



ASSOCIATION OF  
FAMILY AND  
CONCILIATION COURTS



eNEWS

## **There's No Place Like Two Homes AFCC Regional Training Conference Kansas City, Missouri**

The program brochure and online registration are now available for the AFCC Regional Training Conference, *There's No Place Like Two Homes: The Complexities of Separation, Divorce and Co-parenting*, November 7-9, 2013, at the Westin Kansas City at Crown Center in Kansas City, Missouri. The training conference is formatted to offer intensive three-hour training workshops to sharpen your skills.

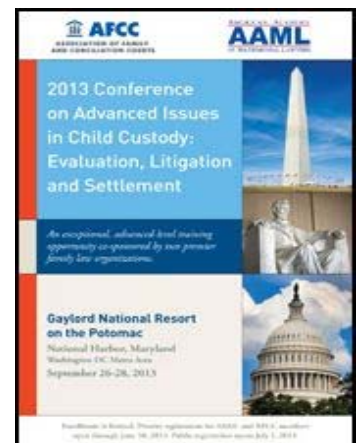
[Register online, view the conference program brochure](#)

### **Keynote Address with Isolina Ricci, PhD Two Homes: A Time to Ask the Tough Questions**

The two-home concept has evolved and expanded as parents, lawmakers and professionals have shaped and reshaped the reality of shared parenting after separation within the context of an accelerating pace of change in the economy, culture, customs, shifting norms and information technology. Isolina Ricci, author of the *Mom's House, Dad's House* books and founder and director, Custody & CoParenting Solutions in San Ramon, California, will share her perspective based on 40+ years as a clinician, mediator and statewide

MONTHLY E-  
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### **Upcoming AFCC Conferences**



**AFCC-AAML Conference**

coordinator of court services. Dr. Ricci will discuss the core challenges professionals, parents and children face today and offer a forecast for the future.

### **Scholarships to the Regional Training Conference**

Scholarships to assist with the cost of attendance will be awarded by the AFCC Scholarship Committee. Scholarships will cover the cost of registration, pre-conference institute, certificate of attendance, Saturday's luncheon and access to the AFCC hospitality suite. The application deadline is September 5, 2013.

[Apply for a scholarship](#)

### **AFCC-AAML 2013 Conference**

#### **Advanced Issues in Child Custody: Evaluation, Litigation and Settlement**

**September 26-28, 2013**

Registration is now open to the public. Register early, enrollment is limited and the first AFCC-AAML Conference, held in 2011, sold out. Registration rates increase September 4. The conference will be held at the Gaylord National Resort on the Potomac, National Harbor, Maryland, in the Washington, DC Metro Area.

[Register online, view the conference program brochure, exhibit space available](#)

### **President's Message: Asking the Hard Questions**

*By Nancy Ver Steegh, JD, MSW, St. Paul, Minnesota*

One of the things I like best about AFCC is the vibrant discussion that takes place at conferences, in think tanks, on task forces, and in the pages of the *Family Court Review*. We value and encourage the expression of different perspectives under our big multidisciplinary tent, in part because we know that the challenges facing families and children are too complex for any one of us to solve.

[Read more](#)

### **President's Profile**

#### **Meet the New President of AFCC, Nancy Ver Steegh**

When Nancy Ver Steegh discusses any aspect of her work, her strong commitment to helping poor or vulnerable people within the legal system is immediately apparent. For more than a decade Nancy worked for Legal Aid, she has also worked as a community organizer, and mediator. Now a law professor, she is an educator, mentor and

#### *Advanced Issues in Child Custody: Evaluation, Litigation and Settlement*

September 26–28, 2013  
Gaylord National Resort  
Washington, DC Metro Area

[More information](#)



#### **AFCC Regional Training Conference**

*There's No Place Like Two Homes: The Complexities of Separation, Divorce and Co-parenting*

November 7–9, 2013  
The Westin Crown Center  
Kansas City, Missouri

[More information](#)

#### **AFCC 51st Annual Conference**

May 28-31, 2014  
The Westin Harbour Castle  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

[More information](#)

#### **AFCC 11th Symposium on Child Custody Evaluations**

November 6-8, 2014  
Westin La Cantera Hill  
Country Resort  
San Antonio, Texas

#### **AFCC 52nd Annual Conference**

May 27-30, 2015  
Hilton New Orleans Riverside

policy maker, but her focus on the underserved continues.

[Read more](#)

## **Ask the Experts**

### **Ten Tips for Engaging People in Conversation**

*Sue Bronson, MS, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Rebecca T. Magruder, MSW, JD, St. Charles, Missouri*

Regardless of which professional hat we wear when working with clients, in order to help the families we serve we need to engage them and others, as well, in conversation. On the surface this may sound like a very simple concept, but we all struggle with the complexities of understanding what is really important to clients. The following ten tips are designed to help you provide opportunities to have the meaningful conversations where debate turns into dialogue.

[Read more](#)

## **AFCC 51st Annual Conference**

### **Navigating the Waters of Shared Parenting: Guidance from the Harbour**

**May 28-31, 2014, at The Westin Harbour Castle  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada**

There is limited consensus about the term “shared parenting” after separation and divorce. It may refer to parenting time, quality, decision making or responsibilities; it has multiple labels, including joint or split custody, access, time sharing and parallel parenting. Many believe shared parenting to be a worthy goal; others caution against presumptions and unintended consequences. Save the date and join AFCC for this ongoing conversation about the pros, cons, challenges and opportunities that shared parenting presents for children, families, practitioners, researchers, policymakers and advocates. Look for the program online at the end of December; the print version will be available January 2014.

## **Submit a Workshop Proposal**

AFCC is accepting proposals for 90-minute workshops to be presented at the 51st Annual Conference. The deadline for submission is Thursday, October 3, 2013. See the Call for Proposals for a list of topic suggestions and submission guidelines.

[More information](#)

## **Passports Needed for US Residents Travel to Canada**

Canadian law requires that all persons entering Canada carry both proof of citizenship and proof of identity. A valid US passport, passport card, or NEXUS card satisfies these requirements for US citizens. As of

New Orleans, Louisiana

### **AFCC Regional Training Conference**

November 5-7, 2015

Hyatt Regency Columbus  
Columbus, Ohio

### **AFCC 53rd Annual Conference**

June 1-4, 2016

Sheraton Seattle Hotel  
Seattle, Washington

### **AFCC Chapter Annual Conferences**

#### **AFCC Texas Chapter Annual Conference**

*Feed Your Brain*

September 19-20, 2013

Hurst Convention Center  
Hurst, TX

[More Information](#)

#### **AFCC New York Chapter Conference**

NY Upstate Conference—

Rochester, New York

September 27, 2013

RIT INN Conference Center  
Henrietta, New York

[More Information](#)

#### **Ontario Chapter Annual Conference**

*Our Families' Faces*

October 18, 2013

Toronto Public Library

Toronto, Ontario

[More information](#)

#### **California Chapter Annual Conference**

*Back to the Future: Serving California's Changing Families*

February 7-9, 2014

InterContinental Mark Hopkins

San Francisco, CA

[More information](#)

#### **Massachusetts Chapter**

Monday, July 15, routine passport applications are being processed in approximately 4-6 weeks from the time of application. Plan ahead, apply for or renew your passport ahead of time.

[More information](#)

## Member News

**Chief Justice Paula Carey**, Boston, Massachusetts, who served as the Chief Justice of the Probate and Family Court, was appointed by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court as the Chief Justice of the Trial Court, effective July 16, 2013.

**Christine Coates** and **Robert Backerman**, Boulder, Colorado, were awarded the annual Community Service Award by the Boulder Interdisciplinary Committee in recognition of their outstanding contributions and commitment to the children of the community. In cooperation with the Boulder District Court, they began and staffed a pro bono early neutral consultation program for self-represented parents to educate them about the needs of their children and help them resolve parenting disputes early in their divorce/separation process.

**Judge Sandy Karlan**, President of the Florida Chapter, Miami, Florida, was honored by Florida's Children First for her service as Chair of Commission on the Legal Needs of Children. The committee produced a [report](#) after a three year study of other jurisdictions and legal representation programs. One recommendation in the report, that has been successfully implemented, was for the Florida Bar to appoint a standing committee on the legal needs of children.

**Retired Superior Court Judge Leonard Edwards**, Los Altos Hills, California, has written a book, [The Role of the Juvenile Court Judge: Practice and Ethics](#). The book is divided into three sections: Running the Juvenile Court, Ex Parte Communications, and Working off the Bench. It explains the unique role of the juvenile court judge in the context of ethics using hypothetical scenarios to offer advice and solutions.

**Barbara Jo Fidler**, **Nicholas Bala**, and **Howard Hurwitz**, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, have created a best practice guide, *Emotional Harm and Parent-Child Contact Problems in High Conflict Separations* for the High Conflict Forum (Toronto) in conjunction with Jewish Family & Child. The Guide addresses different types and intensities of parent-child contact problems when parents are separating or divorcing, including situations of parental alienation and domestic violence. It

## Annual Conference

March 28, 2014

Regis College

Weston, Massachusetts

[More information](#)

## Join AFCC

Are you a member?

[Join](#) or [Renew](#)

AFCC offers member benefits that promote excellence in practice.

[View member benefits](#)

## AFCC Chapters

Network and share your interdisciplinary view of family court matters on a local level. There are currently chapters in the following states and provinces:

**Australia**

**Alberta**

**Arizona**

**California**

**Colorado**

**Connecticut**

**Florida**

**Illinois**

**Indiana**

**Louisiana**

**Massachusetts**

**Minnesota**

**Missouri**

**New Jersey**

**New York**

**Ontario**

**Texas**

**Washington**

**Wisconsin**

[Add an AFCC Chapter to your membership](#)

## Ask the Experts

Is there a topic you would like to see covered by an AFCC Ask the Experts piece?

[Email your suggestion](#)

provides practical advice from an interdisciplinary perspective for child welfare workers, lawyers, judges and other professionals.

### **RSI Incorporates as Free-Standing Nonprofit**

Resolution Systems Institute (RSI) has announced that as of July 1, it is an independent, nonprofit organization. Eighteen years ago RSI started in Chicago as an affiliate of the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) with little more than the idea of gathering and disseminating information about court ADR in Illinois. Today RSI is the leading provider of court ADR services, programs and research in the nation. RSI will continue to pursue its mission of strengthening justice by enhancing court alternative dispute resolution systems.

[More information](#)

### **Meet the New AFCC Board Members**

AFCC is pleased to welcome Lesley Goldsmith, Jacqueline Hagerott, and Robert A. Simon to the AFCC Board of Directors for terms that began July 1, 2013.

[Read more](#)

### **Conferences of Interest**

#### **ACR Annual Conference**

Association for Conflict Resolution will hold its annual conference, *Making Peace Happen: New Normals*, October 9-11, 2013, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The program features keynote speaker Grande Lum, Director of the US Department of Justice Community Relations Program. Network and collaborate with professionals in multiple disciplines in both public and private sectors. A special two-day retreat for the Family and Elder Sections of ACR takes place following the conference.

[More information](#)

#### **AAAA/AAARTA Annual Mid-Year Conference**

The American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and the American Academy of Assisted Reproductive Technology Attorneys will host their Mid-Year Conference in historic Charleston, South Carolina, November 10-12, 2013. The conference, *The World of Assisted Reproductive Technology—A Global Approach to Family Formation in the United States and Abroad*, will feature introductory and advanced sessions on topics such as egg banking and legal consideration, LGBT family formation, international ART issues, ethical considerations in ART, and more.

[More information](#)

### **About AFCC eNEWS**

Readers are welcome to forward this e-newsletter to interested colleagues. All opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of AFCC.

#### **Editor:**

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## **Sesame Street Resources on AFCC Website**

Visit the Sesame Street page on the AFCC website—you can't miss Abby Cadabby on the homepage—the page contains links to resources including a free mobile app, videos, a caregiver guide, tips for families, a children's storybook, and interactive activities. The *Little Children, Big Challenges: Divorce* initiative features Muppet Abby Cadabby and provides tools and language to help young children (ages 2-8) cope with and understand divorce at an age-appropriate level. AFCC members can order free kits to share with their clients. Sorry, at this time the kits are only available to members in the US.

[Read more](#)

## **Family Law in the News**

### **The Rise of Single Fathers—A Nine-Fold Increase Since 1960**

*By Gretchen Livingston, courtesy of Pew Research*

A record 8% of households with minor children in the United States are headed by a single father, up from just over 1% in 1960, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey data.

[Read more](#)

### **Study Shows Early Divorce Affects Parent-Child Relationship**

*By Katherine Kirk, courtesy of IAALS Online*

A recent study shows that divorce in early childhood has an impact on the relationship that children have with their parents at a young age and continuing after adolescence. The study analyzed two surveys, which revealed that children of divorce were more likely than others to view their relationships with their parents as “unreliable” and showed that “people whose parents had divorced by their 5th birthdays were also more likely than others to see their later relationships with their parents as insecure....”

[Read more](#)



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## Meet the New AFCC Board Members

AFCC is pleased to welcome Lesley Goldsmith, Jacqueline Hagerott, and Robert A. Simon to the AFCC Board of Directors for terms that began July 1, 2013.

**Lesley Goldsmith, JD** has worked as an Assistant Judicial Case Manager at Norfolk Probate and Family Court in Canton, Massachusetts, since 1998. Ms. Goldsmith served as a law clerk to the Probate and Family Court Justices 1997-1998 after graduating from New England Law/Boston in 1997. Prior to law school, Ms. Goldsmith worked as a residential social worker in Ohio and her native country, England. Her work with families began in England in 1978. Ms. Goldsmith is a Past President of the Massachusetts Chapter of AFCC and currently serves as Secretary and Co-chair of the Conference Committee.

**Jacqueline Hagerott, JD, LLM** is the manager of the Dispute Resolution Section in the Supreme Court of Ohio, where she serves as the mediator for the Supreme Court litigants; consults with and advises judges, court personnel, and government officials regarding dispute resolution process design, program planning, implementation and evaluation; and drafts rules and legislation related to dispute resolution. Her experience includes the practice of law, an associate deanship, curriculum design, and dispute resolution. Her academic degrees include an AAS in business management, a BS in accounting, a JD, and LLM in business with a concentration in dispute resolution. She is licensed to practice in the State of Ohio, the US District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, and the Supreme Court of the US. She is the author of *Foreclosure Mediation: Responding to the Current Crisis*, 40 CAP. U. L. REV. 908-32 (2012). She is a national speaker and trainer on the topics of dispute resolution systems design, foreclosure mediation, preparing clients for mediation, creating local court autonomy while balancing statewide interests, working the pro se litigants, and what stakeholders want and need—courts and neutrals. She served as the Chair of the Ohio State Bar Association Dispute Resolution Committee from 2007–2012 and has been an adjunct faculty member at Franklin University since 2006.

**Robert A. Simon, PhD** is a forensic psychology consultant in the domain of child custody and family law. Based in San Diego County, California, Dr. Simon consults on cases throughout the United States. He is the co-author of the book *Forensic Psychology Consultation in Child Custody Litigation: A Handbook for Work Product Review, Case Preparation and Expert Testimony*, published by the Section of the Family Law of the American Bar Association. Dr. Simon is also a psychological ethicist and serves as a senior member of the ethics committee of the California Psychological Association and provides ethics consultation in his practice. Dr. Simon is a member of the editorial boards for the *Family Court Review* and the *Open Access Journal of Forensic Psychology*.

[Read more about the AFCC Board of Directors.](#)



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## Ask the Experts

### Ten Tips for Engaging People in Conversation

*Sue Bronson, MS, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Rebecca T. Magruder, MSW, JD, St. Charles, Missouri*

Regardless of which professional hat we wear when working with clients, in order to help the families we serve we need to engage them and others, as well, in conversation. On the surface this may sound like a very simple concept, but we all struggle with the complexities of understanding what is really important to clients. The following ten tips are designed to help you provide opportunities to have the meaningful conversations where debate turns into dialogue.

**1. Be fully present.** The external distractions in our environments as well as the thoughts rattling around in our heads interfere with our ability to listen carefully and form a connection with another person. It's extraordinarily challenging to be fully present in a conversation when a small electronic device is buzzing or blinking in your pocket or on the table. Giving your full attention to the speaker is a gift that tacitly invites the speaker to stay engaged in the conversation. Your full attention suggests that you are truly interested in hearing more.

**2. Stay in the moment.** So often, our minds race ahead of the speaker's words and before we know it, we are three steps ahead of where *we think* the speaker is going, which makes it much more difficult to connect. You may begin to think of strategies for solving the problem, or likely outcomes. Even if you are correct in your assessment of where the speaker is going, the speaker may lose interest in telling you much more because you have usurped his or her ideas and the speaker no longer has ownership. A few slow deep breaths help to slow the mind. Staying in the moment allows you to pick up on the nuances of *the speaker's* thoughts and emotions, which will yield much more information about what is really important.

**3. Talk less, listen more.** Let the speaker be most important. Be respectfully curious, yet purposeful in the questions you ask and the statements you make. Hear the speakers' feelings and values as well as their thoughts. Have compassion for their journey, which is unique to them. Most ideas you think you want to share with the speaker can wait until later in the conversation, or you may find out that they need not be addressed at all. When we hold back and listen more, we can avoid the occupational hazard of falling in love with our own seemingly wonderful ideas, and, instead, be dazzled by the brilliance of the speaker's ideas.

**4. Listen without judgment or defensiveness.** Being in a judgmental frame of mind, which happens to all of us from time to time, prevents us from hearing what is truly important to the speaker. When you notice your judgments or defenses come up, seek a deeper understanding of the speaker's experience by asking questions motivated by *genuine curiosity*. Ask open-ended questions about the speaker's perception of the situation. Ask how the situation has affected the speaker on a personal level. Ask about the speaker's thoughts for rectifying the situation if the situation is still ongoing and still causing problems. In converting your judgmental thinking to genuine curiosity, you may quickly find that your judgments and defensiveness vanish into thin air because you can now see the speaker in a totally different light. Even if your judgments are confirmed, you will understand the speaker at a deeper level.



**5. Be a witness to the conversation.** Be mindful of the whole communication, the verbal messages, as well as the non-verbal messages, of the speaker and the reactions of everyone in the room. Reflect what you have heard and seen as well as what you have not heard. Be clear about your actual observations versus when you are “filling in the blank.” Ask the speaker to let you know if you correctly stated what was going on.

**6. Engage with people’s emotions.** There is valuable information in the expression of emotions, so don’t discount the emotions as mere venting. Acknowledge the emotions and validate why the speaker’s emotions would make sense from his or her perception of the situation. Normalizing emotions allows the speaker to be more open to discussing his or her values, real concerns, and the meaning of what he or she has experienced. Understanding the emotions will help you to understand what is important in the big picture, as well as in the specific situation.

**7. Ask more questions, make fewer statements.** Ask lots of open-ended questions. Ask about what is important to the speaker. Ask questions about their life experiences. Ask about thinking, values, beliefs, and emotions. Ask questions that help you understand what motivates the speaker. Be brave in asking about the elephant in the room, the dynamics driving the conflict, and the unspeakable. Gently shine a light on the situation. The client’s job is to decide what to do. Your job is to keep shining the light and supporting people in difficult and painful conversations.

**8. Empower people.** Encouraging people to act on their own behalf helps them to feel in control of their own lives, which in turn allows them to make decisions in their best interests. We empower people by listening closely, reflecting their words and emotions, summarizing the big picture, and checking in to see what the next step should be. Reflection helps the speaker to hear him or herself in a new way and allows for self-correction as necessary. Summarizing clears the fog, reveals the big picture, and makes clear what is really important. Checking in gives control to the speaker in determining the next step. As a result, people become calmer, clearer, focused, confident, articulate, decisive, and more accepting of the other person’s perspective.

**9. Be inclusive of different perspectives.** There are many right ways to do things. Encourage clients to think more broadly. Speak to the clients’ strengths and encourage them to think outside of the box. Encourage the notion of “Yes, and…” instead of “yes, but.” “Yes, I see your perspective, and at the same time, I see the situation a little differently.” Encourage appreciation in the richness of their differences and ask how their differences can be merged to create an outcome that is greater than the sum of its parts.

**10. Take responsibility for your own behaviors.** Realize that you are as human as your clients and that you will make mistakes from time to time. Apologize when you have wronged others and change the hurtful behavior. Ask clients what you can do to put things right. Ask if they would prefer to work with a different professional. Assess with another professional in a consultation what triggered your behaviors and what steps you might take to have a different outcome the next time your buttons are pushed in a negative way. The important thing is to learn the lessons that the mistake has to teach.

Sue Bronson and Rebecca Magruder will present a full-day pre-conference institute, *Engaging People in Conversation: Getting Out of the Fight and into Meaningful Dialogue* as part of the AFCC Regional Training Conference, *There’s No Place Like Two Homes: The Complexities of Separation, Divorce and Co-parenting*, November 7-9, 2013, at the Westin Crown Center in Kansas City, Missouri.



eNEWS

## President's Profile

*Meet the new President of AFCC, Nancy Ver Steegh, JD, MSW*

When Nancy Ver Steegh discusses any aspect of her work, her strong commitment to helping poor or vulnerable people within the legal system is immediately apparent. For more than a decade Nancy worked for legal aid programs; she has also worked as a community organizer, and mediator. Now a law professor, she is an educator, mentor and policy maker, but her focus on the underserved continues.

Nancy holds an MSW and JD from Washington University in St. Louis. After completing her education, Nancy spent the next ten years working for legal services offices in St. Louis, Missouri; East St. Louis, Illinois; and Minneapolis. While many of her cases dealt with family law and child protection, others involved civil rights, housing, and public benefits.

As a legal aid attorney Nancy began to work on domestic violence issues, which she often encountered with her family law and child protection clients. She ultimately brought a class action lawsuit against two police departments and a prosecutor for failure to respond to calls, make arrests, and prosecute domestic violence crimes. The lawsuit was settled when the defendants agreed to change their policies and practices and participate in ongoing training.

Nancy did not travel a traditional road to academia. She met her husband, Jack, while they were both working for legal services. When their three sons, now ages 28, 26 and 21, were young, Nancy worked part time teaching, training and educating police and prosecutors about domestic violence. She was a community organizer advocating for affordable housing, a mediator, and then an adjunct professor at William Mitchell. She eventually joined the fulltime faculty, served as associate dean, and was recently named the Justice Helen M. Meyer Distinguished Chair in Child Protection.

Nancy teaches a wide range of courses including family law, domestic violence law and policy, a seminar on civil child protection, family mediation and alternative dispute resolution. She offers interested students encouragement in the field of family law, and noted that good mentors were valuable to her when she was a new lawyer. "I was blessed with good mentors who offered practical wisdom about roles, boundaries and practice." Nancy enjoys working with family court professionals throughout Minnesota. "The teaching and mentoring part of my job is my favorite," she said, "William Mitchell has a diverse student body, we call it the 'Mitchell mix,' with students of all ages and from all walks of life, undergrads to professionals returning to school."

Nancy values the importance of professional dialogue within the field. "Better ideas come when we're working together," Nancy said, reflecting on the progress made with domestic violence policy and general awareness. "So much excellent work has been done, much of it by AFCC members: the research with respect to the impact of domestic violence on children, custody and parenting; the Wingspread Conference; and the current Domestic Violence and Child Custody National Work Group collaboration with the Battered Women's Justice Project, NCJFCJ, and Praxis...all of these benefit families."

As the co-reporter and co-author of the [Report from the Wingspread Conference on Domestic Violence and Family Courts](#), with Clare Dalton, Nancy has been instrumental in working with the family law and domestic violence communities. Nancy explained, "The field has changed a great deal in regard to

domestic violence. Although there is so much more to be done, it's gratifying to me to at least see more awareness. Not all that long ago, in the 60s and 70s, the debate about domestic violence centered on whether or not it existed."

When you read Nancy's President's Message this month, you will understand how much she values the opportunities for dialogue available through AFCC. She said, of AFCC conferences in particular, "It's a chance to explore and debate hard questions and issues. It's a very special thing to have a group of people with such a strong commitment to children and families gather to really talk about tough subjects. That strong commitment creates an energy that drives discussions and inspires constructive conversations; it's always refreshing to talk with people with different perspectives in a constructive way."

Nancy identifies one of the greatest issues currently facing the field as the need to ensure equitable access to the legal system and she cautioned against, "...the creation of a two-tiered legal system, where those who can afford to pay more have access to different resources than those who cannot." Expressing concern about the origin of this problem, she said, "Severe cutbacks to court systems at every level in the past few years have exacerbated existing differences. A concern I have is that the most vulnerable people, those who need the most assistance, will suffer the most." When asked what can be done, Nancy said, "AFCC members are in an excellent position to talk to people about this. As a multi-disciplinary association with its roots in the court system, AFCC members can bring attention to the problems they see."

Nancy believes that one of the important discussions now taking place concerns the role and purpose of the family court system. "What is needed in terms of programs and resources? Should the complex needs of families be addressed by the court system or by private entities? If services are provided by the courts, how will the system function? There is not necessarily one right answer. This is a long term issue," said Nancy.

Nancy's plate is full with AFCC commitments. In addition to serving as President of the Board of Directors, she is on the editorial board of *Family Court Review*; she and Gabrielle Davis recently edited an updated edition of *Essays from the Family Court Review: Domestic Violence*; she represents AFCC on the Uniform Laws Commission Joint Editorial Board; and, she serves as reporter for the Domestic Violence and Child Custody Evaluations Task Force. In addition to these AFCC duties (and of course, a fulltime teaching schedule) she is a member of the Domestic Violence and Child Custody National Work Group.

With the sparse time available outside her commitments, Nancy is in more than one book club and is a self-described audiobook addict, listening while commuting to and from work. "Some books are better read aloud. I'm always looking for good readers, the reader makes a difference." she said, adding that she'll gladly accept recommendations. She also enjoys spending time with friends and biking. Nancy and Jack will celebrate their 30th anniversary in October.



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## President's Message: Asking the Hard Questions

By Nancy Ver Steegh, JD, MSW, St. Paul, Minnesota



One of the things I like best about AFCC is the vibrant discussion that takes place at conferences, in think tanks, on task forces, and in the pages of the *Family Court Review*. We value and encourage the expression of different perspectives under our big multidisciplinary tent, in part because we know that the challenges facing families and children are too complex for any one of us to solve.

AFCC is a place where reflective practitioners congregate to explore new research, reinvigorate practice, see friends, and ponder the future. In that spirit I'd like to pose five questions about the family court system that might benefit from deliberation by AFCC members and friends.

1. How can family law professionals best respond to cutbacks that make the family court system less accessible and less affordable for families?
2. What are the ramifications (foreseen and unforeseen) of privatizing some family court functions?
3. How can the family court system meet the needs of a wide variety of families—which families should be given priority in terms of system design?
4. What should be the larger purpose and role of the family court system—provision of a neutral forum, delivery of services, and/or enhancement of family functioning?
5. How should system effectiveness be defined and by who?

I suspect that analysis of these questions will vary considerably across jurisdictions, states, and countries. As I have the pleasure of meeting more of you over the next year, I look forward to exploring these and other questions with you. Of course, hard questions never have easy answers but I believe that there is power in asking them.

I am excited and honored to serve as President this year. I have big shoes to fill. Last year Arnie Shienvold worked tirelessly and effectively on behalf of AFCC. His leadership experience and insights strengthened the organization and his irreverent humor endeared him to AFCC members as far away as Australia.

Looking forward, our conferences this year will include programs growing out the Shared Parenting Think Tank held in January of 2013. In addition, the April volume of the *Family Court Review* will feature articles on this very hot topic. If you haven't already done so, please mark your calendars for the fall conferences in National Harbor, Maryland (with AAML) and Kansas City and the annual conference in Toronto. I hope to see you there.