

## FAQ: The Family Tree®

by J. Russell Crabtree

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Q *What is the Family Tree®?*

A The Family Tree® is a two-question, online survey of a congregation, or other religious organization, that is completed by its members. While most surveys ask evaluative questions of respondents, the Family Tree® asks about the connections of members to one another. This enables us to generate a series of maps that show how the organization is relationally networked.

Q *What is the purpose of the Family Tree®?*

A Using the Family Tree® is like looking at a street map of a city. Some intersections are large and carry a lot of traffic. Others are smaller and have only a few cars passing through them. In the same way, the Family Tree® report provides a map of the relationships within an organization, shows which ones are carrying a lot of information and which ones are connecting just a few people. Some relationships are one-way; others are reciprocal. Having these maps helps a leader know how to navigate the relational space of an organization.

Q *How does a leader use the Family Tree®?*

A. Churches and other religious organizations find the information provided by the Family Tree® to be helpful whenever they are preparing to bring a new leader on board such as a Pastor, Bishop, or Executive. It takes time for a new leader to meet all the members and even longer to understand how they are connected to one another. Family Tree® familiarizes a new leader with those connections and helps him or her get to know the “family” more quickly.

Q *We have an organizational chart of our organization that shows how people are connected. What does Family Tree® provide that is different from that?*

A In many situations, there are important informal leaders who do not sit in official positions. These are not discovered in a formal organizational chart, but often through trial and error. Family Tree® helps orient a new leader to the informal structure of a church or organization in the same way that an organizational chart orients a new leader to the formal structure.

Q *Are there any other uses of the Family Tree®?*

A Yes, it can be useful in any situation where leaders want to consult with people from every corner of the organization. This would include preparation for a new search process, strategic planning, or developing a communication strategy.

Q *What do the maps show a leader?*

A The maps show a number of views of an organization. One view shows the Isolates, that is, the folks who are isolated. Another view shows the Islands, the people who are connected to one another but not to the “trunk of the tree”. Still another view shows the Bridges. These people are the glue in an organization. Without the Bridges, the family would fragment into many disconnected clans. The final view shows the Key Figures. These are the major relational intersections in the congregation where a lot of information traffic is flowing. Key Figures are usually informal leaders.

Q *What questions are asked in the Family Tree® survey?*

A As mentioned earlier, there are two. The first is easy: “What is your name?” The second is simply this: “Who are the persons in this church (or Diocese, for example) with whom you have a one-on-one relationship and would be comfortable going to for advice?” That’s it.

Q *I’m concerned that members of our organization might not be comfortable sharing who their relationships are with everyone else.*

A The full maps are only shared with the new leader of an organization or with a few leaders who are trying to design a process that is inclusive of all groups. The only maps that are released to everyone are those that have been stripped of all the names. It is like looking at a street map without the names of the streets. The structure can be informative itself, but no one need be uncomfortable

- Q *How might a new leader use the maps provided by the Family Tree®?*  
A A new leader might use the maps to reach out to those who are isolated. Or a new leader might try to find ways to connect the Islands to everyone else. A new leader could use the maps as a way of building consensus on important decisions rather than simply engaging in top down decision-making.
- Q *How is the Family Tree® survey administered?*  
A The survey is created online. Members are sent a link to the survey, either via email or snail mail. The survey can be completed in just a few minutes.
- Q *What about people who don't have computer access?*  
A We provide a PDF file of the survey that can be used to create print copies which members can complete and return to the office where a trusted person can go online and input their data.
- Q *Can the Family Tree® be used in conjunction with the Church Assessment Tool® or other organizational surveys like the Regional Association Assessment Tool?*  
A Yes. Because the Church Assessment Tool® (and other similar tools) is confidential, we create the Family Tree® as a separate survey linked to the end of the CAT. When a person hits "Done" at the end of the CAT, he or she is taken to the Family Tree® survey. In this way, we insure the confidentiality of the first survey while allow the sharing of names in the Family Tree®.
- Q *I have taken many surveys. Why have I never seen one like this before?*  
A Only recently has the technology become available to make something like the Family Tree® possible. Leaders in organizations have known for years how critical the relationships are in the bodies they lead. Now they have the capacity to lead in a way that is better informed about those relational networks.
- Q *Can we add questions to the Family Tree®?*  
A Yes, an organization can add questions to the Family Tree®. For example sometimes a question is added regarding tenure in order to determine how well an organization is assimilating newer folks. The maps are color-coded for members who joined in different time intervals.
- Q *Who takes the Family Tree®?*  
A All members and affiliates who live "in-town", have been active within the past year, and who are able to physically and emotionally cope with the survey.
- Q *How does our church or organization set up the survey for members to take it?*  
A We create the survey for the church and send the web link to the church contact person. The webmaster for the church website creates a button, either on the homepage or on a separate page of the website which members can click.
- Q *How do we make sure that unauthorized persons don't take the survey?*  
A If desired, we can provide a password that is communicated to members to insure that others cannot access the survey.
- Q *How do we publicize the Family Tree®?*  
A A full set of instructions is provided for your organization including sample documents and announcements. Members can be notified by snail-mail or email and given information about how to take the survey.
- Q *How long do we give members to take the survey?*  
A Generally, churches give their members two to three weeks to take the survey.
- Q *After members have completed the survey, how long does it take to get the Family Tree® report?*  
A We will generally email a report to the church contact person within 48 hours after the close of the survey.
- Q *What does the Family Tree® cost?*  
A The cost is scaled for the size of the organization. For a church it is priced by average Sunday (or weekend) attendance.
- Q *How do we get started?*  
A The church (or other organization) appoints a liaison for the Family Tree®. This person then registers the organization for the Family Tree® by going to [www.hollycowconsulting.com/registerfamilytree](http://www.hollycowconsulting.com/registerfamilytree).