

## THE "WE ARE FAMILY" STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

In our society today the nuclear family is less and less the norm. The traditional family structure and support system has broken down again and again. Family life has become more and more fractured and fragmented. These realities are reflected in the lesser amount of time families spend together, the decrease in quality relationships between parents and children, the breakdown of more and more marriages and the breakup of an increasing number of homes.

Unless your church is different from most, the modern family described above is heavily represented within your membership. This family may even constitute a majority of your congregation. Undoubtedly, many of your older members — who were raised in a traditional family and established one of their own — now find themselves isolated and alone. Following the death of their spouse, they rarely move in with a daughter or son and her/his family. More than a few members of most churches — whether young, middle aged or old — are either separated physically from their blood kin or **feel** separated from them.

Where, then, are these members to **find** family? Where are they to **be** family to others? Is there a place in our society where these persons can receive and give care, nurture and encouragement for which the traditional family has been known?

Is not God calling your church to be the place where these physically and emotionally separated persons can find family and be family? The fact that we often refer to the church as "our church **family**" suggests that we understand the importance of helping our members think of themselves as a family and function as a family.

When a church begins to function as a family, it serves as a support system for persons whose own family support system has fallen apart or begun to disintegrate. Acting as surrogate fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, the church supports these members with love, helps them grow in the Christian faith, and supports their efforts to live responsible lives. In other words, it becomes family to persons of all ages who are in need of family, often even desperate for family!

The "We Are Family" program helps pastors and lay officials clarify for the congregation the sense in which it is called to be a family ... and function as a family. The program assumes that persons will respond most positively to the invitation to support the church's present and planned ministries when they themselves feel strongly supported, as in a healthy family. Indeed, this assumption has been proven to be the case time and again in churches manifesting healthy family qualities. Their members participate with high energy and deep loyalty, sharing freely of their time, talents, and possessions. Unless your church has already achieved the ultimate in family-like togetherness and functioning, the "We Are Family" program can help you move to a higher level.

## THE CHURCH FAMILY ALBUM

In the weeks leading up to your solicitation of stewardship responses, a key worker called the Album Compiler supervises the creation of a "Church Family Album" to be circulated among your members. This Album, which will carry Stewardship Response Cards, is divided into sections presenting your church's past, present, and future. The first section features the history of your church, including the faithful stewardship of members through the years. The second section features your church's present programs and ministries. And the third section features your church's dreams and plans for the coming year.

An Album Planning Committee, chaired by the Album Compiler, decides on the overall design of the Album. Members of this Committee include the Pastor, Finance Leader, Campaign Director, Publicity Agent, and others who may bring special insights and skills to the planning process. The Compiler recruits a photographer and layout person in the congregation, both of whom work under his/her direction. In rare cases, it may be helpful to go beyond the church membership for assistance with pictures and layouts. The Compiler is responsible for writing copy. Layouts, with copy, are shown to the Pastor and Campaign Director prior to printing and placement in the beautiful three-ring Album Binder. The Church Family Album provides a unique opportunity to communicate with your members in ways that will inform and inspire them as they prepare to make their stewardship responses. **It is the heart of the "Family" program!**

## THE STEWARDSHIP RESPONSE FOLDER

The third section of the Album, whose title sheet reads OUR CHURCH'S FUTURE, ends with a Response Folder that contains Stewardship Response Cards in Enclosure Envelopes. Estimate of Giving Cards, on which members are invited to indicate their planned financial giving for the coming year, are enclosed.

The Caring & Sharing Card gives members the opportunity to indicate talents and time that they, as caring members of the church family, are willing to share with the body. These Cards are enclosed in the Envelope along with the Estimate of Giving Cards. While many churches will have other arrangements for gathering talents/time commitments, some will not and may decide to take advantage of this opportunity.

## THE CHURCH FAMILY ALBUM RELAY

On the Sunday you select, copies of the Church Family Album begin being relayed from home to home on ten-family neighborhood (geographical) Routes. Each member family will have a full day to examine, enjoy and use the Album, after which they will pass it on to the next family on the Album Route List at the front of the Binder. The Relay is overseen by Album Relay Coordinators, trained at a Breakfast Briefing on

the Sunday the Relay starts. The Relay will end two weeks after it has begun, with the Albums being turned in to the church office for processing of the Stewardship Response Cards.

## THE STRENGTHS OF THE "WE ARE FAMILY" PROGRAM

An obvious strength of this program is the theme itself. The word "family" holds diverse and powerful meanings for persons. While a number of your members have painful past and/or present experiences associated with family, all of them sense the importance of family and long for participation in a family that is supportive and life-affirming. "We Are Family" are three words that suggest your church is an inclusive place in which excluded persons can come in out of the cold ... and find a warm home atmosphere!

A second strength of the program has to do with the solicitation method used. The relay system democratizes the solicitation of stewardship responses, giving many, many members the opportunity to help with the campaign **in a way that is comfortable and rewarding for them.**

A third strength is that this solicitation method is one of **minimum** resistance due to the use of the "estimate of giving" concept as opposed to the pledge concept. While members who have refused to sign pledge cards are willing to fill in estimate cards, those who have made and paid pledges customarily treat their estimates as if these were pledges and pay them just as faithfully.

And a fourth strength is that the program incorporates a system of **total accountability** within the framework of a sound, detailed organizational structure. Key workers are held accountable by other key workers, so that all features of the program are likely to be carried out on time and in appropriate ways. Not only is each such person held accountable, but each is supported in appropriate ways.

As you explore the program and put it to work for you, it is likely that you will discover additional strengths for your particular church and situation.