

State of Affairs

Michael McManus writes:

“Today’s marriages are built on a slippery slope of changing feelings and circumstances – not on a rock of commitment. Many easily find excuses to walk away from marriage vows, spouses, and children.... We live in a fast-paced culture that honors only one constant value: individual freedom” (p.20-21).

- In 1960, when four-fifths of all first marriages were blessed by the church, there were only 393,000 divorces (p.22).
- In 1990, when three-quarters of all first marriages were still being blessed by the church, breakups tripled to 1,185,000 divorces (p.22).

There is great confusion with statistics.

George Barna – Born Again Christians divorce at the same rate as non-Christians. "There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage," George Barna.

“Study: Christian Divorce Rate Identical To National Average”
Audrey Barrick, Christian Post Reporter, April 4, 2008|

Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family wrote a recent column in Baptist Press highlighting Wright's interpretation of the state of divorce for Christians. "The divorce rates of Christian believers are not identical to the general population — not even close," he wrote. "Being a committed, faithful believer makes a measurable difference in marriage."

Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, agrees there's been some confusion.

"You do hear, both in Christian and non-Christian circles, that Christians are no different from anyone else when it comes to divorce and that is not true if you are focusing on Christians who are regular church attendees," he said.

Wilcox's analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households has found that Americans who attend religious services several times a month were about 35% less likely to divorce than those with no religious affiliation.

Nominal conservative Protestants, on the other hand, were 20% more likely to divorce than the religiously unaffiliated.

"There's something about being a nominal 'Christian' that is linked to a lot of negative outcomes when it comes to family life," Wilcox said.

“Christians Question Divorce Rates Of Faithful”
Adelle M. Banks March 14, 2011

Is your church a

'blessing machine'

that grinds out weddings with no attempt to keep track of how many of them end up in the divorce courts?

1. Overloaded Pastors
2. Pressure from parents
3. Pressure from couple
(McManus, 139)

Or is your congregation a place where young people learn skills and attitudes to

build a lifelong marriage? (McManus, 24)

1. help the teenager keep chaste
2. help the dating couple
300 hours alone time leads to bed time
3. Assessment inventory like PREPARE/ENRICH
4. Marriage Prep
 - a. teaching on the substantive issues of marriage
 - b. equipping the couple to communicate and resolve conflict
 - c. evangelizing the couple to help put Christ at the center of their marriage
 - d. helping each couple learn about marriage via a mentor couple

Marriage Mentoring ['ma-rij· 'men-tōr]

- (1) When a more experienced couple invests
- (2) in a less experienced couple
- (3) to help them navigate the marriage journey.

“What are mentor couples uniquely qualified to do? Be a practical role model to other couples; give precious time; demonstrate the church’s love of the new couple; become a part of the church’s life” (McManus, 134).

Implementing a marriage mentor program can be an exciting and powerful addition to the ministry of your church or outreach to your community. A formal mentoring program often ensures that premarital couples get more preparation, and get it



earlier in their engagement; two factors which promote healthier relationships.

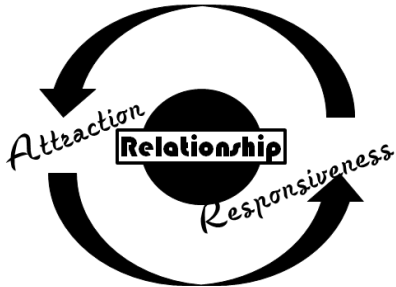
Value of Marriage Mentors

- For *premarital and newlywed couples*, Marriage Mentors provide helpful role models during the premarital stage and first year of marriage.
- For *Marriage Mentors*, investing in other couples can be an enriching experience for their own marriages.
- For the *clergy*, a mentoring program provides a way to offer more comprehensive premarital and newlywed programs to their congregation and community.
- For the *church*, it expands ministry options, facilitates outreach to young couples, and helps to develop more sharing and connection among members of the congregation.

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Selecting Marriage Mentors

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Warmth 2. Genuineness 3. Empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving timely information to mentorees • modeling aspects of what they wish to impart • challenging and motivating mentorees to move to higher levels • directing mentorees to helpful resources when needed • encouraging goodness and inspiring greatness • lessening mentorees' anxiety by normalizing experiences • helping mentorees set goals • keeping mentorees accountable to their goals • providing a periodic review and evaluation of mentorees' performance
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Caution Flags for Marriage Mentors

- You are currently battling any kind of addiction (gambling, pornography, drugs, alcohol, etc.).
- You have uncontrollable emotional outbursts that you have not yet managed.
- You have recently suffered a significant setback (financial, emotional, etc.).
- Your marriage is not stable or is fraught with frequent conflict.
- You have suffered serious emotional wounds from some kind of abuse in your life and you are still trying to find healing.
- You are struggling with significant financial debt.
- One of you is far more motivated to become a marriage mentor than the other.
- You do not have a sense of meaning and purpose in your life.
- You are pessimistic about marriage in general.
- You avoid personal responsibility for problems in your life.
- You are not content and at peace with your life and your marriage.
- You are not living your life by submitting to biblical principles.
- You are primarily motivated to be marriage mentors to help your own marriage.
- You have been told by others that you may not be in a good place to be marriage mentors right now.

Bottom Line

“Both you and your spouse need to be in a healthy place to be effective. After all, your relationship is the most important ingredient of the mentoring process.... If you do not demonstrate a relatively healthy marriage, you become part of the problem rather than the solution” (Parrott, 40).

Marriage Mentoring Self-Test

5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=undecided; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree

- _____ 1. Giving advice has little to do with good mentoring.
- _____ 2. I can accept and respect people who disagree with me.
- _____ 3. I can make a mistake and admit it.
- _____ 4. I look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
- _____ 5. I tend to trust my intuition even when I’m unsure of the outcome.
- _____ 6. I don’t need to see immediate and concrete results in order to know progress is occurring.
- _____ 7. Who you are in mentoring is more important than what you do.
- _____ 8. My presence frees others from the threat of external evaluation.
- _____ 9. In a tense emotional situation I tend to remain calm.
- _____ 10. I know my limits when it comes to helping others.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

40-50 You are well on your way to being an effective mentor; take special care to maintain the qualities you have.

30-39 You have what it takes to be effective, but you will need to exert special attention to grooming your traits.

Below 30 Seek out advice and counsel to assess your strengths and to pinpoint which characteristics you need to develop further.

Teaching / Marriage Mentor Skills

- 1. Building a rapport
- 2. Walking in another couple’s shoes
- 3. Working as a team
- 4. Agreeing on outcomes
- 5. Asking meaningful questions
- 6. Listening aggressively
- 7. Fielding any question they throw at you
- 8. Telling your stories
- 9. Praying together
- 10. Staying sharp and refreshed
- 11. Being yourself and going with the flow

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Accountability for Marriage Mentors

- Lead Marriage Mentor Couple
- Pairing of Mentor and Mentee
- Accountability Meetings/Small Groups
- Confidentiality
- Continual Training

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Bibliography

McManus, Michael J. Marriage Mentors: Helping Your Friends and Family Stay Married. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993.

PREPARE/ENRICH. www.prepare-enrich.com

Parrott, Drs. Les and Leslie. The Complete Guide to Marriage Mentoring. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005.