

October 2023 – Book Review by Deacon Jamie Travers

“Inside Out Families: Living the Faith Together” by Diana Garland

Diana Garland is one of my favorite authors on Family ministry. She was the Dean of the School of Social Work at Baylor University. She is the author or editor of 18 books, including *Flawed Families of the Bible: How God’s Grace Works through Imperfect Relationships*; *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*; and my favorite family ministry text book *Family Ministry a Comprehensive Guide*. Diana sadly passed away from cancer in 2015.

“Utilizing the research methods for which she is well known, in *Inside Out Families* Diana Garland guides congregational leaders and counselors to encourage families to engage together in the Christian practice of service. The fruit of family service, she writes, is not only a deeper understanding of one another and of what God is doing in the world but also the reordering of a family’s values and time together. It is this communal service, she demonstrates, that will develop in children and adolescents a resilient faith that will carry them into adulthood - and, ultimately, prove essential to maintaining a vigorous, resilient faith in congregational life. *Inside Out Families* features stories of actual, ordinary families, and draws on findings from the Church Census Project and the Families and Faith Project, both funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc.” – from the book’s back cover.

Some of her books are like textbooks, and others like this one are easier to read and full of stories along with research & suggestions, which makes *Inside Out Families* accessible to all readers. Diana does a great job of telling stories and presenting research on how families serving together in faith is an important part of faith formation, both in the home and in the church family. She gives examples of how families can serve together and how congregations can help families serve together. Diana also gives examples of how churches can teach and role model service as an important part of faith formation and discipleship. She will explore the service work inside and outside the church walls and the walls of the family home; hence the title, “Inside Out Families”.

This is one of my favorite quotes of Diana Garland from the book on page 19 in talking about Families & Faith: “I came to understand faith as the melody of our lives. We do not communicate faith just by spouting what we believe to be the central truths. We live it; it has to be illustrated. Like a song has to be sung to be music, so faith has to take shape in action, in doing. Family stories are like words sung to the melody of faith.” You can read more about this concept in her book *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*.

Service is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Diana’s book will help parents and church leaders to think about how important not only service is, but the importance of serving together intergenerationally as a family.