

Community Marriage Policies Help Lower Divorce Rates

A 'Key to Success' in Love and Marriage

From World News with Charles Gibson, Oct. 22, 2007

(<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/Story?id=3761217&page=1>)



Community marriage policies provide mentors to married couples. — From World News with Charles Gibson

In Clackamas County, Ore., tucked between the cafes and microbreweries of Portland and the misty peak of Mount Hood, more than 170 churches have banded together in defense of love and marriage.

The churches are doing things like organizing date nights for married couples, instituting very strict rules for couples getting married and encouraging older couples to act as marriage mentors.

To learn more about the Clackamas County policy, please [click here to visit their website](#). For more information on community marriage policies, please visit www.marriagesavers.org.

Tom and Liz Dressel are the driving force behind this anti-divorce effort. The two started this mission because their marriage was once in danger.

"[Our marriage] was rotten, it was very dark," Liz said. "There was no love there ... I just dreaded when Tom came in through the door every night."

"My focus was my job. I loved it. My marriage and my children were secondary," Tom said. "I was not a good parent."

The Dressels say they came back from the brink through faith and a lot of hard work.

"I never could dream that we would have the marriage that we have today," Tom said.

Marriage Missionaries

The couple are now marriage missionaries. Six years ago, they helped convince nearly every church in Clackamas County to sign onto something called a "community marriage policy," which requires every couple contemplating marriage to undergo four premarital mentoring sessions.

Priests and pastors now say they will no longer perform "quickie weddings."

"They need to think more about what lies ahead and what they are committing themselves to," Roman Catholic Father Richard Huneger of the Archdiocese of Portland said of the community marriage policy.

Pastor Tom Hurt of the Oregon City Evangelical Church also thinks the policy is a good idea.

"Right now they're kind of thinking about getting ready for a day, and premarital counseling gets them ready for a marriage," he said.

As part of the policy, couples participate in counseling sessions and fill out a detailed premarital inventory on a wide range of subjects, including finances, parenting, religion and communication styles.

But the policy doesn't stop after the trip down the aisle. Churches also agree to promote programs to strengthen existing marriages, like date nights where couples drop off their kids, sit for a brief video and then head out for dinner. And if a couple gets in trouble down the line, support groups led by seasoned mentor couples like the Dressels are available.

The Dressel's plan seems to be working. The divorce rate in Clackamas County dropped by 15 percent in the first five years under the policy.

While the Dressels admit they cannot prove their policy is what lowered the rates, the couple and religious leaders feel the community marriage policy is saving marriage and protecting children from the pain of divorce.

There are now more than 200 community marriage policies in place across the country.

This is the final installment of our series "Key to Success" in which we show creative solutions to entrenched problems in this country.

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