Two events took place on March 11, 2011. The one most of us will remember is the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan, the catastrophic results of which are still being felt throughout that island nation. The other event drew less attention; it was the bill to legalize gay marriage in Maryland that fell short of passage after supporters failed to find enough votes to overcome Republican opposition, and because of the misgivings of some Democrats in the deeply Catholic state.

The bill to make Maryland the sixth state to allow gay marriage had already passed the Senate after language was added to keep religious groups from being forced to serve at gay weddings. The governor said he would have signed it.

This news was also important because two weeks earlier, on February 23, the Justice Department announced that President Obama now believes that the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional and he will no longer defend the 15-year-old law in federal court. DOMA, signed by President Clinton in 1996, allows states to not recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and provides a federal definition for “marriage” that excludes same-sex couples. Marc Ambinder wrote in the National Journal that the February 23rd decision, “combined with the president’s role this December in pushing Congress to repeal the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy for openly gay men and women serving in the military, suggests that the administration does not believe that the potential downside in raising a banner on a major culture issue justifies their inattention to it.”

A CBS News/New York Times poll taken in April of 2009 found that forty-two percent of Americans say same-sex couples should be allowed to legally marry; that’s up nine points from the previous month, when thirty-three percent supported legalizing same sex marriage. Two polls taken in 2010 by CNN and the Associated Press found support for allowing same-sex marriage in the United States exceeded fifty per cent for the first time. A recent poll, taken by ABC/Washington Post in March of 2011, confirms that the majority of Americans, fifty-three percent of respondents, think that same-sex marriage should be legalized, up from thirty-two percent in 2004, and Vice President Joe Biden predicts that legalized same-sex marriage is inevitable.

Fifty-three percent of respondents think same-sex marriage should be legalized.

At the same time, according to a TIME/Pew research poll released in November of 2010, forty percent of Americans believe that marriage is becoming obsolete, up from just twenty-eight percent in 1978. Stephanie Coontz writes that “as an institution that regulates people's lives, marriage is no longer the social and economic necessity it once was. People can...”
Hold Fast That Which Is Good

The mission of Family Life Professionals in the local Adventist congregation is clear. It is to foster and sustain healthy relationships among members of the church family and, by extension, among those whose lives are touched by our community outreach. It stands to reason, therefore, that the well-being of relationships within the Family Life Professional’s own family circle is paramount, for how can leaders who don’t know how to manage their own families take care of God’s church? 

Next in importance is the need for Family Life Professionals to establish and nurture harmonious relationships with the pastor and other local church leaders for, “Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?” More broadly, Family Life Professionals need to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships at all levels of church leadership in order to harness the power of networking resources.

Forging agreement is easier said than done. How can unity of thought and aspirations be achieved, given the widely differing backgrounds and perspectives of individuals within the network of Family Life Professionals?

A remarkable collection of declarations that draws together the best thinking of the church on various contentious issues is readily accessible to Family Life Professionals. While it would be presumptuous to make claims of infallibility about these statements, they can certainly serve as a starting point of conversations among members of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals about what constitutes our collective wisdom regarding thorny social issues.

From these rich resources we have selected three statements as the focus of this edition of Family Life. The first is “An Affirmation of Family.” The second, “An Affirmation of Marriage.” And the third is “Home and Family.”

Here are a few caveats to consider as we engage in a careful review of these position statements.

A pernicious temptation for those of us in leadership positions is to believe so much in our own perspectives on matters that we disregard or dismiss those consensus views of our colleagues that differ from our independent thinking. Instead of submitting to the necessary discipline of exposing our cherished ideas to the spotlight of collegial scrutiny, we find ourselves inclined to adopt a stubborn stance, to adamantly defend our personal beliefs against constructive criticism.

The opposite error is no less troublesome. This is the curse of uncritical compliance, of mindless acquiescence to expectations of the group, of doing what we do just because some authority figure says so. For many of us who feel drawn to a ministry of making a positive difference in the lives of people, the idea of doing something to cause any kind of unpleasantness within relationships is abhorrent. Consequently, peace at any price is the principle that orders our interpersonal interactions. Conflict-avoidance becomes our modus operandi. And to justify our disinclination to confront those whose beliefs and practices are out of harmony with God’s revealed directions we console ourselves with the words, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

While remaining fully committed to the unity for which Christ prayed and which was so remarkably evident in the lives of His followers on the day of Pentecost, we should remember that, “The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people, should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error.”

That said, it is no virtue or mark of intelligence to be constantly caviling, questioning, and quibbling. Sometimes scrupulosity is more our enemy than our friend. Instead, we should candidly and diligently examine the issues and advocate for healthy, spirited discussion. Then, having satisfied ourselves about the merits of the positions adopted by our Church, we have

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An Affirmation of Family

with Susan E. Murray

The Power of a Positive Marital Relationship

“God also intends that a revelation of Himself and His ways be gained from the family relationship. Marriage, with mutual love, honor, intimacy, and lifelong commitment as its fabric, mirrors the love, sanctity, closeness and permanence of the bond between Christ and His church. The training and correcting of children by their parents and the loving response of offspring to the affection shown them reflects the experience of believers as children of God. By God’s grace the family may be a powerful agency in leading its members to Christ.”

More than twenty years have passed since the adoption of this statement in 1990, but the challenges remain and have perhaps even increased. It has been said that every child is raised in a different family, meaning that individuals perceive their life in their own way and like no other. So what is a parent to do? Well, I believe every parent “needs a plan.” A plan that works for each child and that has as its foundation God’s plan for parenting. Plans that work are based on principles, and this statement from the General Conference is a principled statement.

Let’s consider the reference to the training and correcting of children. The words discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably, but they have somewhat different meanings, and certainly a different emphasis. Punishment is defined as, “an act or an instance of punishing, or severe treatment or suffering.” Discipline is “training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement.”

Let’s consider discipline as it is compared to punishment, from a principled perspective:

**Punishment** expresses power of personal authority. It is usually painful and based on retribution or revenge. It’s about what happened in the past. It is arbitrary.

**Discipline** is based on logical or natural consequences expressing the reality of the social order, the rules which must be learned in order to function adequately. It is concerned with what will happen now, the present.

**Punishment** is imposed or done to someone. The responsibility is assumed by the punisher.

Discipline is when the responsibility is assumed by the individual. It comes from within and is desired.

With **Punishment**, options for the individual are closed.

With **Discipline**, options are kept open so an individual can choose to improve their behavior.

**Punishment** is a teaching process which usually reinforces failure identity. It is essentially negative and short term without sustained personal involvement on the part of the punisher.

**Discipline** is an active teaching process involving close, sustained personal involvement. It emphasizes teaching ways to act that will result in more successful behavior.

**Punishment** involves open or concealed anger.

**Discipline** is friendly.

**Punishment** is easy or expedient.

**Discipline** can be difficult and time-consuming.

**Punishment** is about external locus of control. “I can’t do anything to change things, I give up.”

**Discipline** builds internal locus of control. “What happens to me is largely a result of the decisions I make and the effort I put forth.”

**Punishment** breaks involvement.

**Discipline** maintains involvement.

According to H. Stephen Glenn, many well-meaning parents have a false perception about the effectiveness of punishment because it seems to work; it momentarily stops the misbehavior. He identifies the Three R’s of Punishment. These are natural responses on the part of a child when living in a punitive atmosphere.

1)  Resentment. “This is unfair. I can’t trust adults.”
2)  Revenge. “They are winning now, but I’ll get even.”
3)  Retreat, in one of three extremes:
   a.  Rebellion. “I’ll do what I want and just be careful not to get caught next time. I have a right to lie and cheat under these circumstances.”
   b.  Reduced self-esteem. “I must really be a bad person who deserves to be punished. I will keep trying to please, but I’m not very good at it.”
   c.  Retirement. “I give up; I can’t win, so why try? I wish people would just leave me alone.”

Affirmation continued on page 7
eventually be dissolved. He knows that the emotional stress of their broken homes has lasting consequences, not only on the divorcing couples and their children, but on other family members, friends, the church, and society at large. Pastors and family life professionals have a duty to perform—to ensure the stability of their own families before seeking to stabilize the families of others. The “marital relationship is to reflect love, sanctity, closeness.” The challenge here is for pastors and family life professionals to practice non-malfeasance. That is to say, they must do no harm. They must ensure that their interventions and actions do not inadvertently harm their own members or people in the broader community.

“Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord.” Ellen. G. White states that, “One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached.” (AH 32) The alarming number of children from the homes of pastors and family life professionals who have left the Church is a painful reminder that failure to adequately guard and nurture children and youth can have devastating consequences. If we wish to be recognized as credible and effective leaders we must do all we can by God’s grace to strengthen our own families and the families of those within our circle of influence.

“Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it.” Unfortunately, a great number of children go to bed each night with their biological father absent from the home. Many of these children are either undereducated, or stand a great chance of dropping out of school. The ripple effect is seen daily in drug abuse, promiscuity, and general societal regression. Pastors and family life professionals must constantly seek ways of addressing these problems; and whenever possible they must counsel young people to be drug-free, chaste, and responsible members of society.

Leaders’ hearts must be carefully guarded and their marriages kept strong.

Harm-avoidance also means that the hearts of pastors and family life professionals must be carefully guarded and their marriages kept strong so that their people will be shielded from the deleterious effects of infidelity and misconduct.

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construct successful lives outside marriage in ways that would have been very difficult to manage 50 years ago, and they have a far greater range of choices about whether to marry, when to marry, and how to organize their marriages.β

Coontz reflects that in the 1950s, about half of all American women were already married in their teens, and marriage was an almost mandatory first step toward adulthood. For a woman, marriage was considered the best investment she could make in her future. Marriage was also supposed to be the only condition in which people could or should regularly have sex or raise children. Divorced or unmarried people were routinely judged less qualified for bank loans or job promotions, sexually active single women were stigmatized, and children born out-of-wedlock had few legal rights and, in many cases, were looked down upon.

Today however, society has provided many other ways to grow up, seek financial independence, and meet one’s needs for companionship; and sex outside of marriage has become an acceptable way of life for many who choose cohabitation rather than marriage as a way of life. So what might have seemed a “good enough” reason to enter marriage in the past no longer seems sufficient to many people.

With all these changes to the traditional view of marriage taking place today, where does our church stand on this issue? The position of the Church is clear: “Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman.”

During these times of change, we as Adventist Family Life Professionals have the opportunity and the tools to affirm the sanctity of marriage, not just as a societal institution, but as God’s plan for His children, established in Eden, and affirmed by Jesus during His ministry on earth.γ

Questions for Discussion:

1. What measures can be adopted, in areas where gay marriage is legal, to affirm the value of the original design for marriage?
2. How can congregations best minister to single individuals who are committed to a life of sexual purity but who also struggle with heterosexual or homosexual temptations?
3. What steps can family life professionals appropriately take when married couples in congregations seek help for sexual intimacy difficulties?

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the privilege of communicating them to the members of our congregations and teaching them by example how to apply the principles to their lives.δ

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2 http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-4972643-503544.html
3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_the_United_States

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1 1 Timothy 3:5
2 Amos 3:3 NLT
3 http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/index.html
4 http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat11.html
5 http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat16.html
6 http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat32.html
7 Matthew 5:9
8 John 17:22
9 Acts 2:1
10 Gospel Workers 298
11 Review and Herald, September 16, 1873
In recent years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has published several statements about the family, marriage, and the raising of children. The one I want to focus on was introduced at the General Conference session in Indianapolis in 1990, and presents God’s ideal plan; the sinful reality; and the way to restore the well-being of the human race.

“The family [and marriage] tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship on earth. God instituted the family as the primary provider of the warm and caring relationships for which the human heart yearns."

In the family circle, deep and abiding needs for belonging, love, and intimacy are met in significant ways. God blesses the family and intends that its members will help each other in reaching complete maturity and wholeness. In the Christian family, the personal worth and dignity of each member is affirmed and safeguarded in an environment of respect, equality, openness, and love. In this intimate circle the individual’s earliest and most lasting attitudes toward relationships are developed and values are conveyed from one generation to another.”

Elder Neal C. Wilson, who was General Conference president at the time and responsible for the preparation of this statement, continues: “Sin has perverted God’s ideals for marriage and family. Furthermore, the increasing complexity of society and the enormous stresses which fall upon relationships, lead to crises within many families today. The results are evidenced in lives and relationships that are broken, dysfunctional, and characterized by mistrust, conflict, hostility and estrangement.”

Marriages and “Families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships. This will help change the destructive attitudes and practices prevalent in many homes today.” Such change can be accomplished thanks to the counsel of a clinician, educator or similar scholar. But even this professional assistance, though timely and even necessary, may not address the root of broken relationships. The One who can lead to such renewal is the Inventor of marriage and family relationships—the Creator.

“Through the power of the gospel, family members are enabled to acknowledge their individual sinfulness, to accept each other’s brokenness, and to receive Christ’s redemptive healing in their lives and relationships. Although some family relationships fall short of the ideal, and restoration from damaging experiences may not be fully accomplished, where the love of Christ reigns, His Spirit will promote unity and harmony making such homes channels of life-giving joy and power in the church and community.”

Jorge Mayer serves as president of AAFLP. His busy life includes his wife and family and his ministry as a vice-president for the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
**Affirmation from page 3**

Ellen G. White offers a counter to these consequences of growing up in a punitive atmosphere. To mothers she says, “The home should be to the children the most attractive place in the world, and the mother’s presence should be its greatest attraction. Children have sensitive, loving natures. They are easily pleased and easily made unhappy. By gentle discipline, in loving words and acts, mothers may bind their children to their hearts.”

To fathers she says, “The children are his as well as hers, and he is equally interested in their welfare. The children look to their father for support and guidance. Above all, he should be controlled by the love and fear of God and by the teaching of His word, that he may guide the feet of his children in the right way.” She also shares, “But, fathers do not discourage your children. Combine affection with authority, kindness and sympathy with firm restraint. The father should do his part toward making home happy. Whatever his cares and business perplexities, they should not be permitted to overshadow his family; he should enter his home with smiles and pleasant words.”

God’s Word says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 NIV).”

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 5, 1990, at the General Conference session in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Is the biblical “rod of correction” punishment or discipline? (See Proverbs 22:15)
2. In what ways are “discipline” and “discipling” similar and different?
3. How can parents make disciplining their children so beneficial that the children will want to exercise self-discipline?

**Perspective from page 4**

“Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design.” The marriage relationship is not the only plan that God endorses. He blesses the circle of friends and relatives that singles call their families. Therefore, pastors and family life professionals must keep sending the message that singleness is not a dysfunction and that singles’ families can make tremendous contributions of their time, talent, and means to the Church and society.

“Scripture places a solid demarcation socially and sexually between such friendship relations and marriage.” While close and tender bonds may appropriately exist among members of singles’ families, the only way that human sexuality is to be practiced is within the context of marriage—one man and one woman in a life-long commitment of faithfulness to each other. Pastors and family life professionals must promote this message within a society whose values are antithetical to this view. They should not be intimidated by popular culture, but must be defenders of the faith and keepers of the old landmarks.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. How can one best help a married couple recognize when triangulation is occurring and what needs to be done to counteract it?
2. In what ways can domestic violence in a church member’s home be stopped while protecting family members from negative consequences and minimizing co-lateral disruption within the Church?
3. How can the Church celebrate and give proper recognition to the group of friends and family that a single member calls her/his family?
Celebration of Love

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