

## **Rev. John Bell, MDiv** **The Emotional Interplay** **Between Families and** **Communities**



This 20-minute presentation will address the role of community leaders (faith or otherwise) managing relationships in a changing world.

The processes at work in shaping a family's response to a changing world are also at work in a community. How the family addresses a challenge influences and is influenced by a neighborhood, community, workplace, institution and government. Both the reciprocal interaction of families and communities and the wide variation of functioning found in families contributes to a community's capacity to respond to a challenge.

Families at the lowest levels of functioning, who experience high levels of tension and who have limited resources at their disposal, display physical, emotional or behavioral symptoms in one or more family members. Families that are flexible and adaptable in the face of a challenge function at higher levels as leaders manage their reactivity, lean into a challenge and find ways to rally family resources. A similar process is at work in a community.

Outside threats to families in a community can raise the level of anxiety within each family unit. Therefore, at the heart of any societal challenge is the challenge of managing relationships. The ability of a community to meet a problem is influenced by the functional level of its leaders who reflect the functional level of their family of origin. As a result, there is wide variation in how a community perceives and responds to a threat that is rooted in the functional level of the families within a community.

### **3rd International Conference on Bowen Family Systems Theory**



According to Bowen theory, individual behavior is an expression of a complex emotional process within a multigenerational family. As leaders works to manage their automatic tendencies to control others or distance from them, they are in a better position to observe and understand patterns of behavior. This can lead to different ways of responding resulting in shifts in the relationship system (both in the family and the community), a dissipating of symptoms, and effectively and efficiently meeting a challenge.

The family is the building block of the community. The interplay between families with neighborhoods, associations, institutions and governments influences a community's capacity to meet a challenge. Bowen theory provides a way of understanding this interplay. Community leaders are in a better position to respond to a challenge as they work on differentiation of self in their family and apply their learning to leadership in the community.

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Sörbyn, Swedish Lapland, Sweden June 15-17 2020.  
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