



From Silos To One Family Ministry

by Nick Belvins

When I attended church as a kid and as a teen, “family ministry” was a phrase you never heard. Ministry for children was mostly about Sunday School while Youth Ministry was popular, thriving, and typically ran like a completely separate entity. My experience attending the same church as a kid, as a student, and as an adult were all very different. It was all good, but very distinct.

What If We Were One?

Jesus prayed for all of us that we would be one just as he and the Father are one. He prayed for us to be unified, so the world would believe He was sent from God and that God loves them. There is tremendous power in unity. It’s one reason I love the trend we’ve seen in churches in the last decade—the trend of churches going from ministry silos that operate independently, to one united team. In family ministry specifically, we’re seeing children and student ministries band together for a greater impact.

How To Become One Family Ministry

This trend is new, therefore a lot of churches and leaders are in the early stages of transitioning to one family ministry team. All of us, regardless of where we are in that transition, could use help because we never arrive. As Reggie Joiner says, “misalignment happens naturally.” We have to work hard to stay aligned as a team. Going with the theme of being one, here are five key “ones” to establish to transition to one family ministry. For anyone who feels like they have one unified ministry, these critical elements must still be watched and guarded closely.

One Empowered Leader

Having one, unified family ministry starts with having one point leader. Regardless of the specific title, one person should be in place as the leader of family ministry. That point leader must be empowered with the appropriate authority. I’ve worked with churches where the point leader is not empowered, where some of their team members report to someone else or their authority is limited. Not surprisingly, those churches have a hard time becoming one team.

One Regular Meeting

Another great quote from Reggie is “in order to be on the same page you have to get in the same room.” I know, I know. Many of you hate meetings. We all hate meetings that are unnecessary or poorly run. If we want to be unified we have to spend time together regularly working on it. Depending on the size and structure of your church, this meeting might be weekly or it might be monthly. Regardless of the rhythm, I believe a regular meeting with the leaders of all the age group ministries is essential to having one family ministry. At our weekly meeting, we celebrate together, learn together, collaborate and are held accountable.

One Common Language

There’s a lot of buzz lately around creating healthy cultures in churches and organizations. It’s fitting, because culture does trump everything else. In organizations, just like in our world, language goes a long way in shaping the culture. It is hard to have one family ministry if the language we use among each ministry is different.

If we want kids and students in small groups and we call them **small groups** in elementary and **life groups** in middle school, we don’t have one language. It’s important to keep parents in mind, particularly those who have kids in multiple age groups. How we communicate with them should have common threads across all ministries. What are they hearing? Does it sound like one language? It starts with our staff teams. Everyone must believe they are part of one team and language plays into that. “I” and “my” get replaced with “we” and “our.” Children’s ministry and student ministry are *our* ministries, not my ministry and your ministry.

One Clear Path

Once the point leader is in place, with regular meetings and a common language established, the focus can turn to creating one clear path for families. Having one family ministry should result in parents having a clear picture of where they are, where they need to go and what their next step should be. One of the keys to a clear path is having helpful transitions between age groups. Transitions are a time when we can lose parents or help them re-engage, and it all comes down to how well we utilize them. Transitions should help families celebrate what they are moving out of and be fully aware of what they’re headed to next.

One More Tip

Transitioning from silos to one family ministry team is not easy. If I could offer one more tip, it would be this, to **be patient**. This process may take two to three years to complete, and, as we already mentioned, we’re never done working on it. It starts with unifying our family ministry staff, then moves to unifying family ministry volunteers, to finally having parents who feel like they are part of one family ministry. From there, we continually evaluate and improve in order to maintain the unity that’s in place.