

Running Head: PREMARITAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS

## Impact of Premarital Preparation Programs

Nicole Elise Humphrey

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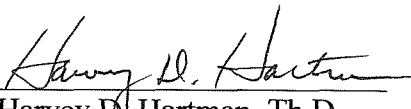
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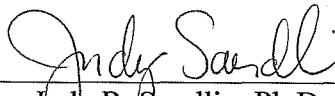
Larry D. Anderson, Ph.D.  
Chairman of Thesis



Edgar E. Barker, Ph.D.  
Committee Member



Harvey D. Hartman, Th.D.  
Committee Member



Judy R. Sandlin, Ph.D.  
Asst. Honors Program Director

April 24, 2006

Date

### Abstract

Premarital preparation is usually a requirement for marriage when a couple chooses to marry in a religious institution. For centuries pastors have counseled couples before they walk down the aisle. Recently there have been developments in premarital preparation with the creation of premarital inventories. There is also an increased interest in Community Marriage Policies. This paper evaluated current status of premarital preparation. The city of Lynchburg, VA received attention by the researcher and there was an evaluation of the current needs for premarital preparation of engaged couples. Goals were created based on the needs and actions were carried out by the researcher in efforts to meet these goals.

### Impact of Premarital Preparation

Many young people dream about marriage and view it as the logical conclusion to the end of a dating period. By many individuals, marriage is viewed as a lasting relationship to the love of their life. However, many marriages now end in divorce. Psychologists, pastors and individuals are beginning to strive to find ways to lower this statistic and strengthen, and encourage the marriage relationship. Marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman, this commitment is witnessed by other individuals:

Marriage is not only a private vow; it is a public act, a contract, taken in full public view, enforceable by law and in the equally powerful court of public opinion. When you marry, the public commitment you make changes the way you think about yourself and your beloved; it changes the way you act and think about the future; and it changes how other people and other institutions treat you as well (Waite & Gallagher, 2000, p. 17).

#### *Marriage Is Better for Men, Women, Children and Communities*

In a society where marriage is often viewed as just a legal contract and divorce rates are rampant, where single parenting is as prevalent and sometimes more frequent than two parent homes, are there any reasons to get or stay married? Marriage is better on average for men, women, children and communities around the globe. Hotmire (1999) calls marriage the “cornerstone of the family, and the bedrock of civil society” (§ 2).

*Men.* For men marriage produces many benefits. The benefits cover all aspects of life, from financial to emotional, to physical and even spiritual. According to Benefits of Healthy Marriages (2005), a survey by the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, it has been observed that married men:

live longer, [are] physically healthier, [are] wealthier, [achieve an] increase in the stability of [their] employment, [have] higher wages, [are] emotionally healthier, decrease [their] risk of drug and alcohol abuse, have better relationships with their children, [partake in] more satisfying sexual relationship, [are] less likely to commit violent crimes, [are] less likely to contract STD's [and are] less likely to attempt or commit suicide (§ 3).

Although many men enjoy the life of bachelorhood, it is apparent that many benefits are available to the married man that the single man is unable to experience. With all of these benefits it is often difficult to understand why an unmarried man would not want to get and stay married. The benefits of marriage far outweigh any reason to stay single.

*Women.* Women, also receive many benefits from marriage. According to Benefits of Healthy Marriages (2005), it has been observed that married women:

[have] more satisfying relationships, [are] emotionally healthier, [are] wealthier, [are] less likely to be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violent crimes, [are] less likely to attempt or commit suicide, decrease [their] risk of drug and alcohol abuse, [are] less likely to contract STD's, [are] less likely to remain or end up in poverty, have better relationships with their children, [and are] physically healthier (§ 2).

In today's society it is very common for a woman to choose to remain single, yet for women it is blatantly obvious that the benefits of marriage cannot be attained in single-hood. The benefits available as the result of marriage far outweigh many reasons

for single-hood. Marriage offers emotional benefits and financial security. For both genders this creates a support system. Emotional burdens can oftentimes weigh down a single person, but with marriage husbands and wives are able to confide in and depend on each other. Many women unable to work when they are pregnant, a phenomenon men do not experience. When the woman has the security of her husband's income, she is able to focus on taking care of herself and her unborn child rather than having the additional burden of trying to procure income.

*Children.* The children living in married parent homes see benefits as well. Children of divorce are more likely to drop out of school, be poor and commit suicide (McManus, 2002). According to Benefits of Healthy Marriages (2005), it has been observed that children of healthily married parents:

[are] more likely to attend college, [are] more likely to succeed academically, [are] physically healthier, [are] emotionally healthier, [are] less likely to attempt or commit suicide, demonstrate less behavioral problems in school, [are] less likely to be a victim of physical or sexual abuse, [are] less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, [are] less likely to commit delinquent behaviors, have a better relationship with their mothers and fathers, decreases their chances of divorcing when they get married, [are] less likely to become pregnant as a teenager, or impregnate someone, [are] less likely to be sexually active as teenagers, [are] less likely to contract STD's, [and are] less likely to be raised in poverty (§ 1).

In a divorce situation, the children are often the reason the parents stay together or a reason the parents use for carrying through with the divorce. Many times a husband and wife will believe the lie that their children would be emotionally healthier if they did not

have to live in a house where mom and dad fight all the time. Apart from marriages where violence or incest is involved, even unhappy marriages are better for children than divorce (Popenoe, 2002). Children thrive in non argumentative environments. If the parents are able to resolve their differences and strive toward a healthy marriage, all individuals in the family are positively impacted.

*Communities.* An individual marriage, two people who became one, is not that great of an impact around the world by itself. However, in a community, healthy marriages produce amazing benefits. The positive effects on a community where healthy marriages exist are almost overwhelming. According to, Benefits of Healthy Marriages (2005), it has been observed that communities with healthy marriages have:

higher rates of physically healthy citizens, higher rates of emotionally healthy citizens, higher rates of educated citizens, lower domestic violence rates, lower crime statistics lower teen age pregnancy rates, lower rates of juvenile delinquency, higher rates of home ownership, lower rates of migration, higher property values, and decreased need for social services (§ 4).

Communities everywhere benefit from supporting healthy marriages. To live in a community with healthy marriages, there is a support system all around. By supporting the marriages in the community, the community is strengthened.

#### *Marriage Is Better for the Economy*

In addition to communities and individuals receiving great benefits from healthy marriages, many other positive effects of marriage are realized. Marriage has a positive effect on the economy.

*Welfare.* Fagan (2002) explains that the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 stipulated

that TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) funds were meant to be used to promote and strengthen marriages. By using this money to promote marriage, the amount of money necessary to assist needy families actually decreases. Many of the poor family units with unmarried parents were choosing not to marry to keep their assistance. By giving the money to married parents only, the unwed couples are encouraged to marry. When states allow the money to continue going to the family after they marry, the marriage should stabilize the family. This in turn will aid them in acquiring and maintaining employment and they will no longer need TANF.

The chief of the Department of Human Services for the state of Oklahoma realized that divorce can very easily cause people to need assistance from welfare (Schaffer, 2002). Lack of marriages and divorces both negatively affect the economy by increasing the strain on welfare. The economy is additionally affected by the workforce.

*Productivity and wages in the workplace.* Married individuals are more productive in the workplace. They are more stable, and therefore, are harder workers (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Husbands earn about 10% and sometimes up to 40% more than single men; economists and researchers are discovering that being married actually helps men earn more money. Researchers and economists have theorized that this is in direct correlation to the amount of responsibility they assume in preparation for and after walking down the aisle (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Married men are also better workers than single men because they have a more settled life. They are less likely to be fired and be absent from work or to quit. Married men will even produce more than a single man on the same task (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).



*Divorce Information*

The divorce rate is something that popular media and society have misconstrued. Unhappy marriages are not always indicative of marriage termination. In fact many marriages that experience unhappy seasons, yet stay together, end up reporting they are very happy with their marriage (Popenoe, 2002). Children of divorce are more susceptible to divorce themselves because they are unsure as to what commitment truly means (Popenoe, 2002). It is important for men, women and children to understand the true facts about divorce and to make their decisions accordingly. Marriage takes a lot of commitment and a lot of work. Premarital preparation will help the couple work on problems before they marry when they are more likely to change. When problems are worked on together, couples are more pleased with the results and are usually more satisfied with their relationship. Effective premarital preparation will train couples to work on their problems before they are insurmountable and produce healthy, stable, satisfying marriages.

*Premarital Preparation Options*

Since marriage is better for men, women, children, communities and the economy it is important to evaluate current programs which are intended to promote healthy marriages. Pastors, congregations and communities for centuries have realized that marriage is not an institution that should be entered into without preparation. Premarital preparation programs are beginning to be more prevalent but currently there are a few in existence. This paper will identify and explore some of the premarital preparation options in the following sections. Seventy-five percent of marriages are performed by a religious leader and take place in a religious institution indicating that pastors are a logical place to

start premarital preparation efforts (Stanley, Markman, Prado, Olmos-Gallo, Tonelli, St.Peters, Leber, Bobulinski, Cordova, & Whitton, 2001). Many of the premarital preparation programs take place at or through a religious institution.

Marriage takes hard work beforehand and then continual work to maintain and improve the relationship. Couples should do soul-searching, honest evaluation and be willing to look at the past to determine if they are ready to commit for life to another individual. Information about family history, finances, ideas about sexuality and children all need to be discussed openly and honestly before a couple is ready to marry (Parker, 2002). The amazing aspect of marriage though, is that it is a skill-based relationship where men and women can learn how to have a good marriage if they are given the right tools and taught how to use them (Schaffer, 2002). It is sad to note that many couples in great need of marital preparation because of their potential for problems are least likely to participate (Sullivan, Pasch, Cornelieus, & Cirigliano, 2004).

*Pastor led preparation.* The responsibilities of a pastor usually include performing weddings and implementing premarital counseling. The pastor can tailor the premarital counseling session to his personal denomination and preferences. Usually the sessions range from one to five visits with the couple. The pastor is examining the couple for interfaith issues, differences in views on children and any other major discernable problems. Pastors tend to use premarital preparation time to lecture, which is an ineffective means of teaching specific marriage skills (Schwartz & Thiesen, 2003).

*Professional preparation.* In special circumstances where the pastor realizes he is inadequate at premarital preparation or the couple has a unique situation that demands professionally trained assistance, the pastor will refer the couple to a professional

counselor. A marriage counselor may work with more than one church and provide the premarital preparation and counseling on a professional level.

*Trained couple or individual who works with the couple.* In some congregations the pastor will develop a mentoring program where a trained, mature, married couple with a good marriage will mentor the engaged couple. The pastor may even ask someone in the church to teach a premarital class. This is usually a specialized version of premarital preparation based on previously published material in either group discussion, video or study format. This can be a very effective method if the important skills of marriage are taught.

*An individual or couple who create their own preparation material.* Some premarital programs combine resources from many sources to create a unique premarital counseling program. These novel approaches are often based on the information developers recognize they needed in their own marriages and many experts and researchers recommend. The thoroughness of the program is utterly dependent upon whether the individual leading the ministry has truly been called or if they are merely doing their expected Christian duty. The benefit of creating or combining material is that the program can be tailored to the presenter and the engaged couple, the disadvantage is that, depending on the education and experience of the presenter, there may be elements missing from the preparation.

#### *Premarital Inventories and Their Psychometric Properties*

According to Schwartz and Theisen (2003) the most effective method for premarital preparation is asking good questions and facilitating discovery in the individuals participating. Many pastors who counsel prefer to preach at the couple instead

of ensuring that they have the tools, resources and skills it takes to have a healthy, thriving marriage. Psychologists and researchers have taken it upon themselves to create material that takes an inventory of the couple's available resources and provides questions for the couple to discuss. Two thorough inventories and preparations are available at this time. They are FOCCUS and PREPARE.

*Facilitating Open Couple Communication (FOCCUS).* FOCCUS was created by Markey, Micheletto, and Becker, (1985). It was developed to reduce current rates of marital distress and divorce (Bruhn & Hill, 2004). Many of the churches or organizations that employ FOCCUS use it because of the ease of implementation by nonprofessionals. A resourceful aspect of FOCCUS is that it has been designed to be used by professionals and trained non-professionals. FOCCUS is often used by trained, non professional mentor couples as part of a broader marriage and family ministry in local churches. These mentor couples are usually hand picked by the church leadership based on a set of standards established by the pastor. Some standards may include elements such as the mentor couple must have stable, mature, growing, and healthy relationship.

The inventory has 156 statements to which each of the engaged individuals indicate whether he/she agrees, disagrees or is uncertain about the statement. The inventory is then scored by the National Scoring Service or through the church, organization or mentor couple. Then each couple is evaluated on the extent to which the scores agree and disagree. The mentor couple invites the engaged couple to dialogue with each other concerning the issues where they disagreed. The sessions range from five to seven sessions spread out so they are one to two weeks apart, which usually take place in the mentor couple's home. It is not a time for the mentor couple to teach the engaged

couple, but for the engaged couple to talk to each other. It is intended to be a safe environment for the engaged couple to discuss issues such as communication, their families of origin which is the home and environment that shaped their personality, how they will handle conflict, their views on having a family, issues related to sexual intimacy, personality issues and gender differences. Life style expectancies as well as their friends and interests will also be discussed as a result of the facilitated communication (Markey, Micheletto, & Becker, 1985).

*Psychometric properties of FOCCUS.* The internal analysis of FOCCUS was conducted by Stanford Research Institute (SRI) Research Center. The reliability was .86 for the basic instrument, .98 for the Interfaith Marriages portion and .94 for the second marriages part. Reliability coefficients of .75 or greater reported by SRI. The predictive quality of FOCCUS as compared to the DAS (Dyadic Adjustment Scale) is also high. FOCCUS has a good ability of predicting relationship quality (Markey, B., Micheletto, M. & Becker, A., 1985).

*Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation (PREPARE).* PREPARE was originally written in 1977 and eventually published by Olson, Druckman and Fournier (1980). PREPARE is a premarital inventory used by professionals and non-professionals to promote communication between engaged couples in areas of marital interaction. Each member of the engaged couple takes the PREPARE inventory that evaluates the individual and the couple on various aspects of who they are personally, how he/she views the relationship, elements of their individual and couple history, and also how they communicate and resolve conflict as a couple. Questions about what they expect from marriage are included in the inventory. After the engaged couple completes the inventory,

it is mailed to Life Innovations where it is scored and returned to the counselor, pastor, mentor couple or individual in charge of the couple's premarital preparation. The facilitator will look over the scores and help the couple by facilitating conversation about their various weaknesses with the goal of turning them into strengths. The facilitator may also teach the couple marriage skills during the premarital preparation process.

According to "Overview of the PREPARE/ENRICH Program" (n.d.) the six goals of PREPARE are:

1. To explore Relationship Strengths and Growth Areas
2. To learn Assertiveness and Active Listening Skills
3. To learn how to resolve conflict using the Ten Step Model
4. To help the couple discuss their Family-of-Origin
5. To help the couple with financial planning and budgeting
6. To focus on personal, couple and family goals (§ 5)

*Psychometric properties of PREPARE.* According to Fitzpatrick & Mancini (n.d.) PREPARE includes four couple inventories intended to identify and measure the relationship of the couple in 20 areas. PREPARE was revised in 1986 and 1996. Internal consistency reliabilities range from .73 to .90. The test-retest reliability scores are .80 for PREPARE. PREPARE is meant to be used by counselors with couples considering marriage. The results include two aspects, an assessment of the couple with an inventory of the answers and a feedback session with exercises to help the couple process the

information.

*Marriage Support Systems, Policies and Programs*

To accurately determine if there is indeed a need for more churches and organizations to implement premarital intervention, it is important to assess the churches and communities that have implemented a policy or program promoting marriage and determine if it has been successful for them. A comprehensive approach to marriage preparation is supported by Michael McManus from Marriage Savers (Groom, 2001). Premarital intervention is important because many couples do not realize the problems they will face in marriage (Murray & Murray, 2004).

*Community Marriage Policies.* One program that strengthens marriages is the “Community Marriage Policy” (CMP). A Community Marriage Policy is unique to the community that creates it, but all such policies have similar elements such as the community’s beliefs about marriage and specific standards they will uphold. The standards vary but usually include a required amount of time to wait between engagement and the wedding, a specific amount of premarital preparation, the intention of the community to encourage established marriages, training mentor couples, creating a network of a support system for marriages and helping blended families (*Sample community marriage policies*, 2001) (Appendix A). The Community Marriage Policy is the work of Mike McManus. In 25 out of 28 cities where CMP’s have been implemented the divorce rate drastically faster than the national statistics (McManus, n.d.). In Modesto, California the divorce rate since 1986 has dropped by 30% (McManus, n.d.). McManus (n.d) goes on to say that cities in which churches have united on a common commitment to marriages have witnessed reduced divorce rates. According to

marriagesavers.com, a study was released stating that in 114 cities/counties with Community Marriage Policies there are declines in divorce rates. In El Paso, TX specifically between 1996 and 2001, churches helped 4,313 couples avoid divorces. Cohabitation rates fell 13.4% in cities with CMP's during the ten year period of 1990 to 2000 and about 31,000 divorces were avoided.

*First Things First.* In Chattanooga, TN, a community-based, secular, nonprofit group was formed in 1997 to serve as a resource for the media on family issues. The program promotes strong, healthy, lifelong marriages, encourages fathers and mothers to be involved in the lives of their children and works avidly to prevent illegitimate pregnancies. The organization First Things First partners with government agencies, congregations, social services agencies, media and individuals to accomplish their goals of strengthening and encouraging the family. They strive to serve the community by encouraging healthy marriages (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

*Marriage Savers.* Marriage Savers (2005) was founded by Mike and Harriet McManus in 1996 to equip communities through congregations to prepare people for lifelong marriages, to strengthen marriages already in existence and aid troubled marriages. In communities targeted by Marriage Savers, the divorce rates have dropped 18 to 35 % (Hotmire, 1999). The 200<sup>th</sup> Community Marriage Policy was signed February of 2006 according to the Marriage Savers Training Schedule: 2005-2006 website (Marriage Savers, 2005).

*PREPARE/FOCCUS.* One of the effects of the utilization of the PREPARE or FOCCUS inventory is that during the premarital preparation many couples choose not to marry. McManus (2000) reports that in his church, the couples that went through



FOCCUS training in the eight years between 1992 and 2000, have experienced great success with the program. 50 out of the 292 couples ended their engagements before the wedding and only 6 out of the 230 that married have divorced. Break-ups are usually not used as examples of success, but for the FOCCUS inventory they speak of its incredible ability to reveal incompatibilities. The couples that chose not to marry prevented bad marriages or even divorces later on. Some couples found irreconcilable differences and decided to either postpone the wedding in order to deal with the issues or break off the engagement entirely because they were not right for each other. This in itself is a credible advertisement for FOCCUS. The program's ability to prevent bad marriages before they start continues to boast its success rate. PREPARE has many of the same qualities and characteristics of FOCCUS therefore it also has the ability to prevent bad marriages and help promote strong, healthy marriages.

#### *State Sponsored Marriage Initiative Programs*

States that have state sponsored marriage initiative programs should be examined by the community, legislators, and researchers to determine their effectiveness. The success these states have encountered can encourage states that have not implemented a Community Marriage Policy or have not made positive strides in more effective premarital preparation.

*Arizona.* Governor Jane Dee Hull of Arizona signed a marriage initiative in April 2000 permitting the state to spend money to develop community-based marriage skills instruction. This money was part of TANF. The state also signed a Covenant Marriage Policy on May 21, 1998 (Fagan, 2001).

*Arkansas.* Governor Mike Huckabee of Arkansas has links to Community

Marriage Policy information on the state website (Fagan, 2001). The governor urged pastors, clergy men and religious leaders to form Community Marriage Covenants. The Governor of Arkansas is a strong supporter of healthy marriages. Information important to engaged and married couples as well as information to the constituents of Arkansas about the measures the state is taking to ensure healthy marriages is also included on the state website. This state has also signed a Marriage Covenant. The marriage covenant of Arkansas encourages engaged couples to participate in premarital preparation programs. The state encourages couples to seek help if their marriage is in trouble. TANF funds are used to support marriage involving low income individuals. The governor's hope is to lower divorce rates. Legislators are considering a tax credit for couples if they take the premarital preparation courses.

*Florida.* Teaching marriage skills in high school started as part of Florida's 1998 Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act; it was the first state to do so. Part of this curriculum encourages premarital preparation. For those who go through a four hour course on marriage preparation, the marriage license fee is reduced by 50 percent (Fagan, 2001). The state of Florida mandates skill-based marriage education classes in high school and divorce education instruction for all divorcing couples with minor children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002).

*Oklahoma marriage initiative.* Oklahoma is a state with a history of appalling divorce rates and unhealthy marriages. In 1999 Frank Keating the Governor of Oklahoma, implemented a Marriage Initiative to combat the astounding rate. It pushed for covenant marriages and required premarital preparation in churches before a wedding could take place (Schaffer, 2002). Fagan (2001) reports that since Governor Keating

implemented the marriage treaty there are fewer incentives to low-income or welfare couples if they live together outside of marriage. A three-tier model was developed to train, and educate state leaders regarding the Marriage Initiative, developing a pilot program in seven counties disseminating information and orientating the leaders to the Marriage Initiative. TANF caseworkers were trained in the use of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002).

PREP was created by Scott Stanley. PREP is intended to help couples increase their communication skills, it is a curriculum that is skill and principle based (PREP, Inc., 2006). The faith leaders of the communities were also involved in the Initiative where 800 leaders in 66 out of 77 counties signed the marriage covenant. The covenant established a commitment to encouraging pre-marital preparation, waiting periods before marriage, and development of marriage mentors within the congregations.

*Wisconsin.* Fagan (2001) informs readers on the efforts of the state of Wisconsin to support marriages. Wisconsin was the first state to hire a full-time worker to create Community Marriage Policies. The state wanted clear standards in all communities for marriages.

#### *Community Sponsored Marriage Initiative Programs*

*Kansas.* Goforth (2003) reports that since 1996 there have been zero divorces at Christ Lutheran Church, one of the first churches to put into practice the marriage covenant. Kansas City, Kansas, experienced a unique phenomenon when the city signed a Community Marriage Policy. There were 40 pastors who signed it and the divorce rate dropped by 32 percent in two years, but in Kansas City, Missouri right across the river,

the city did not sign a CMP and the divorce rate rose during the same time (Fagan, 2001). This was an unexpected statistical occurrence, because the cities are matched for every other variable; the only difference in that two year period was the Community Marriage Policy.

*Michigan.* In 1997 the Greater Grand Rapids Community Marriage Policy initiative was created. It follows the Marriage Savers model and its focus is to raise awareness of the benefits of marriage and provides resources for couples to strengthen their marriages effectively. The purpose is to ensure the well-being of members of the community (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002). As part of the policy one year minimum courtships are encouraged, chastity outside of marriage and faithful marriages are promoted and a thorough premarital preparation process is to be expected of religious organizations (2002).

*Washington.* The state of Washington established the Families Northwest's Community Strategies. The goals of this organization are to lower divorce rates by building healthy environments for marriages and families (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002). A ten-year public campaign to educate the public and various social leaders about the importance of marriage also happened in this state.

#### *Lynchburg Needs Assessment- Current Status*

The city of Lynchburg, Virginia is the area of interest for this paper. In the greater and immediate Lynchburg area, there are hundreds of churches. A sampling of these churches were the focus of the study to gather the necessary and relevant data appropriate to this study. A sample of every denomination in the Lynchburg area was contacted.

*Pastor counseled churches.* In Lynchburg, several churches chose this form of

premarital preparation as their primary means. Some of these churches were Living Word Baptist Church, Brentwood Community Church (who also uses professional counselors), Calvary Chapel of Lynchburg, Fairview United Methodist Church, Tree of Life, First Assembly of God, and Chestnut Hill Baptist Church.

*Professional.* The nature of premarital preparation, the time available to the pastor and other relevant factors influence the premarital preparation process. Certain pastors choose not to prepare couples personally but to refer them to a professional counselor in the area. Some of these churches include The Lynchburg Church, Family Life Christian Church and Blue Ridge Community Church. BRCC uses a counselor through His Touch Ministries. Family Life Christian Church has a licensed counselor that performs premarital preparation.

*FOCCUS.* Only a few churches in the Lynchburg area using FOCCUS, but the success rates they have encountered are encouraging. Grace Evangelical Free Church has been using FOCCUS for several years now and they continue to receive positive feedback from the engaged and mentor couples. The mentoring program at Grace continues to grow based on the need expressed in the church. The mentor couples are typically selected and approved by the pastor or the lead mentor couple. Continual training for the mentor couples is provided, and they continue training new mentor couples. In the city of Lynchburg and the surrounding area there are a few churches that have mentor couples trained, but this does not always mean they are using the program.

*PREPARE.* In the Lynchburg area, PREPARE is a popular method of premarital counseling. The current churches in the Lynchburg area that uses PREPARE are Thomas Road Baptist Church, Hyland Heights Baptist Church, and Heritage Baptist Church (the

way HBC uses PREPARE is with the Pastor taking them through it and combining it with a few other videos and sessions).

*Other methods.* Along with PREPARE, Hyland Heights Baptist Church also uses SYMBIS (Saving Your Marriage before It Starts) by Les and Leslie Parrott. SYMBIS takes the engaged couple through seven questions that are very important before and after the wedding day. The questions are:

- 1) Have you faced the myths of marriage with honesty?
- 2) Can you identify your love style?
- 3) Have you developed the habit of happiness?
- 4) Can you say what you mean and understand what you hear?
- 5) Have you bridged the gender gap?
- 6) Do you know how to fight a good fight?
- 7) Are you and your partner soul mates? (Parrott & Parrott, 1995, p. 7)

These questions provide avenues for discussion in the areas of communication, conflict, gender roles, personality preferences, interests, views on sex and whether the two are matched personality wise. Throughout the questions there are inventories for the couple to take individually and then compare together to help them understand each other more completely (Parrott & Parrott, 1995).

There are many great premarital preparation books available such as: *Getting Ready For The Wedding: All You Need To Know Before You Say I Do*, ( Parrott and Parrott, 1998). *Before You Say 'I Do': A Marriage Preparation Manual for Couples* (Wright, 1997). *"Don't You Dare Get Married Until You Read This! The Book of Questions for Couples,"* (Donaldson, 2001) and more equally useful resources.

*Lynchburg-Needs Assessment- Divorce Rate*

Clear assessment of the current divorce rate of Lynchburg, along with identifying available resources, clarifies how urgent the need is for better preparation. It is important to note that although the divorce rate is a reality, the calculation of it is skewed.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001), the divorce rate is the number of divorces per year per 1,000 people. This means that the number of marriages in existence is not considered when divorces are averaged.

Something must be done; marriage truly is better for men, women, children, communities and the economy. Positive premarital preparation programs already established that have successful outcomes should be implemented by churches without existing programs. Lynchburg has a few churches with preparation programs firmly established, but there are many churches without effective premarital preparation, and the community in Lynchburg is lacking the benefits of these programs.

Goals, Objectives and Activities

These objectives, goals, and activities have been formed in conjunction with those of the Marriage Alliance of Central Virginia. Many aspects to the goals are purely desires on the part of the researcher, but most of the elements are the result of the researcher working alongside the Marriage Alliance.

*Goal #1.*

The first goal is to make churches aware of and participate in opportunities the Marriage Alliance makes available.

*Objective #1.*

The objective to accomplish this goal is to contact the 113 names in the Marriage

Alliance database for churches in the greater Lynchburg area. Inform the names in the database of the Marriage Ministry Forum and invite them to bring church members interested in promoting marriage.

*Activity #1.*

Divide the phone list into a manageable number of phone calls per day and contact churches.

*Goal #2*

The second goal is to contact churches currently using FOCCUS or PREPARE to determine how effective they believe the inventories are at preparing couples for marriage.

*Objective #1*

Send the survey to the Marriage Alliance database to question the churches and organizations.

*Activity #1*

Put the information received from the survey in a format that is useful for understanding the responses.

*Goal #3.*

The third goal that has been established is to introduce FOCCUS to five churches in Lynchburg within the year 2006.

*Objective #1.*

The objective to accomplish the goal is to initiate contact with 15 churches in Lynchburg currently not using FOCCUS or PREPARE.



*Activity #1.*

Coordinate with the Director of The Marriage Alliance to identify churches without FOCCUS or PREPARE.

*Activity #2.*

Another activity will be to contact the 15 churches and set up an appointment with the Senior Pastor.

*Activity #3.*

Finally, meet with the Senior Pastor along with the Director of the Marriage Alliance and present FOCCUS to the pastor.

*Goal #4.*

The fourth goal is to facilitate two FOCCUS trainings in Lynchburg within the next year.

*Objective #1*

Organize, coordinate and prepare for two FOCCUS trainings in Lynchburg. Marriage Alliance works to have four training sessions yearly; the researcher would be involved in the coordination aspect in bringing them to Lynchburg.

*Activity #1*

The researcher plans to work with the Director of the Marriage Alliance to choose a date, location and time for two FOCCUS trainings.

*Activity #2*

The researcher plans to participate in advertising for FOCCUS trainings through available media resources such as email, internet advertisements, bulletins and television commercials.

*Activity #3*

The researcher plans to volunteer services to coordinate ordering of materials, select a FOCCUS trainer and handle registration of attendees.

**Results**

The researcher hoped to encourage participation in the utilization of premarital preparation inventories in premarital counseling. In addition to increasing participation, the researcher hoped to increase in understanding and knowledge of how to present, information to potentially unwilling sources. The researcher began by contacting the 113 names listed in the Marriage Alliance database that had expressed interest in marriage ministry information. The churches were all contacted. For the most part, the researcher encountered unwilling, and uninterested individuals. The researcher left many messages promoting the Marriage Ministry Forum without receiving many positive responses. The actual forum was on Monday, February 13, 2006 and there were 6 non-presenters in attendance to learn more about the Marriage Alliance and various ministries available in Central Virginia. At the Marriage Ministry Forum both PREPARE and FOCCUS were presented. The researcher successfully accomplished goal number one and the added benefit of the Forum was that several organizations heard about PREPARE and FOCCUS.

The second goal was very successful as well. The researcher received 11 responses from the email that went out. The responses were all positive. The organizations using the inventories believe them to be very successful in preparing couples for marriage (Appendix B).

The researcher was unsuccessful in accomplishing the third goal. After speaking

with the director of the Marriage Alliance, the researcher decided that the task was too large for the scope of this paper. The Marriage Alliance is in the process of increasing use of premarital preparation inventories, but the work the researcher wanted to do, was not conducive to supporting the Marriage Alliance.

The fourth goal of this paper was partially completed. The researcher worked with the director of the Marriage Alliance to plan FOCCUS training in Lynchburg, Virginia at Liberty University on April 1, 2006. The researcher planned on calling individuals and organizations that expressed interest in training, but was unsuccessful. The researcher planned on helping order material and other details, but was also unfruitful.

Further research into this area is recommended because of the benefits to men, women, children and communities. Promoting healthy marriages, and encouraging existing marriages and will provide benefits for communities and eventually the nation.

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## Appendix A

### SAMPLE COMMUNITY MARRIAGE POLICIES

*Some 50 pastors signed a "Wilmington Community Marriage Policy" in March, 1997. Although each city's policy varies, this is typical of many, and is presented below in its entirety:*

#### Wilmington Community Marriage Policy

Our concern as area clergy is to promote lasting marriages under God and to establish spiritually healthy families. Since almost 75 percent of marriages are performed by clergy, we are in a unique position to dramatically affect the marriages and families in our community. We are deeply troubled by our country's epidemic of marital instability and divorce and feel it must be directly addressed by the faith community. Our purpose is to enrich marriages and to significantly reduce the divorce rate in Wilmington area congregations.

We accept, as clergy, the responsibility to raise the level of commitment in those we marry and those married couples who look to us for spiritual instruction. We believe that couples who seriously participate in premarital testing and counseling will have a better understanding of what marriage involves. We also believe that an increased commitment to marriage preparation will result in the reduction of failed and failing marriages.

Therefore, as agents of God, acting on His behalf, we believe it is our responsibility to encourage couples to set aside time for marriage preparation. We acknowledge that a wedding is but a day, while a marriage is for a lifetime.



What God has joined together, let the faith community of Wilmington seek to hold together.

***Therefore:***

1. We will normally require a minimum of four months marriage preparation.
2. We will require a minimum of four counseling sessions, utilizing both the Scripture and a premarital inventory.
3. We will train mature, married couples to serve as mentors to work with engaged couples, newlyweds, or those experiencing marital difficulties.
4. We will offer two post-marital counseling sessions with clergy or a Mentor Couple within the first year of marriage.
5. We will create a support system of couples whose marriages have successfully weathered life's challenges to assist with troubled marriages.
6. We will seek to establish support systems for blended families.
7. We will cooperate with other congregations and organizations to share resources and create a positive climate in which marriages are helped to succeed.

**Covenant**

I commit to seek the endorsement of these minimum standards by my congregation and to encourage others to do so, for the Glory of God and the good of our whole community.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Marriage Savers, Inc.

Mike and Harriet McManus, Co-Chairs

9311 Harrington Drive

Potomac, MD 20854

301-469-5873    [michaeljmcmanus@cs.com](mailto:michaeljmcmanus@cs.com)

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*The following Tallahassee policy was signed by 64 pastors on January 15, 1999, and was praised as a "model for Florida" by newly-elected Governor Jeb Bush.*

*Tallahassee Community Marriage Policy\**

***We Believe:***

1. That God has established in scripture the sanctity and companionship of marriage;
2. That God intends the marriage bond between husband and wife to last a lifetime;
3. That as church leaders we have a responsibility to provide premarital preparation to every engaged couple. This will improve their understanding of marriage and deepen their mutual commitment;
4. That as clergy we have a responsibility to provide ongoing support to strengthen and nourish existing marriages.

***Therefore We Will:***

1. Encourage a courtship of at least one year;
2. Expect a minimum of five counseling sessions for engaged couples, preferably over a 3-4 month period, with one session devoted to taking a premarital test or inventory (FOCCUS, Prepare); one devoted to insuring a biblical understanding of morality, marriage, and divorce; and one devoted to a post-marriage follow-up;
3. Train mature married couples to serve as mentors to those who are engaged, newly married, experiencing marriage difficulties, or remarried;

4. Encourage retreats, classes, and marriage enrichment opportunities designed to build and strengthen marriages;
5. Develop and implement programs for troubled marriages using counseling, retreats, and mentoring by couples (including those whose own marriages were once in trouble);
6. Promote sexual abstinence outside of marriage
7. Promote faithful marital relationships
8. Set an example as pastors by attending couples' retreats and being involved in other relationship enrichment activities;
9. Take this covenant back to our church to be ratified by the appropriate church leadership.

\* This project is sponsored by *Live the Life Ministries* locally and *Marriage Savers*<sup>®</sup> nationally.

Live the Life Ministries, Inc.

Richard Albertson, President

3207-31 Shamrock East

Tallahassee, FL 32308 [richalbert@aol.com](mailto:richalbert@aol.com)

Marriage Savers, Inc.

Mike and Harriet McManus, Co-Chairs

9311 Harrington Drive

Potomac, MD 20854

301-469-5873 [michaeljmcmanus@cs.com](mailto:michaeljmcmanus@cs.com)

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## Appendix B

Please take a moment to help the Marriage Alliance...

Nicole Elise Humphrey is a college student who is working with us to prepare a study on the use and effectiveness of marriage inventories (PREPARE and FOCCUS) in our area. Please give her your full cooperation in any way you can. Doing so will help us at the Marriage Alliance do a better job of serving you through our training courses in premarital preparation and marriage education.

Thank you for your assistance on this project, and for your support of the Marriage Alliance of Central Virginia. If you have any questions, feel free to call me.

Lawrence M. Compter, Executive Director Marriage Alliance of Central Virginia

18013 Forest Rd. Ste C04, PMB 165

Forest VA 24551-4305

(540) 587-6689 email: [info@marriagealliance.org](mailto:info@marriagealliance.org)

*Building stronger families through stronger marriages for a stronger community.*

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Hello!

I am doing a study on marriage inventory use, on behalf of the Marriage Alliance of Central Virginia, and I would like to ask you a few questions. According to our records your church or religious organization has received training in either FOCCUS or PREPARE.

To complete the survey: hit the "REPLY TO ALL" or "REPLY TO EVERYONE" or "REPLY ALL" button, and fill out the form by replacing the blanks with your answers (use "x" in the multiple choice questions). If your email setup does not duplicate the original in the reply, use copy and paste to transfer the survey questions to your reply document and then fill in the answers.

(If you have difficulty, if the form below is not clear, or if you cannot get the "reply to all" to work, please call or email the Marriage Alliance directly.)

## MARRIAGE INVENTORY SURVEY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church/Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions for your church or faith organization if you are a clergy member or lay mentor, or for your practice or organization if you are a professional counselor. If you are involved in some other form of premarital preparation, please indicate.

When did you receive training in PREPARE? \_\_\_\_\_ FOCCUS? \_\_\_\_\_

Was it sponsored or co-sponsored by the Marriage Alliance? \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No

*(Note: If your training was received in the last 3 years from Daryl Pitts, Larry and Nancy Anderson, or Phil Waugh, it was likely co-sponsored by the Marriage Alliance.)*

What is your current position? (check one)

\_\_\_\_Clergy      \_\_\_\_ Professional Counselor      \_\_\_\_Lay person      \_\_\_\_ Lay

mentor couple\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Which premarital inventory are you currently using?

\_\_\_ FOCCUS    \_\_\_ PREPARE    \_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How many individuals in your organization are currently trained in the use of a marriage inventory? \_\_\_\_\_ Clergy    \_\_\_\_\_ Professional Counselors    \_\_\_\_\_ Lay people

Who facilitates the use of the premarital inventory in your organization (if not you)?

\_\_\_ Clergy    \_\_\_ Professional Counselor    \_\_\_ Lay person    \_\_\_ Lay mentor couple

How many couples have taken the inventory at your organization since you were trained? \_\_\_\_\_

How effective do you think the inventory is as a premarital preparation tool?

\_\_\_ Not at all    \_\_\_ Slightly    \_\_\_ Moderately    \_\_\_ Very effective

To what extent would you consider *your experience* in using the inventory successful?

\_\_\_ Not at all    \_\_\_ Slightly    \_\_\_ Moderately    \_\_\_ Very successful

Do you have any couples in need of training to become mentor couples? \_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_ No    If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

Any other comments, questions or suggestions?

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS  
SURVEY!