

**MARRIAGE PREPARATION MINISTRIES  
AROUND THE UNITED METHODIST CONNECTION  
February 10, 2013**

The following paragraphs describe some of marriage preparation ministries offered by United Methodist churches. The first example shows what can be done by a large, multi-staffed congregation, but a group of smaller churches could work together to provide an equally effective approach. See the end of this document for contact information for programs and organizations named in it, and please let me know of other ministries you would recommend for inclusion in this document.

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**Asbury United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma**, has an active Marriage Council with representatives from various parts of their Marriage Ministry. Their premarital ministry (Couple-to-Couple), which they developed themselves and began in 1993, currently consists of about 35 trained and supervised Support Couples who provide mentoring for more than 50 couples each year. Charlene Giles, Director of Care and Marriage Ministries at Asbury, reports that the Support Couples participate in 20 hours of training, including how to work as a team (taking turns being the leader and the observer); creating a “couple testimony” of how God has made a difference in their marriage and learning to share parts of it when appropriate; practicing praying with others; asking good open-ended questions; being gently assertive when working with an engaged couple, etc. They also learn how to administer and share the results of the PREPARE inventory. Charlene comments, “Our goal is for them to meet eight times with the engaged couple, usually in the home of the Support Couple, providing a warm atmosphere that usually includes some sort of refreshments. A few Support Couples even serve entire meals! When engaged couples meet with their Support Couples four hours or more, they qualify for the Oklahoma marriage initiative discount of \$45 off the \$50 marriage license fee. Couples marrying in our church building and those whose weddings are officiated by one of our pastors, even if held elsewhere, are required to participate in Couple-to-Couple. We also get requests from members who are having destination weddings far away, and we try to meet their needs whenever we can.” For more information, contact **Charlene Giles, M.A., L.M.F.T. at Asbury UMC**, 918-392-1145 or [cgiles@asburytulsa.org](mailto:cgiles@asburytulsa.org) or visit [www.asburytulsa.org](http://www.asburytulsa.org). (Other marriage ministries of this church are described in Marriage Education and Enrichment Ministries Around the UM Connection.)

Reverend Thomas Stribling, pastor at **First UMC in Happy, TX**, in the Northwest Texas Conference, participated in a training event for the UM resource *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* and used it for the first time in 2011 with a premarital couple, meeting once a week for five weeks. He reported that the material was very effective in helping them deal with several issues they needed to work through. Each week they brought up problems they had discussed while doing their homework or that they had not thought of before. Tom continues to use this material, finding it very effective, broad enough to fit many different situations, and adaptable on a couple-by-couple basis.

Steve Bringardner, Pastor of Discipleship and Care at **Dexter United Methodist**

**Church, Dexter, Michigan**, reported that couples who get married there are required to participate in three two-hour marriage preparation classes held every spring, in addition to meeting with the officiating pastor at least three times. Three staff persons and two professional counselors in the congregation have been trained and certified in the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory. Plans are underway to recruit and train a set of mentor couples to meet with engaged couples for six months prior to the wedding and at least that long afterwards. (Other marriage ministries of this church are described in Marriage Education and Enrichment Ministries Around the UM Connection.)

**Peoples UMC in South Portland, Maine**, offered a Dance and Relationship Education Class for Couples, hoping to appeal to those who want to learn to dance for their weddings, as well as to others looking to enrich their relationship. Each evening began with an hour-long ballroom dance class led by an instructor from a nearby community center, followed by an hour-long relationship education session. Many of the dance instructions regarding communication led nicely into the relationship education program, which was presented by certified Mastering the Mysteries of Love leaders, but could be any of a number of specific curriculums, such as those named at the end of this document.

Bill and Kathy Dickey had already been trained by Marriage Savers when they moved to **Beckley, West Virginia** in 2003. They established a mentoring ministry at **Beckley Temple UMC**, and trained eight mentor couples. The Dickeys were invited to lead a district retreat for pastors and spouses, at which they used Dr. Chapman's *The Five Love Languages* DVD. This was so well received that some of the pastors involved sent couples from their churches to the next mentor training event. This ministry has evolved into a locally designed program, incorporating material from Dr. Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, and is required for all couples being married there. Dan and Becky Doman now coordinate a team of seven mentor couples who work with engaged and newlywed couples to help them prepare for successful and lasting marriages. There is no charge; and mentoring supplements, but does not replace counseling by the pastor. In 2012, seven couples took part in the program and early in 2013, the Domans reported three couples already being mentored.

At **Church of the Resurrection UMC, Leawood, Kansas**, couples who wish to be married there must complete a six-session premarital class, which is also open to newlyweds and couples just thinking about marriage. (Other marriage ministries of this church are described in Marriage Education and Enrichment Ministries Around the UM Connection.)

At **Frazer Memorial UMC in the Alabama/West Florida Conference** (<http://frazerumc.org/>), Ginny and Mike Dietvorst, a Better Marriages trained couple, serve as pre-marriage mentor coordinators. Their pool of marriage mentor couples work with approximately 30+ couples a year. Some non-member couples from the community also request pre-marriage mentoring through this program. ([dietvorst@mindspring.com](mailto:dietvorst@mindspring.com))

At **Heritage UMC, Clearwater, Florida**, engaged couples are required to take the PREPARE or FOCCUS Inventory and meet with a mentor couple for 4 to 6 sessions, a total of about 10 hours, in addition to at least two meetings with the pastor.

At **Manchester UMC in Missouri**, Couples planning to marry take the PREPARE/ENRICH inventory on line. They then go over the inventory in general in a group setting and meet one-on-one with the pastor for counseling. Wedding workshops, offered three

times a year, provide opportunities to discuss the ceremony and plans with a wedding coordinator.

Vicki Dale, MS, LPC, Director of Counseling and Full Life Ministries at **Platte Woods UMC, Kansas City, Missouri**, offers a Marriage Mentor program for premarital and newlywed couples. (Other marriage ministries of this church are described in Marriage Education and Enrichment Ministries Around the UM Connection.)

In 1999, **Wesley UMC in Erie, Pennsylvania**, began a marriage mentoring program that has helped reduce the divorce rate by adequately preparing couples for marriage. That year, Wesley UMC and 17 other area congregations formed a Community Marriage Policy requiring everyone married in their churches to participate in pre-marital mentoring by a couple whose marriage had been solid for at least 15 years. Lee and Nancy Coleman have served as mentors in this program since its beginning. Participating couples use the FOCCUS inventory to identify strengths and differences; then meet two to five times with their mentors, trained through the Marriage Savers organization. The Colemans also have led training seminars for pastors on pre-marital counseling. Contact Marriage Savers at 301-469-5873 for more information about training for pre-marital mentoring.

In 2011, **Stillwater UMC**, a multi-campus congregation in **North Dayton, Ohio**, reached out to its economically struggling community by setting aside two Saturdays each year for free weddings. Services were scheduled at two-hour intervals to allow time for setting up. The church provided free music, sound, wedding coordination, and pastoral care, including pre-marital counseling. Working with merchants in the area, the church helped to secure flowers, cakes, and even free photography for each wedding.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS NAMED IN THIS DOCUMENT**

**Better Marriages** – (formerly ACME): 800-634-8325, [www.bettermarriages.org](http://www.bettermarriages.org)

**FOCCUS - FOCCUS** (Premarital and Marital Inventories) [www.foccusinc.com](http://www.foccusinc.com)

*Growing Love in Christian Marriage* - [www.Cokesbury.com](http://www.Cokesbury.com)

**Engaged Encounter United Methodist** (ME/EEUM): 866-633-3862, [www.encounter.org](http://www.encounter.org)

**Marriage Mentors** - [www.marriagementors.org](http://www.marriagementors.org)

**Marriage Savers** -301-469-5873, [www.marriagesavers.org](http://www.marriagesavers.org)

**Mastering the Mysteries of Love** - [www.nire.org](http://www.nire.org)

**PREP and C-PREP (Christian PREP)**– [www.prepinc.com](http://www.prepinc.com)

**PREPARE/ENRICH** – [www.lifeinnovation.com](http://www.lifeinnovation.com)

**The Five Love Languages** - [www.5lovelanguages.com/](http://www.5lovelanguages.com/) and popular booksellers

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