

MARRIAGE SAVERS REPORT CARD 2007

ABC News Spotlights Community Marriage Policy®

On October 22, 2007, Charlie Gibson anchored a superb **ABC World News** story on a Community Marriage Policy® signed by 170 churches in Clackamas County, Oregon. It is a good example of how Marriage Savers helped 10,000 clergy of 220 cities reverse the culture's high divorce rate. Gibson announced: "There's a different kind of good neighbor policy, a new movement of saving marriages by turning to the power of church and community. We've looked for Keys to Success, simple solutions for some of the country's biggest challenges. For Better, For Worse. ***Is there a secret for a successful marriage? Yes, but you have to look outside the marriage and look to the community. Those involved say they are seeing real results.***"

At our suggestion, ABC correspondent Dan Harris traveled to Oregon to see a Community Marriage Policy (CMP). He reported, "Tucked between the cafes and micro-breweries of Portland, Oregon, 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." Harris described CMP organizers Tom and Liz Dressel as "marriage missionaries" who "organized nearly every church in the county to sign a Community Marriage Policy" in 2001. "It required every couple contemplating marriage to undergo four premarital mentoring sessions. Pastors said they will no longer perform quickie weddings." One said, "Couples say 'Just do this, like they were calling a plumber.'" A pastor added, "They think they are getting ready for a day. Premarital preparation gets them ready for a marriage." ABC showed the Dressels preparing a couple for marriage. Harris said, "They had to fill out a very detailed premarital inventory with 150 items on issues from parenting to communication." Dan asked the woman, who had one divorce, if she learned "things that will prevent a failed marriage?" She replied, "Absolutely! Conflict management, number one." Her fiancée agreed, "I've learned to be a better listener." The ABC story then featured married couples at a 10 Great Dates event "to strengthen existing marriages. They drop off their kids, watch a brief video and head off for dinner." A husband explained, "We can check in with each other



to see if there are any problems. At times it can be so hectic it is difficult to have 'us' time."

Result? ABC reported Clackamas County's "**divorce rate fell 15% in the first 5 years** of the Community Marriage Policy." Its organizers "feel the policy is in fact saving marriages and protecting children from the pain of divorce." ABC concluded with Charlie Gibson referring viewers to ABC News.com for "a great deal more information about community-based marriage saving," which refers people to Marriage Savers. See ABC's story at www.marriagesavers.org.

The Role of Marriage Savers

Marriage Savers coached the Dressels on how to organize the Clackamas CMP and spoke at its signing. We then offered 12 hours of training of clergy and Mentor Couples in how to administer the FOCCUS premarital inventory and teach communication exercises. We showed an excerpt of the "10 Great Dates" videos which clearly took root. We also:

Illustrated how couples whose marriages once nearly failed can mentor couples in crisis, teaching a couple who rebuilt a marriage, to tell their story of recovery using 17 **Restoration Marriage Ministry** principles like AA's 12 Steps.

Helped separated couples to reconcile with a 122 week workbook course, taken with a Support Partner called "**Reconciling God's Way.**"

Taught how to create a **Stepfamily Support Group** that can save 80% of marriages with stepchildren who typically divorce at a 70% rate.

Marriage Disintegration Continues Nationally

The need for the work of Marriage Savers can be seen in national data which reveal the continued disintegration of marriage in America:

Marriage Rate Plunges: Since 1970 the marriage rate has plunged 50%.

Cohabitation soared to 5.4 million couples in 2006, a 12-fold hike since 1960. With 2.2 million marriages a year, cohabitation is the dominant way male-female unions begin.

Out-of-Wedlock Births jumped 8% in 2006 to 1.64 million babies. That's nearly two-fifths of all births (38.5%).

Divorce: Jesus said, "What God has joined together let no man separate." Yet half of all marriages since 1970 have ended in divorce – 42 million, affecting 40 million children.

Marriage Savers Has Answers

No other organization has reduced divorce and cohabitation rates in more than 100 cities/counties and begun increasing marriage rates. This is one reason you should consider contributing to Marriage Savers. But there are other reasons below.

Divorce Rate Falls: Clackamas County's 15% divorce rate drop is an *average result*. An independent study by the Institute for Research and Evaluation of the first 114 CMPs signed through 2000 reported that divorces fell 17.5% in seven years. Seven cities/counties slashed divorce rates by 48% or more (Austin, Kansas City, KS, Salem, OR, Modesto, CA and El Paso). There were 650 divorces in 1995 in Kansas City but only 196 in 2005. **That is a 70% plunge.** The Institute said that 30,000 to 50,000 divorces were averted in CMP cities by 2001. With six more years and nearly twice as many CMPs (220 by 12/07) 100,000 marriages may be saved.

Cohabitation Rate Falls: From 1990-2000 the cohabitation rate of CMP cities/counties fell 13.4%, while it rose 19.2% in carefully matched counties in each state. Thus, at decade's end, CMP cities ended with a **cohabitation rate one-third lower** than counterparts (13.4 + 19.2= 33%)

Marriage Rate Rises, but not immediately. Evansville, IN's divorce rate fell soon after signing a CMP in 1998 but marriages remained flat until 2004-5 when they rose 16%. The pattern was similar in

Modesto, but marriages jumped from 1,100 in 1994 to 2,500 in 2005.

Reform No Fault Divorce to Slash Divorce Rates in Half

America's divorce rate is the world's highest because the law permits one partner to unilaterally end a marriage even with no allegation of adultery or abuse. What was begun by two people willingly is terminated by one person against the will of the spouse in 80% of cases. This is called "**No Fault Divorce,**" because no fault need be alleged to get the divorce.

Result: innocent children are scarred for life; they are three times as likely as those from intact marriages to be expelled from school or to have a baby out-of-wedlock, five times as apt to live in poverty or to commit suicide, and 12 times as likely to be jailed. Also, the divorced live 4-10 years less.

Mutual Consent: In my newspaper column I called for a change in the law in cases involving children to "Replace No Fault Divorce with Mutual Consent Divorce." Either spouse could file for divorce on grounds of adultery, abuse, etc. But if no such fault is alleged, both parties would have to agree. "Government has an interest in the future of children, and they'd be best served if parents worked out their differences," I asserted. Attorney John Crouch, President of Americans for Divorce Reform, estimates that change would cut divorce rates by 30%.

Shared Parenting: "If parents agree to a divorce, they should have equal access to children – Joint Custody or Shared Parenting. Today's norm of Sole Custody removes one parent from the lives of their children, I argued. However, of the six states that passed the strongest Joint Custody laws, five experienced the largest drops in the divorce rate: Montana, Kansas, Connecticut, Idaho and Alaska. Why? "If a parent knows they will have to interact with the child's other parent while the child is growing up, there is less incentive to divorce," says David Levy of the Children's Rights Council." Both he and Crouch estimate that if each parent had custody at least one-third time weekly -- divorce rates would fall an additional 20%. **If enacted with Mutual Consent, both said divorce would plunge in half saving 500,000 marriages a year.**

First Result: I was asked to serve on a Virginia Marriage Commission which proposed to replace No Fault Divorce with Mutual Consent if "there are minor children." Either party could file "a written objection to the granting of a divorce." Shared parenting was not endorsed. A Mutual Consent bill was introduced, to be debated in 2008. While the Commission vote was

unanimous, 100% of key Virginia Legislative members are attorneys. Passage will be difficult.

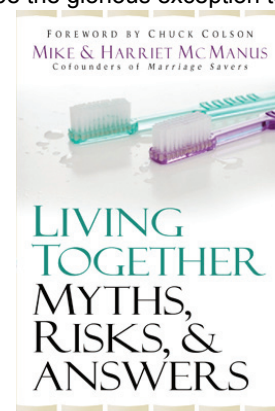
Second Result: The National Association of Evangelicals asked for an NAE resolution draft. An earlier NAE resolution identified “easy divorce” as a social evil to be challenged, and committed NAE to improve “marriage and divorce law.” Given the failure of all legislatures to reform No Fault over 35 years, NAE is considering a Federal Law of Mutual Consent and Shared Parenting be passed by Congress. “The need for reform at the national level is similar to the need for federal Civil Rights Laws in the 1960s when no southern state would pass laws guaranteeing black civil rights,” the resolution states. “Husbands and wives who vowed to stick together ‘for better, for worse, till death do us part’ should live their vows pledged on the altar of God,” it states. “Why? Children need both a married mother and father.” The resolution will be voted upon by NAE’s Board in March, 2008. If passed by an association of 45,000 churches with 30 million members, it could become an issue in Presidential and Congressional races.

Marriage Savers Vision – 2008

Candidates for President & Congress will be asked to support cutting divorces in half.

A coalition of leaders of the Marriage Movement from scores of organizations have agreed to help 20 cities adopt reforms to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce. Many do not have a CMP (such as Philadelphia and Columbus, OH) . The coalition, called WinShape, has pledged to help create a CMP in every city, plus 10 new ones in 2008.

Mike & Harriet McManus co-authored a new book, ***Living Together: Myths, Risks & Answers***, to be published in March, 2008 by Howard Books. Richard Cizik, VP of NAE, observes, “For too long church leaders have ignored cohabitation. This book is a wake up call on the extent of the problem – with encouraging, proven answers. It is must reading by every pastor and lay leader.” Chuck Colson’s Foreword says, “This book is designed for pastors, parents and marital mentors who are confronted with couples who think they’ll be the glorious exception to the cohabitation statistics.” At Mike & Harriet’s church, 55 of 288 couples discussing an inventory with Mentors – **decided not to marry**. Such couples have the same scores as those who marry and later divorce. Every breakup is an avoided divorce! But of the 233 couples who did marry from 1992-2001, there were only seven divorces. **That is a 97% success rate over a decade - “marriage insurance.”**



Help Us Save Marriages

- Donate \$50 for a DVD with the ABC Show and Overview of How to Slash Divorce
- Donate \$100 or more for a signed copy of *Living Together: Myths, Risks & Answers*
- Use Click & Pledge on our new website: marriagesavers.org, or mail a check.

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