

AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IN BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY FOR THE PARISH

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Bowen Family Systems Theory, developed by Murray Bowen, posits the emotional system (family), rather than the individual, as the basic unit of human behavior. Envisioning the individual not as a discrete unit but as a part of an intricate system is a challenging reorientation of thinking. Accepting this challenge involves defining one's own positions while genuinely respecting others' views. This process includes a balancing of individuality and togetherness: two forces that, according to Bowen, tug at all life. Study of Family Systems Theory is widespread. These largely adopt a top-down approach, seeking to improve congregations through developing more mature leaders. Bowen acknowledges the crucial role of the leader of an emotional system, but stresses that change in self is the only change that a person directly can effect. This change in one individual in a family usually leads to change in the system as a whole, person by person. Therefore this curriculum teaches Bowen Family Systems Theory to individuals.

The curriculum presents each of the eight concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory, as well as key ancillary ideas in the theory, and accompanying passages from the Bible and examples from Christian tradition are offered for reflection. The aim is to use theory as a lens through which to see anew what can be familiar material for class participants. There is a reciprocal quality to this effort, since looking at the selections from the perspective of theory tends to render the components of the theory more accessible. Central to this method is the premise that Jesus is the model of the well-

defined person - not reactive to others but thoughtful and principled in his responses to them.