

New Offerings from Marriage Education and Enrichment Organizations

Several long-standing marriage education and enrichment organizations have developed new strategies and innovative programs, seeking to reach more couples and to increase their effectiveness in strengthening marriages.

Better Marriages

This organization, founded by David and Vera Mace in 1973, now offers two Virtual MEGs (Marriage Enrichment Groups), each meeting once a month, in which persons can participate by phone or webcast. Ongoing groups offering opportunities for couple dialogue are found by many to be the most effective setting for relationship growth. Better Marriages provides training and certification to equip leaders for such experiences, as well as for retreats, workshops, and various other formats. Couple dialogue involves intentional conversation between partners in which they take turns expressing their thoughts, feelings, and wants. Each partner strives to truly hear and understand the other. Visit the website www.bettermarriages.org and click on Events to find the dates and access information for upcoming Virtual MEGs. You can also listen in to archived dialogues to learn more about this model for couple communication, as well as learn about scheduled retreats and leadership training events. Sign up at the website to join Better Marriages and discover an amazing array of resources and benefits to nurture your marriage.

One of the Virtual MEGs is facilitated by Eddie and Sylvia Robertson, active in Better Marriages since 1974, a Leader Couple, Specialists in Marriage Enrichment, and Trainers and Advanced Trainers of Leader Couples. They are also certified in the use of Prepare-Enrich and Couple Communication. At their website, www.eddieandsylviarobertson.com, they share information about the Virtual MEG, articles, couple exercises, and a blog about what they have learned through the years and continue to learn as they face the challenges of daily living. Their recent book titled *Wonderful Wednesdays: Fifty-two Conversations for Couples* (Canton, GA: Yawn's Publishing, 2012) provides a year's worth of conversation prompts to help readers apply the basic principles and practices of marriage enrichment on their own. You can also enjoy their insights on their Facebook page (Eddie and Sylvia Robertson Marriage Enrichment)

Marriage Encounter United Methodist

The dedicated presenters and organizers of this fruitful ministry have developed a plan to make their program more accessible. They are in the process of developing a DVD which can be used when live presenters are not readily available and in alternative formats to the traditional Marriage Encounter Weekend. Their hope is to reach more couples who are interested in growing their marriage relationship. The experience will usually be spread out over seven weeks, with a weekly session held in the local church or other public facility. This will reduce the cost and simplify child care arrangements, hopefully making it easier for some couples to commit to participation. Because this project involves an updating of the presentations and fund-raising to cover production costs, the new DVD format will probably not be available until 2017. Stay tuned for updates on progress and consider scheduling such an event in your local church next year. You can learn more about Marriage Encounter United Methodist and find schedules for upcoming events at www.encounter.org.

The Association of Marriage and Family Ministries (AMFM)

Since late 2003, AMFM has been encouraging and resourcing Marriage and Family Ministries in churches. In order to serve this calling, they hosted an annual training conference for marriage and family ministry leaders, produced an annual Marriage and Family Ministry Resource Guide, spoke at conferences, organized topical ministry teams online, trained over 250 churches in a Couple-to-Couple Marriage Mentoring model, and helped churches build their marriage and family ministries.

Moving into 2016, AMFM is refocusing its efforts on four main initiatives:

1. **The Church's Greatest Untapped Outreach Opportunity booklet** – This easy-to-read, 31-page booklet for church leaders bears witness to the importance of marriage and family ministries within congregations and beyond - as outreach ministries to the community. The booklet encourages churches to work intentionally through and build upon the ministries they already have in place. (free download at www.amfmonline.com)
2. **Marriage and Family Ministry Made Simple workbook** – The goal of this workbook was to create a simple, step-by-step training for marriage and family ministry that is self-taught and can work for churches of any size. Churches who would like coaching and/or training by the AMFM team may call 480-718-3020 or email Staff@AMFMOnline.com.
3. **WWW.40DayLove Dare.com** – Based on the book *The Love Dare*, referenced in the movie *Fireproof*, this online community has served over 150,000 individuals and couples trying to build their relationship skills by taking the 40-day challenge.
4. **Thrive Couples** – This new platform launched on March 11th with a Facebook community and will soon have a website (www.thrivecouples.com), a twitter feed, and even an app. The focus will be on serving couples through an expansive and relevant collection of tips and tools directly targeted to help them thrive, not just survive.

To learn more about AMFM and its ministry resources, contact egarcia@amfmonline.com.

By refining and refocusing their efforts, taking advantage of technology and of new research about effective programs, these organizations hopefully will reach more people with encouragement and resources for building stronger marriages. To read about a wide variety of organizations focused on marriage education and enrichment, see “**Marriage Education and Enrichment Organizations and Websites**” under the Marriage Education and Enrichment section of Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources at www.marriagelovepower.net - or visit www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries and search by title.

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