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Guarding the Center

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Perspective



Guarding the Center

May 15 is important. It's the International Day of Families, the day the world community remembers families. Last year's theme was "Families, Education, and Well-being." People around the world have observed this important day since 1993. Yet, based on most research I have seen, divorce rates have not budged, single-parent households have increased, and abuse has not abated.

As a faith community we have repeatedly spoken out on behalf of those suffering domestic violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM), rape, and many other unspeakable horrors we encounter daily in our news feed. EndItNow is not just a slogan or a program (www.enditnow.org)—it's an attitude of protest and engagement in the face of misery and pain. It's deeply rooted in God's prophetic voice that we can hear in the likes of Isaiah, Amos, and many other voices of Scripture speaking about orphans, widows, strangers, and those who are poor. I am proud of EndItNow, but I am worried about Adventist families.

Our divorce rates are not significantly different from those found in the cultures we live in. I know many single-parent Adventist homes struggling to make it. Absentee fathers are not just an issue affecting our neighbors.

Last year, the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research of the General Conference published some of the results of a major 2013 survey covering nine world divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church focusing on family worship. Out of the 24,882 people responding to the survey, 17 percent reported that they never have family worship, while 12 percent indicated that they worship together as a family less than once a month. Another 14 percent shared this experience once a week in their families. A total of 43 percent of Adventist church members have little or no engagement with the living Word in the context of their families.

Could it be that the lack of family worship has a bearing on the health of Adventist families all around the globe? The numbers suggest that this is not a regional problem but a global issue.

I remember how the busyness of my life at times kept me from making it home before my three

young daughters would go to bed. I am grateful that my wife carried the torch in those moments. Twice a day we would gather around a table or sit in the living room to spend time with Jesus—together. I am not a statistician, and I don't know if there is a straight line from no or little family worship to losing the next generation of Adventists. As a pastor and educator, however, I do know that time spent with the living Word—individually and collectively—is always healing time that moves hearts closer to one another and brings us together at the foot of the cross.

Family worship requires commitment and creativity. It needs to be age-appropriate. It's not a replacement for honest conversations or the time to "win" an argument. It's the moment to invite the Spirit to make Himself at home: in our hearts, in our living rooms and bedrooms, in our relationships. May 15 would be a great time to restart together the practice of family worship and invite others to share in the blessing. ©