**Issues facing the step-family**

The blended family – somehow it sounds so strange to those readers who have managed to maintain the traditional nuclear environment. Yet, at every turn, we encounter families torn apart for reasons ranging from death to abuse. Statistics tell us that more than 45 per cent of the people who get married these days have been married before. And, more than half of those are the custodial parent of at least one child. This means that more than seven million children are transplanted into stepfamilies each year.

**Giving up expectations**

Because the dreams of a "a white picket fence and a two-story home on an All America Street with two parents and two children happily living their lives" is so magnetic in our expectations of marriage, to give that notion up as an expectation for a second marriage with children is difficult. Nuclear families develop slowly – the marriage relationship usually has a chance to grow before the first child appears. However, the blended family brings individuals together in a marriage that will be difficult at best and the resulting relationships must be dealt with simultaneously and immediately. Unfortunately, we can never quite start over. We drag pieces of the past into our new marriages. It seems we can never completely sever ties to a former spouse with whom we have had children. To our dismay, we finally have to give up any expectation that we can erase our first marriages as if they had never happened and recreate the nuclear family.

**Understand the issues**

Money always seems to loom into the forefront in blending families. The envelope in the mail with an attorney’s return address can strike terror to the non-custodial parent’s heart. He/she knows any increase in child support will strap an already slim budget and fuel additional stress in the present relationship. Or, certainly those families where no support is forthcoming from the non-custodial parent can feel the pain of lack of resources as well.

Children, too, suffer from the dislocation of divorce and blending of families. Mom and dad have emotional ties to each other as their relationship matures. Children, however, are often thrown into common bedrooms with strangers, made to call an intruder "mom" or "dad," catapulted into new schools, churches neighbourhoods – the children have no ownership in the home or the new life. Often, the deep resentments, the depth of loss and lack of attentiveness in their own grief and adjustment processes push children to thoughts of suicide, acting out with sex, drugs, alcohol and other marginal lifestyles while silently crying out for help.

**Possible solutions**

What, then, are the solutions for such a myriad of problems? Space prohibits me from addressing them in depth. However, a thumbnail pass at solutions would include the following:

1. Blended family parents must persist at developing a solid, loving relationship exclusive of, and resistive to, issues relating to the children.
2. Step-parents must throw an umbilical cord to their stepchildren as a signal that they are in this relationship for life and that nothing the child can do will cause the step-parent to abandon them.
3. Issues of your children versus my children have to be melded into "our children" issues regardless of custodial or residential restraints.
4. Sensitivity to the dislocation and relationship issues of the children must be demonstrated immediately for this family to survive.
5. Communication between all members of the family is critical to solve money, ex-spouses and other crisis issues that may blind-side the blending process.

Experts say that the proving time for step relationships takes two to five years. Within that time, they say, the blending family will either split or strengthen. With God’s help within the incubator of the Christian community, we can defy the odds that the blending family will fail and experience healthy, thriving, vibrant and caring