

Frequently Asked Questions

Why have a long courtship? Courtships lasting less than a year are associated with a higher risk of divorce. A leisurely pace to courtship produces marriages that last.

What's wrong with cohabitation? First, cohabitation has diverted millions from marrying. There were 21 million never-married Americans in 1970, but 52 million in 2005. Second, many people think of cohabitation as a "trial marriage." Instead it is a trial for divorce. Those who do marry after cohabiting are 50% more likely to divorce than those who do not live together before marriage. And 75% of children born to cohabiting couples will experience separation of their parents before they reach 16 years of age.

Why have premarital mentoring? Of 288 couples mentored in one church during the 1990s, 55 couples decided *not* to marry. Studies show such couples avoided a bad marriage before it began. However, there were only seven divorces of 233 couples who married over a decade. That's a divorce rate of only 3%. A 97% success rate over ten years is virtual "marriage insurance."

What is a Mentor Couple? Mentor Couples have healthy marriages and can be found in any church. They have been trained to help other couples prepare for, enrich or restore their marriages.

Why have post-wedding mentoring? Nine out of ten couples participating in post-wedding sessions, (mentoring opportunities, classes, seminars, or marriage enrichment weekends) report that the experience strengthened their marriages.

Does a Community Marriage Covenant really make a difference? A 2004 study shows that the 114 communities that already have such a policy reported an average 17.5% drop in divorces in seven years.

Goals of Our Community Marriage Policy:

- Create a premarital preparation program whose graduates have a 90% success rate.
- Launch a program to enrich all marriages in our congregations.
- Restore 80% or more of troubled marriages.
- Help more than half of separated couples to reconcile.
- Enable 80% of remarried couples and stepfamilies to be successful.

This marriage covenant is a work in progress, and we invite and encourage other churches, organizations, and individuals to become involved with us in strengthening marriages in Hardin County.

If you wish to discuss the covenant or add your name to the growing list of supporters please contact either Ministerial Association.

Elizabethtown Ministerial Association

Radcliff Ministerial Association

This Community Marriage Covenant is one of more than 200 Community Marriage Policies developed with the assistance of Marriage Savers, 9311 Harrington Dr., Potomac, MD 20854, www.marriagesavers.org, 301-469-5873



*Hardin County
Community
Marriage Covenant
Elizabethtown, Kentucky*

*Because we care for
our community,
for married couples,
for children...*

*We offer this policy to
help marriages
last a lifetime.*



Why a Marriage Covenant?

What type of positive change in American family life could improve the overall well being of married couples and children in Hardin County? Many believe that the answer comes by strengthening the marriage relationship and increasing the probability of children being born and raised in healthy, married, two-parent homes with a father and mother both providing guidance and nurture.

Some hold this view because of their spiritual belief that marriage, between a man and a woman, and the family are institutions ordained by God. Others base their support on evidence that children of such families have significantly lower rates of poverty, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, delinquency and substance abuse.

With 75% of all marriages taking place in houses of worship, the clergy can play a critical role in laying a foundation for a lifelong partnership.

Our secular community, likewise has a role to play by reviewing its organizations and businesses and finding ways in which it can strengthen marital relationships and family life.

Definition

A Community Marriage Covenant is a set of agreed-upon guidelines for premarital preparation and community support for marriages. Its purpose is to empower couples for healthy, lifelong marriage and to raise the standard of two-parent families within the community.

This community covenant is not intended to imply criticism of single-parent families nor does it assume that abusive situations should be endured.

The Current Trends – A Cause for Concern

- In the last five full calendar years (2002-2006) a total of 4,954 marriages have been filed in the Hardin County Clerk's office.
- In the same time, the Administrative Office of the Courts reports that during that period there were a total of 3,814 divorces filed in the county.
- Those figures suggest that married couples need assistance in their marriages to assure that problems are resolved and that marriages are strengthened.

Hardin County Marriage Covenant

This covenant expresses the common concerns of the faith community regarding the need to strengthen proposed and existing marriages.

We Believe:

- God has established the sanctity and companionship of marriage in Scripture.
- God intends the marriage bond of husband and wife to be a lifelong union.
- As religious leaders, we have a responsibility to participate in and to provide premarital preparation to improve the understanding and mutual commitment of couples being married.
- As religious leaders, we have a responsibility to strengthen and nourish existing marriages.

Therefore we will:

- Encourage courtships of at least one year.
- Affirm abstinence outside marriage and fidelity within marriage.
- Provide mentoring for engaged couples that will utilize Scripture, a premarital inventory and teaching of communication skills (a process lasting approximately four months).
- Offer two post-wedding mentoring sessions with clergy or mentors in the first year of marriage.
- Train mature married couples to be mentoring couples serving engaged and couples in crisis.
- Enrich all existing marriages with an annual retreat held at the church at low cost.
- Reconcile the separated with a workbook course, "Reconciling God's Way."
- Heal hurting marriages with couples whose own marriages nearly failed, to mentor crisis couples.
- Create Stepfamily Support Groups to help couples with stepchildren to be successful.
- Share resources with other congregations and community organizations to strengthen marriages.

Rationale

To Reduce the Rate of Divorce:

An important study released in 2004 stated that the first 114 communities with a Community Marriage Policy reduced their divorce rate by 17.5% over seven years, saving 50,000 marriages through 2001. With six more years and twice as many CMPs, perhaps 100,000 divorces were averted.

To Reduce the Rate of Cohabitation:

The same study reported that from 1990-2000, cities with a Community Marriage Covenant ended the decade with a cohabitation rate one-third lower than those without a CMC. By contrast, the number of cohabiting couples has soared 12-fold since 1960 from 430,000 to 5.2 million in 2005

To Raise the Rate of Marriage:

Modesto, CA, the first city to create a Community Marriage Policy, saw its number of marriages rise from 1,300 in 1986 to 2,500 in 2005. Evansville, IN, reports a 16% rise in the marriage rate from 1998 to 2004-5. This is in stark contrast to with the 50% drop of the U.S. marriage rate from 1970-2005.

To Encourage Lengthy Courtships:

Short courtships before marriage – that is courtships lasting less than a year – are associated with a higher risk of divorce.

To Expect a Premarital Process:

A Gallup Poll found that 57% of all marriages fail due to poor communication and conflict resolution skills. In 38% of those divorces, couples say they were aware of those problems when they married or soon afterward.

To Initiate a Mentor Couples Program:

Trained mature married couples will serve as mentors to work with engaged couples, newlyweds and those experiencing marital difficulties.

To Encourage Marriage Enrichment Opportunities:

Nine out of ten couples attending marriage enrichment weekends, seminars, or classes believe that the experiences strengthened their marriages.