

The Community Marriage Policy® Is About Saving Marriages

From www.marriagesavers.org

Marriage Savers has developed a proven strategy to slash divorce and cohabitation rates, and to raise the marriage rate. We have helped the clergy of 220 cities and towns (by December, 2007) to adopt a Community Marriage Policy® with the goal to "radically reduce the divorce rate in area churches," as Modesto, CA pastors put it in the first covenant in 1986. Clergy join together across denominational and racial lines and sign a public covenant on the courthouse steps to make healthy marriages a priority in their congregations. Specifically, in Community Marriage Policies®, religious leaders pledge to train Mentor Couples to help other couples at every stage of the marital life cycle to achieve five great goals:

1. Give "marriage insurance" to the engaged -- a 95% guarantee that their marriage will go the distance.

Three elements are involved.

First, couples are given a premarital inventory to give couples an objective view of their relational strengths and areas for growth. A tenth of couples who take an inventory decide not to marry.

Second, couples in healthy marriages are trained to administer the inventory and discuss the unique issues it surfaces with each couple.

Third, trained Mentor Couples teach skills of how to resolve conflict. This combination raises the percentage of those who break up short of marriage to a fifth. Studies indicate that those who break an engagement have the same scores as those who marry and later divorce. They have avoided a bad marriage before it begins. For example, in the church of Mike & Harriet McManus, of 288 couples who prepared for marriage from 1992-2000, 21 dropped out of the course, mostly to break up. Another 34 couples completed the process, and decided not to marry. That's 55 couples who decided NOT to marry -- is a high 19% dropout rate. However, of those couples who did marry, there have been only seven divorces, **a 97% success rate over a decade.** That's marriage insurance.

2. Enrich all existing marriages by conducting an annual week-end event at the church, using a marital inventory, speakers, or videos.

For example, a DVD series called "10 Great Dates" has been used to strengthen 100,000 marriages. If couples offer free babysitting, scores of couples will

come to the church on a Friday or Saturday night, drop their kids off and then watch a 20 minute DVD excerpt on such topics as "Resolving Honest Conflict," "Becoming an Encourager" or "Building a Creative Love Life." Couples then go on a 90 minute date for dessert and coffee where they fill out a brief questionnaire on that week's theme from a paperback book, and talk. Ten such Great Dates are scheduled every week for 10 weeks, or every other week. Total cost to the couple, the \$12 for the paperback.

3. Restore four out of five troubled marriages by training "back-from-the-brink couples"

Restore four out of five troubled marriages by training "back-from-the-brink couples" (whose own marriages once nearly failed) to mentor couples currently in crisis. A couple nearly driven apart by adultery who survived has something to say to a couple in a crisis over adultery. Marriage Savers offers a "Restoration Marriage Ministry" training over a Friday night-Saturday training.

4. Reconcile the separated using a self-guided workbook course, "Marriage 911"

Separation is usually a prelude for divorce. However, separation can be used to spark personal, professional and spiritual growth that attracts back the errant spouse. The person trying to save his/her marriage takes this course with a friend of same gender, who gets a Support Partner Handbook to serve as an accountability partner, meeting weekly for 12 weeks. "Marriage 911" heals more than half the marriages of the separated. Cost: Only \$28 plus shipping.

5. Help stepfamilies succeed by creating "Stepfamily Support Groups"

Help stepfamilies succeed by creating "Stepfamily Support Groups" that give couples with children from a previous marriage a place and a plan to learn how to be successful parents and partners. A kit is provided with a Manual on how to work with five organizing stepfamily couples, a CD by the author, Rev. Dick Dunn, played at the beginning of each meeting, and a paperback book, "Willing to Try Again." Instead of losing 70% of stepparents to divorce, this program saves 80% of remarriages, at a cost of only \$38 to the church.

What are the Results of a Community Marriage Policy®?

- **Divorce Rate Falls:** An independent study by the Institute for Research and Evaluation of the first 114 Community Marriage Policies found that on average, divorce rates fell 17.5% over seven years, nearly double the 9.4% decline of very similar cities in each state. Although that is a modest difference, it saved 30,000 to 50,000 marriages through 2001. In fact, seven cities slashed divorce rates by 48% or more. With six more years and 106 more CMPs in place, perhaps 100,000 divorces have been averted.
- **Cohabitation Drops:** The Institute study also found cohabitation fell 13% in CMP cities from 1990-2000 while it rose in similar cities by 19%. Thus, CMP cities ended the decade with cohabitation one-third lower than control cities. No other organization has helped any city reduce divorce and cohabitation -- let alone in more than 100 cities.
- **The Modesto Story:** Since the clergy of Modesto, CA adopted the first Community Marriage Policy in 1986, not only has the divorce rate plunged 50%, but the number of marriages has grown from 1,300 in 1986 to 2,500 in 2005. As thousands of marriages have been saved or created, children are faring much better. In a decade, the teen birth rate fell 30%, double the U.S. decline - and the school dropout rate fell 19%.

Churches Virtually Eliminate Divorce

It's the dream of every pastor -- a church that virtually eliminates divorce.

Impossible? NO! Marriage Savers gave awards in 2002 to five diverse churches, each of which has created a congregation with a "safety net" under every marriage. In a four to six year period, they have had from zero to four divorces. **Five churches in five years have had a total of only seven divorces between them. That is a virtual elimination of the scourger of divorce** that breaks up half of those who marry today. In 2003, five more churches were given "Marriage Savers Congregational Awards" which are noted below.

The leaders of the first five churches can make an astonishing pledge to every couple in the congregation:

We can offer you Marriage Insurance. Your marriage will not only go the distance; it will prosper and be a

joy to you and your children and your children's children.

Further, Marriage Savers told each of these congregations that they can proudly run ads in newspapers or radio to the community: "Is your marriage in pain?" "Are you afraid you may be heading for divorce? Are you getting married? Would you like to learn how to build a marriage for life? Come here and receive the help you need to create a joyful, lifelong marriage! We have been given a national award that we are a "Marriage Savers Congregation."

- America's first Marriage Saver Congregations are very diverse denominationally: Baptist, Lutheran (Missouri Synod), United Methodist, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and an inner city non-denominational church. Three are in Mainline Protestant denominations, and two are Evangelical. They are located in four states: South Dakota, Virginia, Kansas and Florida. One element is common to each of these remarkable churches. Each had trained a group of Mentor Couples who are willing to reach other couples at every stage of the marital life cycle: Preparation, Enrichment, Restoration, Reconciliation, and Stepfamilies. These couples have created a "safety net" under every marriage in their churches.
- The two Kansas churches are only ten miles from each other, but could not be more different; the affluent suburban Christ Lutheran Church in Overland Park, Kansas and a small ghetto Kansas City church, Bread of Life Outreach Ministries in Christ Church. Yet they have joined across racial, economic and denominational lines to build a safety net under every marriage, not only in their churches, but in others in that area. They created a Kansas City Community Marriage Policy on the Kansas side of the state line. In 2003, 50 more churches from Missouri joined in a Greater Kansas City Community Marriage Policy. Mike and Harriet McManus provided the initial training of Mentor Couples in 1996.
- **Christ Lutheran** is a church of 1,300 members with a dozen Mentor Couples who have prepared 36 couples for marriage in the last six years, losing none to divorce. The church has also trained "back-from-the-brink couples" whose marriages once nearly failed, to come along side 10 troubled marriages, all of whom saved their marriage. Christ Lutheran also conducts an

annual marriage enrichment retreat. To learn more call the Rev. Jeff Meyers, 913 345-9700.

- **Bread of Life Outreach Ministries in Christ Church in Kansas City, KS**, with 140 members, has trained eight Mentor Couples who have prepared 10 couples for marriage, and worked with three troubled marriages in four years, only one of whom divorced. Equally important Pastor LeRoy Sullivan challenged seven couples who were cohabiting from the pulpit by saying "There are some couples in this church who are living together. That's not God's plan. His plan is that couples should marry or live apart." Result: five couples married and two separated. Bread of Life was transformed from being a church of women and children to married couples and children. Has there been any such inner city transformation in America? Pastor LeRoy Sullivan is deceased.
- Three others are in "Mainline denominations" that have been losing church members: Killlearn United Methodist Church in Tallahassee, St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Richmond and First Baptist Church of Sioux Falls, SD. A brief profile of each:
 - **St. Giles Presbyterian Church** in Richmond is a 1,000 member church which has prepared 61 couples for marriage in five years, only one of whom has divorced, though several canceled or postponed wedding plans. Another 27 couples attended enrichment events, none of whom divorced.. St. Giles has also worked with eight couples in crisis, none of whom divorced, though two are still separated. To learn more, call Bob Ruthazer at 804 282-9763.
 - Bob Ruthazer has also created a Richmond Community Marriage Policy called the Richmond Marriage Builders Alliance.
 - **Killlearn United Methodist Church** is a 3,000 member congregation of - the largest Protestant church in Tallahassee - which has prepared nearly 150 couples for marriage since 1999, **none of whom has divorced**. Its "back-from-the-brink" Mentor Couples have also worked with 30 troubled marriages, none of whom divorced, though two couples who did not seek help did divorce.
- Richard Albertson, a layman who created these ministries with his wife, Elizabeth, has also created the Tallahassee Community Marriage Policy which is called "Live The Life Ministries." From 1999, when it was signed by Gov. Jeb Bush and 50 pastors, it pushed down the area's divorce rate by 13%, according to the Institute for Research & Evaluation. Comparable counties in Northern Florida saw their divorce rates fall only 1.3% in the same time. Thus, Tallahassee has out-performed comparable counties **by 10-fold**. For more information, call Richard Albertson at 850 668-3700.
- **First Baptist Church of Sioux Falls, SD**, is a church of 1,916 members, 691 of whom turn out when it is 50 degrees below zero and 900 on an average Sunday. It has prepared 64 couples for marriage since 1997, two of whom have divorced. First Baptist has also created a program to enrich existing marriages that has attracted 700 couples from 15 churches over several years called "Ten Great Dates," sparked by a video series led by David and Claudia Arp. It also has a vigorous "Marriage Ministry" to save couples whose marriages are in crisis. In six years, 22 marriages threatened by divorce have been mentored. All but two have been saved. The key contacts are Tony and Tami Trussel, who led this movement and Rev. Susan Omanson. Call 605-336-0966.
- The Trussels have also created a Sioux Empire Community Marriage Policy **that has reduced county-wide divorce rates by 14% from 1997-2001**.