense of entitlement—“your right to come into my home and get the cereal without asking,” she explained. Attachment is “the people we want with us when life is awful, even if they can’t do anything, can’t fix it,” she said.

Both Garland and Prosser stressed the importance of sharing stories and memories as the way to help nurture belonging and attachment. In the research that led to her book, *Sacred Stories*, Garland interviewed 110 families across the nation and across denominations.

“It was in the stories that I heard the real faith, not Sunday school-answer faith,” she said.

Garland urged church leaders to focus on families’ strengths, to “see families less as ‘problems to be fixed’ and more as mysteries rooted in God’s image and through whom God works,” she said.

For more information about the Family Ministry Academy and future workshops, contact the Center for Family and Community Ministries at (254) 710-4417 or visit www.family-ministry.org.

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.