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In This Issue

- [City News](#)
- [Sector News](#)
- [Convergence News](#)
- [Devotional from Jeff](#)
- [Events](#)



First Things First University

First Things First, a strong leader in the area of community mobilization, has developed a brand new training website call First Things First University.



www.firstthingsu.org is specifically designed for those who are seeking to build or are in the process of building a grassroots community marriage initiative. What makes this website an amazing tool?

- Classrooms where you can learn about marketing, fundraising, board development, strategic planning, coalition building and more
- Forum where you can pose questions to other leaders of community marriage initiatives and to experts in the field
- Social networking component for you to list your events (upcoming or those you have already done that you would like to share with others)
- Photo album where you can upload pictures of your events so others can see exactly how you pulled your event off

The best part is that everyone contributes, coaches and mentors each other as we seek to build best practices across the country. We encourage you to take a look at the website to get a feel for all the ways this would benefit your team. Since the website is in the Beta phase (still working out the kinks) First Things First is offering a special price of \$500 for your entire organization for lifetime enrollment.

This is a very special opportunity to get cutting edge training from the best! We hope you can take advantage of it.

AMFM Resource Guide Now Available

The Association of Marriage and Family Ministries is excited to present the Premier Issue of the [Marriage and Family Resource Guide](#). This tool is the first of its kind and will prove to be invaluable for marriage and family ministry and education. The guide gives readers quick access to quality resources and organizations. Take a look at the interactive, online version by clicking here: www.amfmresources.com/resourceguide. Be sure to share the link with other marriage and family leaders. (Available soon in limited print copy.)



Convergence News

Fireproof

As of 2/5/09, Fireproof was the #1 selling title on Walmart.com, #1 on the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA) chart, breaking the "street week" record for any movie in CBA, #2 on the general market sales chart, and #4 rental title in US.

Focus on the Family Marriage Simulcast

As of 2/13/09, 66,500 people will be attending the Focus on Marriage Simulcast at 498 host churches on February 28. There's still time to register to attend - find out more at <http://focusonmarriage.com>

Devotional from Jeff

This morning it is still dark outside, the fire in the fireplace is burning hot, and the Five Roses tea from South Africa adds a sentimental touch via the taste buds. For me the hearth has always been the symbol of warmth and refuge of the home. Smoke coming out of the chimney says, "It's warm inside." I recall Henry Nouwen saying something like, "If you stand with the door open looking for people to invite in, the heat will drain out of the house. Keep the door closed and then when people knock, open it." That has been a word picture for Gail and I to make sure the fire of our love for each other warms our house first. When we do open the door to our home and invite others in, we will have a warm hearth to share. For too many years I stood with the door open looking for ways to be needed, useful and relevant - and the heat drained out of the house.

As I am sitting here, Elsa, our boxer dog, wants to be close and enjoy the fire but the popping in the fire is scaring her. She is pacing back and forth away from the fire, whining. I coax her to come close, scratch her favorite spot under her neck, then a pop in the fire has her jumping back. I can't convince her that it is safe. I smile at the picture of her doing this...it has a familiarity to it. Do I fear the fire too? Will it warm me or will it burn me?

The ancients often talked about "thin places" where the

earth is closer to heaven and it was easier to hear God. These are set-apart places with a certain spiritual saturation in the atmosphere where it is easier to sweep aside life's distraction and "be still and listen." For me, the hearth in these early winter mornings is a "thin place" where I yearn to lean through the veil of daily preoccupations and be warmed by the Presence of God. Staying real in an unreal world makes me desperate for these encounters. But do I fear the fire too? Yes! Experience tells me that the untamed fire of God will warm my spirit but consume my flesh. This is risky business. I know "flesh" is a churchy term, but to me it represents all that I have made of myself: my ambitions and pursuits that originate from me, hidden motives coming from old wounds that betray my true desires, and so on. The fire is a danger to all this. Pride, self-sufficiency, arrogance, complacency and the like are highly flammable. There are whole seasons of life where I pulled back from the fire in fear and negotiated my own way. The pain of those years keeps me leaning towards the hearth.

These are uncertain days. The predictor models for the future are falling apart. In such times staying centered, or grounded, or in your "thin place," is more about survival than simply personal growth and well-being. Here are a couple of thoughts that I am taking to heart:

"Jeff, make a priority of tending the warmth of your own hearth - take care of Gail and your kids. Your home will be warm and you will have something to give."

"Lean into the fire and enjoy the freedom that refinement brings. Let Elsa be the one to pace and whine for warmth but too scared to get close."

Blessings,

Jeff (Chair, National Steering Committee)

Upcoming Events

Love and Respect Training for Leaders

WinShape: March 1-3

Emerson and Sara Eggerichs will be equipping ministry and lay leaders that are already familiar with the Love and Respect program to go deeper in their ability to help couples. Serving Marriages is hosting the Eggerichs and is offering a special price for military and public safety couples who want to attend of \$200 (includes everything). Other leadership couples may attend for \$365. For more info, please visit [Serving Marriages](#).

Reconciling Troubled Marriages Certification Training

WinShape: March 11-13

Join Clint & Penny Bragg and Joe & Michelle Williams to learn about helping couples reconcile and getting a ministry started in your church. The only charge is for meals, \$65 per person (all other costs including lodging, materials and training is covered by the Marriage CoMission). For more information, please visit www.marriagecomission.com/go/reconilingtraining.

Relational Foundations Conference

WinShape: April 16-18

Come learn how to prepare for effective marriage and family ministry in your church during this dynamic conference. Refine your model of ministry to focus on relational relevance. Cost is \$175 per person. For more information and a brochure, please email Katie Ferguson at katie.ferguson@ilministries.com

If you have any questions or needs, please contact Andrea Lee at andrea@marriagecomission.com or 404-775-8808.

Thanks,
Marriage CoMission