The American Families of Faith Project


David C. Dollahite, PhD & Loren D. Marks, PhD

BYU School of Family Life
Our Scholarship on Religion and Family Life: 
David C. Dollahite, PhD & Loren D. Marks, PhD 
https://americanfamiliesoffaith.byu.edu

This report reflects our desire to give an account of the first 25 years of our work on religion and family life. It reports our scholarship (traditional and public) and the impact of that work. We take seriously that the great majority of student (and all of faculty) funding at BYU comes from consecrated contributions of faithful tithe payers and generous donors.

In the mid-1990s, when we began our work on religion and family life, we faced significant uncertainties and challenges. In 1995, a leading scholar referred to religion as “the anti-tenure topic.” After hearing us present our findings on how faith helped Latter-day Saint fathers of children with special needs, a respected BYU colleague similarly said, “That is very interesting research. It is too bad it will never be published.” It was a reasonable prediction.

We feel greatly blessed that not only was that work published, but with the assistance of roughly 300 students and more than 20 colleagues we have now produced 170 scholarly publications related to religion and family life and more than 180 academic and professional presentations at national and international conferences. A list of these publications as well as funding information about the project can be found in the appendices at the end of this report.

We have marshalled empirical evidence from the best available research in the social sciences, medicine, and religious studies to document the value of religious involvement in strengthening individuals, couples, families, and communities. Our own work shows how and why religious commitments and actions can improve personal wellbeing, marriage, and family life. We strive to help people live their faith in ways that bless their marriages and families.

Since our first joint publication in 1998, we have worked to understand and document the nexus of faith and family life to help religious families. That first article was based on interviews that we conducted when Loren was an undergraduate family life student doing research with Dave, who was then a relatively new BYU professor.

We now co-direct the American Families of Faith Project, a national research project in which we and more than 20 key collaborators have conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with about 300 married couples with children (about 700 individuals) from 33 states in 8 regions of the United States. Over half the families are from various racial/ethnic, national, and cultural minorities. The sample includes about 30 couples/families from each of the following religious-ethnic groups: Asian Christian, Black Christian, Catholic & Orthodox Christian, Evangelical Christian, Hispanic Christian, Jewish, Latter-day Saint, Mainline Protestant, and Muslim. We have recently added interviews with about 35 Unaffiliated couples and 35 Interfaith couples.

The mission of the American Families of Faith project is to engage in rigorous scholarship that explores the nexus of faith and family life to discover and share research-based ideas about ways of “living faith” in ways that benefit one’s marriage and family life by (a) facilitating joy, relational quality, and relational stability, and (b) by helping individuals, couples, and families thrive in a culture that is increasingly challenging for families of faith.

In addition to our “traditional,” peer-reviewed scholarship, we have labored in recent years to produce “public scholarship” based on the research we have done. This is because in 2017, Elder Dallin H. Oaks (then President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) charged BYU faculty to share work related to the central aims and purposes of BYU and the Church with broader audiences, especially work on God-ordained marriage and family life. Thus, in the last five years we have published more than 50 public scholarship articles in outlets including The Atlantic, Deseret News, First Things, LDS Church News,
Liahona, Public Discourse, Public Square, and RealClearReligion. We have enjoyed sharing research-based ideas about families of faith with a far wider array of readership.

Increasingly, many prefer to get their content by audio and visual means beyond the written word (including social media). Thus, we brought on Laura McKeighen as American Families of Faith project Outreach Director. She has helped us produce 17 podcasts, 27 audio articles, 20 videos, and more than 400 posts on social media. The podcasts, audio articles, and videos are available on our American Families of Faith YouTube channel. The sites hosting our podcast include PodBean, Spotify, Stitcher, Apple, Google Podcasts, iHeart Radio, Podchaser, TuneIn, and Podcast Republic.

The purpose of this report is to document our scholarship efforts. The next page and the appendices document highlights, impact, and support of our scholarly work. The bulk of the report provides brief summaries of the public scholarship products with easy access through QR codes. This report shares the first several sentences of each public scholarship article and brief summaries of other products.

We are delighted that the faculty of the School of Family Life recently voted unanimously to revise its policies regarding rank and status (promotion and tenure) to now include the following language supporting public scholarship:

Public scholarship plays an important role and is valued in SFL. Faculty in SFL are encouraged to seek revelation for how they can “define, document, and defend the faith” in ways that “show empathy and understanding for everyone while maintaining loyalty to prophetic leadership and devotion to revealed doctrine” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland). SFL faculty are particularly well positioned to lead the charge outlined in the university strategic plan to be “leader[s] in topical areas that are central to the Church’s purposes” (Strategic Plan Action 1.F) with respect to marriage and family, even when such inquiries or the findings we produce are unpopular or unwelcomed in either public or academic spheres (see Elder Dallin H. Oaks, BYU Leadership Conference, 2017).

This means that the kind of work that we have been doing is now even more encouraged and supported. This leads us to wonder what else we might do. We have plans to write more books for general and Latter-day Saint audiences and to continue to create content intended to creatively help those of the rising generation, including efforts to help those who are less religious learn ways to create and maintain strong marriages and families.

Our work is intended to assist in the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to Abraham that in his seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed (see Genesis 12:3; Acts 3:25; Abraham 2:11). As co-directors of the American Families of Faith Project, we hope you find ideas in these pages that will assist you in your efforts to bless and strengthen marriages and families through the power of religious beliefs, practices, and communities.

We offer you, the reader, an invitation: Our years together as active scholars and authors are numbered. We are almost certainly in the final quarter of our time together. We want to optimize our last years to do the most meaningful and consequential work we can and to share that work with far more people—particularly those of the rising generation and those who are struggling to make faith and religion part of their lives. Therefore, we invite both our Church and University leaders, our colleagues, friends, and students, to suggest ways that we can do better in the future. Please email us with any suggestions you have to help us address more important issues, reach more people, or improve and expand in other needed ways.
Highlights & Impact of the American Families of Faith Project (1998-2023)

- Nearly 300 diverse students have worked on the American Families of Faith project.
- More than 170 scholarly publications on religion and family (including 7 books).
- Our scholarly publications have been cited more than 5,900 times in academic research publications making us one of the most influential research projects on religion and family.
- About 55% of scholarly publications were published with current/former students.
- More than 60 students have been co-authors on these publications (Loren, himself, was Dave’s undergraduate and graduate student).
- We have collaborated with about 150 valued colleagues. More than 75% of our published articles included coauthors from 37 universities other than BYU.
- We have collaborated with students and colleagues (including clergy) from several diverse faith communities from each of the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Articles have appeared in journals from 13 different disciplines/fields (i.e., clinical psychology, developmental psychology, family studies, finance, gender studies, health, law/public policy, methodology, family psychology, race, religious studies, sexuality, and sociology).
- Of the total scholarly publications (i.e., peer reviewed articles and chapters) that have resulted from the AFF project, more than half were lead-authored by someone other than Dave/Loren, and about half included a female author/co-author.
- More than 180 presentations at academic and professional conferences including the annual conferences of the National Council on Family Relations, Society for Research on Child Development, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, American Psychological Association. More than half included a student or former student as lead presenter. Nearly 70% were at national and international conferences.
- We were invited to give three special sessions at the National Council on Family Relations.
- Our student teams have won four Student “Paper of the Year” awards at national scholarly associations.
- Four of our students have received University-level doctoral fellowships at other universities.
- Eleven students who have worked on the AFF project have become university faculty members.
- Former AFF students are working in many jobs/careers including Correlation Research Division of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Qualitative Research for the University of Utah Medical Center; Oregon Health Sciences Institute; State of Louisiana.
- We were invited to write the first ever college textbook on Religion and Family Life (and were recently invited to update it to a 2nd Edition).
- We were invited to write an article on Family Home Evening for The Atlantic magazine (860,000 total subscribers). That article was The Atlantic’s “top-viewed” article for a time.
- Many of our public scholarship articles have been syndicated by RealClearReligion.
- Three volumes on the family proclamation have been edited and used as textbooks at BYU and BYU-I. The first of these (Strengthening Our Families) sold over 100,000 copies.
- We were invited by editors of a special issue of the online scholarly journal Religions to do a diversity, equity, and inclusion audit of the American Families of Faith project to serve as an example for the profession.
- We produced a special issue of the scholarly journal Marriage and Family Review devoted entirely to the American Families of Faith project. We chose to have BYU graduate and undergraduate students serve as lead authors on nine of the eleven articles. It was later published as a book (Strengths of Diverse Families of Faith) with us as the editors.
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It Doesn't Take Life-Changing Drama to Find Humility
Laura McKeighen, David Dollahite, & Loren Marks
Public Square Magazine
(November 21, 2022)

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens, contains a wealth of wisdom in human character and transformation. Newfound generosity, empathy, and compassion emerge as delightful Christmas gifts following Ebenezer Scrooge’s transformation—along with one easily overlooked virtue: humility. Before his eventful night begins, Scrooge is full of pride and self-interest. By the time morning light breaks, he is jumping from bed in order to humbly respect, serve, and connect with the people in his life. He transforms from a lonely and arrogant man to someone who humbly cherishes his relationships with “the least of [his] brethren” (i.e., “Tiny Tim” Cratchit).

The Healing Power of Humility in Parent-Child Relationships
Laura McKeighen, David Dollahite, & Loren Marks
Public Square Magazine
(October 6, 2022)

In a memorable address entitled Beware of Pride, former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and religious leader President Ezra Taft Benson stated, “Pride adversely affects all our relationships—our relationship with God and His servants, between husband and wife, parent and child.” In what follows, we explore more closely the evidence in family narratives that demonstrates the healing force of humility to combat the stumbling block of pride in parent-child relationships.
Will My Kids Keep the Faith?
Parents’ Hopes and Children’s Choices
Laura McKeighen, Loren Marks, & David Dollahite
Public Square Magazine
RealClearReligion
(May 5, 2022)

Among all the many things parents aspire for in a child, one of the strongest desires and greatest dreams of many parents is that their faith will be passed down. In the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, parents are instructed to teach their children to love God with all their hearts (Deuteronomy 6:4-8). In the American Families of Faith project, we asked 396 highly religious but racially, ethnically, and regionally diverse parents in the United States, “How important is it to you that your children follow in your faith?” The majority of parents responded that it was indeed important or very important.

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Sacred Experiences with Jewish Friends
David Dollahite
Public Square Magazine
RealClearReligion
(March 14, 2022)

After a very long and extremely ugly history, antisemitism in America has been increasing tragically as Jewish people are experiencing greater levels of assaults, harassment, and vandalism. Indeed, according to the FBI, nearly 60% of hate crimes in 2020 targeted Jews. And, Bari Weiss has identified antisemitism as the result of various political and societal ideologies.

While anti-Mormonism is real, Latter-day Saints have experienced only a tiny fraction of the persecution our Jewish friends have been subjected to over their three-millennia-long history. But as members of a misunderstood minority faith, it behooves us to join in solidarity with our Jewish friends however and whenever we are able.

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How Can I Talk to My Teen about Religion?
David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Liahona
(March 2022)

Despite what many adults and social scientists think, youth and young adults are very interested in talking with their parents about spiritual and religious matters. As part of our American Families of Faith project, we interviewed parents and youth from various denominations across the United States to discover what’s happening in our conversations with youth and how we can improve those conversations.

Read More Here
In this essay, I will share some experiences from attending religious services of various faiths and what we learned from those experiences. I focus on worship services and celebrations and what I enjoyed and appreciated most about sharing sacred moments of community with others across a range of world faiths and denominations. I express my appreciation and admiration for the wonderful people of God who welcomed me to their sacred services and thus their sacred ground.

"Thank you, I'd be honored": Worshipping with Friends of Other Faiths

Loren Marks
Public Square Magazine
RealClearReligion
(February 3, 2022)

In my 50 years as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have known and loved persons from a variety of faiths who have influenced my life for good. I have even confessed that during my youth in Oregon, thanks to a wealth of diverse friends, I may have learned more about being a “good Latter-day Saint boy” from those outside of my faith than from those inside my faith.

Learning to be a Good "Latter-day Saint Boy" from Friends of Other Faiths

Loren Marks
Public Square Magazine
RealClearReligion
(February 24, 2022)

I grew up as an actively involved member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Oregon, land of the religious “Nones.” In my circle of high school friends, almost none were church people of any stripe, with the exception of a cute girl I dated until her pastor delivered a scathing and apparently convincing sermon on the “evils of Mormonism” that irreparably divided us. As I learned at a tender age, sometimes religion unites, sometimes it divides.

Yet I also learned that vital religious and life lessons can come from widely varied sources.

Attending Religious Services of Other Faiths

David Dollahite
Public Square Magazine
RealClearReligion
(February 3, 2022)

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What is Holy Envy and Can it Heal Our World?

Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Public Square Magazine & RealClearReligion
(December 3, 2021)

Although it happened more than 30 years ago, many of us have watched Michael Jordan line up, lope, and then explode from the free-throw line, soar and then hammer home a slam-dunk contest winning marvel. In a later interview, Jordan said, “It may only be for a second, but it’s flying and I think other people wish they could do it.” Yes, we do. It’s called envy, and we’ve all got a little of it.

Many are familiar with envy as one of the “Seven Deadly Sins,” so how can envy be something that might help or even heal brokenness in the world? Let’s turn to another person who soared in a different way.

Evangelical Christian Families: “God Wants Us... To Be Strong”

David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Public Square Magazine
RealClearReligion
(November 19, 2021)

Carl Trueman recently wrote, “The family is a mess. Religious institutions lack authority. The nation-state is no longer a source of unity but a theater of conflict in which we fight about what is and is not America... And yet that basic human need to belong persists...” In addition to the “basic human need to belong,” William James identified a profound human need for faith that he conceptualized as “the will to believe.”

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In her book, *The New Religious Intolerance*, Martha Nussbaum has written that “any self-knowledge worth the name tells you that others are as real as you are, and that your life is not just about you, it is about accepting the fact that you share a world with others, and about taking action directed at the good of others.”

I(Dave) was raised in a Mainline Protestant Church, Holy Innocents Episcopal Church in Marin County, California. I served as an acolyte (altar boy) for three years (age 9-12) and assisted the Priest by carrying the large wooden and gold cross during the “processional” into the sanctuary at the beginning of the service and the “recessional” out of the church at the end of the service, lighting and extinguishing the candles, and in serving communion. Other than our priest overdoing the incense a bit for my taste/smell, I have very fond memories of those services and of the people I knew in the Episcopal Church.
When Loren taught a graduate course in family at Louisiana State University, the mostly white class of graduate students had just finished reading nearly 400 pages about Black families in America. Katrina Hopkins, an exceptional young woman from Portland, Oregon, asked, “Why is it that when I read about Black families, I hear about criminality and incarceration and non-marital childbearing and the lack of marriageable males, but I do not get to read about strong, marriage-based Black families like the one I grew up in?”

When Loren taught a graduate course in family at Louisiana State University, the mostly white class of graduate students had just finished reading nearly 400 pages about Black families in America. Katrina Hopkins, an exceptional young woman from Portland, Oregon, asked, “Why is it that when I read about Black families, I hear about criminality and incarceration and non-marital childbearing and the lack of marriageable males, but I do not get to read about strong, marriage-based Black families like the one I grew up in?”

My (Dave's) mom was raised by an Irish Catholic mother. My Catholic mom and my Baptist dad met in the middle and were married in the Episcopal Church (where I was raised and served as an altar boy). I enjoyed a childhood that was blessed by some wonderful Catholic adults and kids. Growing up I was fortunate to be coached in various sports by wonderful Catholic men such as Joe Lordan, Tony Damato, and Manny Berreta. My best friend, Rob Guidi, and his family were Catholic. Mrs. Guidi, my second Mom, was very Catholic and crossed herself whenever she drove by St. Rita Catholic church, the church her family attended.
The Inner Logic of Religion(s)
Gregory Wurm, David Dollahite, & Loren Marks
Public Square Magazine & RealClearReligion
(July 7, 2021)

In this essay, we discuss the “inner logic” of religion(s). That is, how religious thinking and acting is important to understand on their own terms and not simply as merely psychological or sociological in nature. Unfortunately, across the social sciences, a typical approach to the study of religion and religions is to reduce religion to sociology or to psychology by imposing sociological or psychological perspectives onto religion.

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Living a New Faith in a New Land
Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Public Square Magazine & RealClearReligion
(July 20, 2021)

Our friend and colleague Yaxin (yah-SHEEN) Lu was born and raised in mainland China and hit young adulthood during the era of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. It served as a stark reminder that freedom—political, religious, or ideological—was severely constrained. Yaxin converted to Christianity and a combination of faith, family, hope, and opportunity for her and her husband—also a Christian convert—led them to the United States. Their decision to act on the belief that God had more than one child for her and her husband burned the bridge between her and her native land, given the one-child policy of the time.

Read More Here
As millions of Americans are returning to public gatherings for worship, there is controversy about the wearing of masks in religious settings. There are diametrically opposing, strongly-held views about this practice. Yet, we think wearing facial coverings at religious services is a wise and compassionate thing to do and a charitable exercise of one's personal liberty.

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This past week, Jews celebrated a Passover and Christians celebrated a Holy Week different from all others. Now, Saudi officials are encouraging the more than 1 million Muslims planning to undertake the five-day Hajj to Mecca in July to consider postponing their sacred pilgrimage.

Throughout the earth, the multi-day sacred celebrations and gatherings that bring joy and peace to millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims have been interrupted by the shadow of shutdowns caused by the specter of COVID-19.

Heightened uncertainty, anxiety, and fear abound during this global pandemic. Religious gatherings often bring a sense of peace and safety, but in this case, congregating for worship can spread the very virus everyone hopes they and their loved ones will avoid. Whether you believe that houses of worship should remain open during this trying time, or that they should close, our research has found that meaningful religious practice at home is both possible and powerful.
Healthy Religion is Good for American Families

David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Deseret News & RealClearReligion
(February 29, 2020)

In a recent Washington Post piece, columnist Max Boot wrote about the effects of religion on economic, physical and social well-being, drawing on data from a global survey and comparing the most religious and least religious countries. He concluded, “There is little evidence that a decline in religiosity leads to a decline in society — or that high levels of religiosity strengthen society. ... If anything, the evidence suggests that too much religion is bad for a country.”

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Romantic Love and Religion – A Match Made in Heaven?

David Dollahite & Loren Marks
RealClearReligion
(February 14, 2020)

Valentine’s Day has become the high holy day of the cult of romantic love. It began as a pagan celebration that, in the 5th Century, became a Christian religious holiday still observed across the world by a variety of faith communities. In contemporary America, however, it has shed most Christian associations, and now billions of dollars (and countless anxieties) are spent on a day that embodies our culture’s extraordinary emphasis on romantic love.

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Surveying the growing body of social science research helps bring greater clarity to the complex, and largely beneficial, interactions between religion and family life. The research also suggests evidence-based best practices for effectively integrating faith and family life, including religious-spiritual authenticity, nurturing parent-child relationships, balancing religious firmness and flexibility, and encouraging youth to have spiritual experiences, sacrifice meaningfully, and pray earnestly—all while parents preach a bit less and listen a bit more.

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The prophet Joseph Smith said, “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.” [1]

While we should cherish the guidance we receive from our own religious beliefs, scriptures, and church leaders, we may benefit from welcoming virtuous direction, inspiration, and comfort from many different sources.

Faithful Fathering: Ten Narratives of Wisdom from Fathers of Different Faiths
Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Meridian Magazine
(June 13, 2019)

Over the past 25 years, we have interviewed more than 300 diverse fathers[1] about the challenges and blessings of striving to be a faithful father. From thousands of pages of transcriptions and field notes we have gleaned 10 insights that have left us pondering the world's most profound job: that of parent.

Read More Here
Family Prayer: A Sacred Time and a Sacred Space – Findings from a National Study

Loren Marks, David Dollahite, & Joe Chelladurai
Meridian Magazine
(March 24, 2019)

We've all heard that familiar saying, “the family that prays together, stays together.” How does the nature and experience of family prayer create strong families? What can we learn from families that pray together? To understand this aspect of family life, from our National Study on Strong Religious Families, we conducted a study exploring how family prayer influenced family relationships. We reported our findings in a recently-published article in the Journal of Family Psychology.

What Religious Parents Say Matters Most in Raising Faithful Children

David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Meridian Magazine
(October 18, 2018)

Although we refer to ourselves as human beings, social scientists spend relatively little time exploring matters of being—the deeper “existential” issues dealing with what it means to be, to become, or to act on deeply held beliefs and responsibilities.

In this article, we explore the answers given by practicing Christian, Jewish, and Muslim parents of adolescents to the question, “What do you consider to be the most important things for you to be or do as a mother/father of faith?” We believe this question addresses the three dimensions of identity-centered religious calling, being, and action in ways that evoke deep thought about things that matter most to religious parents.

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A collection of Einstein’s letters auctioned off in 1996 contains a list of marital expectations for his wife, Maliva Maric. The list includes daily laundry “kept in good order,” “three meals regularly in my room,” a desk maintained neatly “for my use only,” and the demand that she quit talking or leave the room “if I request it.” The marriage ended in divorce, but the list lives on as an illustration not only of Einstein’s darker domestic side, but also of assumptions commonly held about marriage in 1914.

In speaking about our friends of other faiths, President Gordon B. Hinckley stated, “Look for their strengths and their virtues, and you will find strength and virtues that will be helpful in your own life.” As keeping the Sabbath day holy has become a profound point of emphasis over the past three years, our apostles have followed this prophetic admonition by repeatedly pointing to our observant Jewish brothers and sisters as a model of “delighting in the Sabbath.” Most notably, in a 2015 General Conference address, Elder Quentin L. Cook recalled the Jewish Sabbath celebration he and his wife Diane attended in the home of their friends, the Abrams.
Covering or veiling something tends to arouse human curiosity. We want to know, what is behind the veil? Symbolically, this is one question we have addressed with the Muslim women and men we have interviewed in our national American Families of Faith research project. Our central related question was: “What does the practice of hijab (or veiling) mean to Muslims in the United States?” Much has been written about hijab by Western journalists, observers, and philosophers. Their representations of Muslim women's hijab have frequently depicted the practice as a manifestation of oppression, subjugation, and abuse of women.

Every Monday evening, Mormons around the world pause, as families. Together they pray, sing, play games, eat snacks. This is all standard fare for many American households, but the difference is that for Mormons, it’s built into every Monday night (or sometimes another night) and it has an official, deceptively generic-sounding name: family home evening.
Religion both helps and harms individuals and families as illustrated in history, contemporary events, and the personal experience of those who engage in lived religion. One phenomenon we have recently identified and explored in our interviews with 200+ American Families of Faith is that religion both generates and helps with what we call relational struggles in families. Although the majority of our work focuses on how religious often helps, in this article, we investigate what the 200 religiously and racially diverse families we have interviewed have taught us about the first half of this duality—that religion is associated with (and may even create) several relational struggles and problems when we do not live our faith out wisely.

When Father's Day rolls around each year, we think about what to get dad—what gift to offer our father. Advertisements abound for the perfect gift: a cool tie; something related to his favorite hobby; a barbeque so he can grill up burgers and steaks; and many others. Those kinds of gifts are fine. But I want to suggest something different.

“...What is the best thing I can do as a parent to bring our family closer together?” ... “How can I best strengthen my child’s faith?” As scholars and researchers of family and religion, questions like these are sometimes directed our way. Our two decades of interviewing about 200 very strong, “exemplar” families of various faiths from around the United States have revealed some answers to these difficult but vital questions. Across religion, race, and region, mothers and fathers (and their children) have emphasized the power of sacred family rituals. Drawing from the diverse families who taught us, we explore, explain, and illustrate why sacred family rituals matter, with the hope that your family and ours will more effectively harness this power in our own homes and families.
Why This Project? | Highlights 01
Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Podbean

Why the American Families of Faith Project: Enriching & Strengthening Families

In the social sciences there tends to be a focus on weaknesses and why things go wrong. The American Families of Faith Project brings a much needed balance to the study of marriages and families by focusing on the features and origins of relational strengths and health.

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What is Holy Envy? | Highlights 02
David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Podbean

Dr. Loren Marks and Dr. David Dollahite, co-directors of the American Families of Faith project, share thoughts about how their study of various families of faith has led them to a sense of deep admiration or “holy envy” for religious practices from other faiths.

Listen Here
Dr. Loren Marks, co-director of the American Families of Faith project, reflects on his "holy envy" for Asian Christian families in the United States. Their courage to embrace change in a new land, sincerely follow their beliefs, and serve through pragmatic collectivism are a few of the strengths to be admired among the Asian Christian community.

Dr. David Dollahite, co-director of the American Families of Faith project, shares his thoughts on the familial power of sacred rituals among Jewish families. Through many wonderful experiences of participating in Shabbat observance with Jewish families, he has developed a deep sense of "holy envy."

Dr. David Dollahite, co-director of the American Families of Faith project, reflects on his sense of "holy envy" for Catholic and Orthodox Christian families in the United States. A simple, regular, patterned approach to asking and granting forgiveness smooths relationships within many of these families.
In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of Black Christian families. Prayer and having faith in (and a personal relationship with) God are two of the permeating strengths of Black Christian families. The majority of Black Christians we interviewed believed God was present and actively involved in their lives—a belief that positively influenced marriage and family relationships, commitment, and cohesion.

Listen Here
In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of Asian American Christian families. For many of these families, their religious beliefs, practices, and faith community play a significant role in the complex and interrelated process of religious, cultural, and familial adaptation and acculturation. Asian American Christian families live a life where faith is not only influential, it is central.

Listen Here
Catholic & Orthodox Christian Families | Episode 07

Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Podbean

In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of Catholic and Orthodox Christian families. For many of these families, their religious faith is a source of comfort and strength as they seek personal growth and interact with family members and others in society. At the core of the transformative influence of faith in the family lives of Catholics and Orthodox Christians is the concept of forgiveness.

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Evangelical Christian Families | Episode 08

David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Podbean

In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of Evangelical Christian families. These families perceive that hallmarks of Evangelical Christian faith such as reliance on Holy Scripture and a personal relationship with God are foundational for building and maintaining healthy relationships.

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Latter-day Saint Families | Episode 09

Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Podbean

In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of families in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For Latter-day Saint families, the doctrine that marriage and family life can be perpetuated beyond the grave is a central part of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. This eternal nature of the family is a key component driving family relations among Latter-day Saints.

Listen Here
Mainline Protestant Families | Episode 10
David Dollahite & Loren Marks
Podbean

In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of Mainline Protestant families. For some Mainline Protestant believers, God’s relationship with them serves as a model for their relationships with their spouses and children. In addition to giving meaning to their lives and providing a unique set of tools and resources to draw from, Mainline Protestant families draw additional power and strength from their relationship with God.

Listen Here

Muslim Families | Episode 11
Loren Marks & David Dollahite
Podbean

In this episode, we discuss the general life strengths, marital strengths, and parenting strengths of Muslim families. Our experience was that many of the families who shared their homes and stories with us were of a quality of character that any neighborhood or nation might welcome. Their relationships seemed structured but strong; hierarchical but warm. For many of these families, actively living what they believe and teach to their children is extremely important. They feel that Allah is involved in their daily struggles and marriage is a gift.

Listen Here
For those who prefer interacting with audio rather than visual content, the following public scholarship articles have been read and recorded as audio articles.

**Sabbath Observance: Families Can Learn to Make the Sabbath ‘A Delight’** | **Audio Article 01**

**David Dollahite**
Podbean

The Lord views Sabbath observance as a path toward spiritual joy and pleasure and He desires for us to approach Sabbath observance with an attitude of delightful enjoyment. [We] can learn from our Jewish friends about how to make the Sabbath a delight by together choosing ways to make it special, joyous, spiritual and peaceful.

[Listen Here](https://example.com/listen1)

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**Making the Sabbath a Delight: Seven Lessons from Strong Jewish Families** | **Audio Article 02**

**Loren Marks**
Podbean

Seven Jewish-inspired ideas to help us more fully delight in the Sabbath.

[Listen Here](https://example.com/listen2)

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**How to Have a Positive Religious Conversation with Your Youth** | **Audio Article 03**

**David Dollahite**
Podbean

Youth and young adults are very interested in talking with their parents about spiritual and religious matters—especially if parents are willing to actually have a conversation rather than another “parent-preaching” session.

[Listen Here](https://example.com/listen3)
As people abandon religious institutions, they start expecting romantic relationships to satisfy a host of needs that formerly were satisfied through religion.

Understanding the Relationship Struggles in Religious Households | Audio Article 04

Loren Marks
Podbean

Religion both generates and helps with what we call relational struggles in families. ...In this article, we investigate...the first half of this duality—that religion is associated with (and may even create) several relational struggles and problems when we do not live our faith out wisely.

Listen Here
Living Into Fatherhood | Audio Article 06
Loren Marks
Podbean

We have gleaned 10 one-liners that have left us pondering the world's most profound job: that of parent.

Listen Here

Mormons’ Weekly Family Ritual Is an Antidote to Fast-Paced Living | Audio Article 07
David Dollahite
Podbean

More than 100 years after family home evening was conceived, it has taken on new relevance in a modern, fast-paced culture. ... [interview participants] routinely brought up the difficulties of maintaining familial closeness as technology and media have hastened the pace of life.

Listen Here

Behind the Veil: Meanings of Hijab for Muslim Wives and Husbands in the United States | Audio Article 08
Loren Marks
Podbean

What does the practice of hijab (or veiling) mean to Muslims in the United States? ...In a spirit of fostering awareness, understanding, and respect for those of another faith, we share with you what our interview participants themselves entrusted to us, in their own voices.

Listen Here
A Meaningful Gift for Your Father | Audio Article 09
David Dollahite
Podbean

When Father's Day rolls around each year, we think about what to get dad—what gift to offer our father. Advertisements abound for the perfect gift: a cool tie; something related to his favorite hobby; a barbeque so he can grill up burgers and steaks; and many others. Those kinds of gifts are fine. But I want to suggest something different.

Listen Here

The Abiding Power of Sacred Family Rituals | Audio Article 10
Loren Marks
Podbean

Drawing from the diverse families who taught us, we explore, explain, and illustrate why sacred family rituals matter, with the hope that your family and ours will more effectively harness this power in our own homes and families.

Listen Here

Family Prayer: A Sacred Time and A Sacred Space – Findings from a National Study | Audio Article 11
David Dollahite
Podbean

We've all heard that familiar saying, “the family that prays together, stays together.” How does the nature and experience of family prayer create strong families? What can we learn from families that pray together?

Listen Here
What We Can Learn from Ritual and Tradition in American Jewish Families | Audio Article 13

David Dollahite
Podbean

In reference to those of different faiths, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Look for their strengths and their virtues, and you will find strength and virtues that will be helpful in your own life.” In striving to live a good, faithful life and foster loving family relationships in an ever-changing world, there is indeed much strength and virtue that we can gain from our Jewish friends and their examples.

Listen Here
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faithful Fathering: Ten Narratives of Wisdom from Fathers of Different Faiths</td>
<td>Loren Marks</td>
<td>Podbean</td>
<td>Over the past 25 years, we have interviewed more than 300 diverse fathers about the challenges and blessings of striving to be a faithful father. From thousands of pages of transcriptions and field notes we have gleaned 10 insights that have left us pondering the world's most profound job: that of parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Best Practices—and Benefits—of Religious Parenting</td>
<td>David Dollahite</td>
<td>Podbean</td>
<td>The research . . . suggests evidence-based best practices for effectively integrating faith and family life, including religious-spiritual authenticity, nurturing parent-child relationships, balancing religious firmness and flexibility, and encouraging youth to have spiritual experiences, sacrifice meaningfully, and pray earnestly—all while parents preach a bit less and listen a bit more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Do They Tithe? Perspectives on Giving Back to God</td>
<td>Loren Marks</td>
<td>Podbean</td>
<td>In December, articles and blogs address various aspects of Christmas. We would like to address another important December event for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—tithing settlement. While few people have as many positive nostalgic memories of tithing settlement as they do of Christmas, there are profound spiritual aspects of tithing as a way of giving back to God in gratitude for what God has given us.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catholic thinker Michael Novak locates the myth of romantic love in our unfulfilled passion. He distinguishes romantic love from an embodied, other-oriented Christian love. But it’s worth exploring the possibility that elements of the same basic human desire lie at the core of both: a deep and abiding need for profound and lasting—indeed eternal—emotional and spiritual intimacy, the dream of shared meaning and unified fulfillment of our deepest hopes with the “one.”

Listen Here

For two decades, we have interviewed religious wives and husbands in long-term happy marriages and we asked them how they kept their love alive. We heard relational and religious answers that reflected a variety of wisdom.

Like most Americans of our generations (X and the Boomers), we also grew up hearing the voices of classic rock and roll. Rock also has its own kind of wisdom about keeping love alive—though often profane and crass—and it too enshrines a kind of sacred quest for Everlasting Love. On Valentine’s Day these two visions of love collide, converge, and clash in unique and surprising ways.

Listen Here

Religious gatherings often bring a sense of peace and safety, but in this case, religious gatherings can spread the very virus everyone hopes they and their loved ones will avoid. Whether you believe that houses of worship should remain open during this trying time, or that they should close, our research has found that meaningful religious practice at home is both possible and beautiful.

Listen Here
Healthy Religion is Good for American Families | Audio Article 20

Loren Marks
Podbean

A large body of social science research indicates that high levels of healthy religiosity provide many personal and relational benefits that merely nominal levels of religious belief and involvement does not. To settle for the dangerous single story that religion is bad may be at least as unfortunate as the provincial narrative that religion is an unmitigated good. Our carefully measured, double story is that high levels of healthy religion is good for America’s families while what James called “sick-souled” religion is bad for everyone.

Listen Here

Holy Weeks in the Shadow of Death | Audio Article 21

David Dollahite
Podbean

In my experience, both 9/11 and COVID-19 involve grief over profound losses, anxieties and fears about the future, suspicions of others, and divisions across political lines, as well as increased prayers for self and others, increased desire to understand those who are suffering or are different, and greater efforts to build bridges across various divides.

To encourage hope during these difficult times, I would like to share some personal memories from the first Holy Week following 9/11.

Listen Here
The diverse families of faith we have interviewed practiced a wide range of religious rituals and activities at home. These practices reportedly deepened their faith in God and strengthened their sense of connection with their family members. Such patterns of home-based worship take on pointed relevance in our current COVID-19 context where houses of worship have been closed.

Prayer, studying scripture, singing hymns, lighting candles, discussing spiritual topics, storytelling, a shared meal—all of these shared acts can be elements of family worship. And service to others in the human family comprises yet another way for families to worship God together.

The term holy envy was developed by the late Krister Stendahl, who was Dean of the Harvard Divinity School and then Church of Sweden Bishop of Stockholm. This concept is core to the multi-faith research my colleagues and I do in the American Families of Faith project. At the end of the semester, students write a paper on holy envy. This assignment asks students to “List and briefly discuss the 5 most important, personally meaningful, and/or helpful ideas you learned this semester about how those of other faiths practice their religion about which you felt some kind of holy envy.”
Perceptions of Nonreligious Parents | Audio Article 25
Laura McKeighen
Podbean

Although religious intolerance and marginalization still exist today, research suggests that perhaps one of the most marginalized groups is those who report no religion. Through interviews with 31 nonreligious couples, we investigated what nonreligious parents want religious people to understand about them and their families.

Listen Here

Strengths in Diverse American Families of Faith | Audio Article 26
Loren Marks
Podbean

A sad irony of life in contemporary America is that large numbers of people who devote a great deal of time, effort, and money to get into fictional alternate worlds, while at the same time, most Americans seem unable or unwilling to devote much effort to better understanding the religious worlds of their fellow citizens. Thus, many Americans spend hundreds of hours watching and reading about fictional worlds, yet know very little about the religious worlds of their neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family members.

Listen Here

The Inner Logic of Religion(s) | Audio Article 27
David Dollahite
Podbean

In this [audio article], we discuss the “inner logic” of religion(s). That is, how religious thinking and acting is important to understand on their own terms and not simply as merely psychological or sociological in nature. Unfortunately, across the social sciences, a typical approach to the study of religion and religions is to reduce religion to sociology or to psychology by imposing sociological or psychological perspectives onto religion.

Listen Here
### Faith is Central for Many Asian American Christian Families

YouTube (1:30 min)

In our research, we strive to present a strengths-based portrayal of exemplar Asian American Christian immigrant families by allowing participants to represent themselves, their marriages, their families, their faith, and their lived experience in their own voices.

### Sanctified Marriage

YouTube (1:20 min)

Religious involvement can help to sanctify your marriage. Spending sacred time together, creating a shared holy vision/purpose, developing desirable interpersonal traits, seeking and receiving divine guidance, and as a resource for resolving conflicts are all elements that can serve as a spiritual foundation for a strong marriage.

### Developing Interpersonal Traits Can Bless Marriage

YouTube (1:02 min)

Developing interpersonal traits through religious beliefs and practices can bless your marriage. An American Families of Faith participant shares how partnering with God to focus on his personal, emotional, and intellectual traits is blessing his relationships.

[View Here](#)  
[View Here](#)  
[View Here](#)
Dr. David Dollahite, co-director of the American Families of Faith project, shares his thoughts on the familial power of sacred rituals among Jewish families. Through many wonderful experiences of participating in Shabbat observance with Jewish families, he has developed a deep sense of "holy envy."

God is the Third Party in Marriage

During good times and difficult times, God can supply general guidance in marriage. When couples have difficult times in their marriages, they can gain strength by believing that God sanctions their marriage and remembering the times when He intervened to help their relationship.

View Here

View Here
Religious beliefs, practices, and community can strengthen marriage and provide a significant protective factor against marital infidelity. What helps highly religious couples maintain a strong marriage and remain faithful in that marriage? A combination of relationship with God, strengthened moral values, improved relational quality, and a sanctified marriage.

View Here
In the social sciences there tends to be a focus on weaknesses and why things go wrong. The American Families of Faith Project brings a much needed balance to the study of marriages and families by focusing on the features and origins of relational strengths and health.

**Why the American Families of Faith Project: Enriching & Strengthening Families**

YouTube
(6:10 min)

In the social sciences there tends to be a focus on weaknesses and why things go wrong. The American Families of Faith Project brings a much needed balance to the study of marriages and families by focusing on the features and origins of relational strengths and health.

**Religious Youth Make Sacred Sacrifices**

YouTube
(2:31 min)

Are there ways that the children in your family are asked to sacrifice for their faith? When we asked a sample of religious youth this questions, we found six areas in which they sacrificed.

**Attending Worship Services Builds Stronger Relationships**

YouTube
(1:00 min)

Attending mosque, church, or synagogue as a family can positively impact your most important relationships. By focusing on what's most important during worship services, forgiveness can pave the way to stronger family relationships.
Sacred Sacrifices of Youth

YouTube
(1:00 min)

Why are religious youth willing to sacrifice for their faith? Some youth see it as giving up something good (or bad) for something better!

View Here

Religious Faith: Parents Teach and Children Choose

YouTube
(1:57 min)

Even in the most faithful and relationally warm families, the approach which parents take in religious education and socialization has a big impact. This video shares six tips on how to balance your desire for religious continuity with your children's agency.

View Here

Religion Has a Positive Influence on Marital Conflict

YouTube
(1:22 min)

In marriage, as in any meaningful relationship, conflict is a certainty. Religiosity can have a positive influence on marital conflict. Conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and reconciliation can all be aided through religious practices and beliefs.

View Here

God's Guidance and Marriage

YouTube
(1:02 min)

Are you inviting God to be a direct guide in your marriage?

View Here
**Power of Prayer**

YouTube  
(1:00 min)

Prayer can get you through anything and everything!

View Here

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**Ingredients of a Great Marriage**

YouTube  
(51 sec)

Some key virtues can positively influence a couple’s marriage. Love, respect, patience, and forgiveness are some of the foundational ingredients that can make a great marriage.

View Here

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**God is Always Going to Be There**

YouTube  
(44 sec)

God is always there to cheer us on!

View Here
Appendix A:
Peer-Reviewed Articles, Books, and Chapters on Religion and Families

*Denotes student co-author

2023 (or in press)


2022


2021


2020


2019


**2018**


2017


2016


2015


2014


2013


### 2011


2010


2009


2008


2007


2006


2005


2004


2003


2002


2001


2000


1998


Appendix B:  
Professional Presentations and Activities on Religion and Family  
(Reverse Chronological Order)

2023


2022


2021


**2020**


### 2018


### 2017


**2016**


Tuft, A., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. (April, 2016). “We learn and grow together”: *Transformational processes in religious families.* Poster presented at the Utah Council on Family Relations, Ogden, UT.


**2015**


**2014**


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2012


2011


2010


Marks, L. D. (September, 2010). “In God we trust”: Perspectives on finances, family relationships, and faith. Presented to University Methodist Women’s Organization, Baton Rouge, LA.

2009


**2008**


**2007**


**2006**


Marks, L. (March, 2006). *What does science tell us about families and religion?* Invited lecture at the LSU Science and Religion Collegium, Baton Rouge, LA.

2005


2004


Marks, L. D. (February, 2004). Religious diversity in the workplace. Presentation at Annual LSU AgCenter Diversity Conference, Baton Rouge, LA.

Marks, L. D. (February, 2004). State of the black church. Panelist/presentation at LSU Black History Month Celebration, Baton Rouge, LA.


2003


2002


Marks, L. D. (October, 2002). *Why religion matters to families and those who study them*. Invited paper presented at School of Family Life Symposium, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

**2001**


**2000**


**1999**


1998


1997


Appendix C
Funding for American Families of Faith Project (1997-2022)

During our years of research together, we have been supported, encouraged, and sustained by research support from diverse sources delineated in this Appendix. Our primary benefactor, in both direct and indirect ways, has been Brigham Young University (including Eliza R. Snow Fellowships). BYU is funded by the sacred tithing monies of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are especially indebted to members’ financial faithfulness that has helped make the American Families of Faith project a reality.

Indeed, it is with these sacred donations in mind that we make the present accounting and report of our stewardship. In addition, most of the roughly 300 students who have assisted with the project volunteered significant hours and/or were paid out of sacred funds. In summary, our own work represents only a portion of the efforts and offerings needed to produce this landmark project. To these faithful givers and contributors, past and present, we express our profound gratitude.

2020-21


2020

2017-2018

2016

2015

2014
Dollahite, D. C., American Families of Faith. ($24,920). Eliza R. Snow Grant, Brigham Young University. (1/14-12/15)
2010
Marks, L. D. The Meanings behind the Religion-Marriage Connection: Qualitative Reports from a Diverse U.S. Sample. Office of Research and Economic Development Faculty Travel Grant, $750.


2008

2007
Dollahite, D. C., How Processes of Religious Striving in Latter-day Saint Families Are Related to Spiritual Thriving in their Children and Youth. ($10,000). Family Studies Center, Brigham Young University. (1-07 – 12/07).

2006

2005

2004
Marks, L. D. Why Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Communities Matter: A National Qualitative Study of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Families, Faculty Research Grant Program, LSU Office of Research and Graduate Studies, $10,000.

2003
Marks, L. D. The Meaning and Influence of Religious Beliefs in Families: Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives. LSU Council on Research, $5,000.

2003

2003
Dollahite, D. C., Faith and Family Life in the Abrahamic Religions. ($20,000). Eliza R. Snow Fellowship, Brigham Young University. (9/03 – 8/05).
2002
Dollahite, D. C., Faith and Family Life in the Abrahamic Religions. ($10,800). Family Studies Center, Brigham Young University. (1/02 - 12/03).

Dollahite, D. C., Faith and Family Life in the Abrahamic Religions. ($5,000). Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University. (1/02 - 12/02).

2001
Dollahite, D. C., Faith and Family Life in the Abrahamic Religions. ($3,500). Family Studies Center, Brigham Young University. (1/01 - 12/01).

1998

1997


Total Funds Received: $254,408