

***Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families
Living the Faith in Daily Life***

by **Diana R. Garland**

[San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003]

Review by Pat Hoerl, UUA Children, Family and Intergenerational Programs Director

What is it exactly that characterizes faith and spirituality in family life?

This book identifies resilience, strength, and faith in the stories of all kinds of families and encourages readers to think about how faith shapes their own family lives. Author Diana Garland conducted extensive interviews with 110 families in a variety of mainline Christian denominations and the stories from these families both reveal and rely on extraordinary faith. Connecting the personal stories with the overarching Christian story, Garland explores the diversity of structures these families represent and the ways they seek to live their faith in everyday life.

The stories that families tell about themselves are the substance of this book. The underlying *melody* of the stories is the meaning and purpose of shared lives and the faith family members have – in one another, in themselves, in what they value together, in the Spirit of life/God. Stories help families remember what they want to remember, who they are, and what their people stand for. Because of the underlying *melody* of meaning, stories give families a sense of identity and of belonging. By telling our family stories we “interrupt, correct and build on one another’s words and telling a story together becomes in the process, *our* story.”

Garland revisits each family’s stories chapter by chapter. In the first chapter she explores the significance of stories in the lives of families. Chapter two tells stories about how these families identify themselves and some of the challenges of defining who their families are. The third chapter explores stories of family strength and resilience, that which brought them together and keeps them together, even through the challenges and stresses of family life. The fourth chapter describes how these families experience faith in their daily life together. In the fifth chapter Garland describes ways that families attempt to practice their faith. Chapter Six tells the stories of how these families have felt the presence of the holy (God) in the ordinary and critical times of family life. The final chapter explores how readers can help their congregation become a community where people know one another by family and by story and where families are encouraged to practice their faith with one another. The book concludes with two resource guides, one for families – *Your Family Stories: Questions for Reflection* – and one for congregational family groups/family covenant groups – *Thinking About Families and Faith: A Discussion Guide for Groups*.

This book is part of the Families and Faith Series that is “devoted to exploring the relationship between the spiritual life and our closest human relationships.” Series editors Diana Garland and Bradley Wigger state their purpose: *From one generation to the next, faith and families are deeply intertwined in powerful ways. Faith puts all of life, including family life, in such a large perspective that it invites the gratitude, wonder and hope so badly needed in the middle of the complexities and struggles of existence. On the other hand, faith becomes real only as it lives through the concrete human relationships.* I highly recommend this book (and this series) as a resource to those who seek to make faith real in their families, congregations, and communities.