but I decided that my wife would be my first priority, and that I would block out significant quality time for her. We later got involved in marriage enrichment and learned how to use that time well. It transformed both our marriage and my ministry.

**Lonely, Disillusioned Wives**

This personal recital might be unnecessary if I were the only guilty one. But a survey of 157 ministers’ wives throughout North America, conducted by the Institute of Church Ministry, revealed many lonely, disillusioned wives. When these first ladies of the parish were asked how they saw their husbands’ priorities, the average rating was: (1) church work, (2) time with God (3) his health, (4) wife, and (5) children. Nearly two-thirds of the wives reported that their husbands spent fewer than two hours per day—including mealtimes—with the family.³

Frankly, many wives are angry about having to compete with the church for a place in their husbands’ affections. One wrote, “Our whole life is centered upon church work. It’s hard to say when work ends and family time begins.”

A second phase of the survey revealed that 37 percent of the wives felt guilty about taking their husbands’ time to meet their own personal needs, 58 percent worried about the needs of others having priority over the needs of the family, 63 percent worried about their adequacy as pastors’ wives, 67 percent experienced loneliness and isolation, and 72 percent worried about having enough family time.⁴

In a comprehensive book on family ministry, Charles Sell makes a statement that should cause us all to stop and think:

*Strengthening the family strengthens the church. If you think of the church as the only unit with a divine right to exist, you could challenge that statement. Or you could also do so by embracing an inflated concept of the church as an institution, the care and maintenance of which requires the sacrifice of family and other human relationships.*⁵

*If this is true in the homes of the members, how much more true in the home of the minister. Listen to Ellen White: “Nothing can excuse the minister for neglecting the inner circle for the larger circle outside. The spiritual welfare of his family comes first.”⁶*