

What Are the Typical Results?

Marriage Rate Increases: In communities with marriage agreements, marriage rates increase between 10% and 20%.* As the clergy in a community join together and publicly commit to reform marriage, and as they collaborate with other local leaders to disseminate better information about the institution and promote the benefits of marriage to the community, the value of marriage in the community rises.

Divorce Rate Falls: An independent study by the Institute for Research and Evaluation of the first 114 communities that created agreements found that on average, divorce rates fell 17.5% over seven years, nearly double the 9.4% decline of very similar cities without CMA's in each state.* Seven communities slashed divorce rates by 48% or more.*

Cohabitation Rate Drops: The Institute study also found that from 1990 to 2000, cohabitation fell 13% in cities with agreements, while it rose in similar cities by 19%.* CMA's cut cohabitation rates by a third!

Unwed Births: With a reduction in cohabitation and an increase in marriage as a percent of the population, communities will see a decline in the incidence of children born to unwed mothers. In Modesto, CA, where the first CMA was established, teen birth rates fell by 30%.*

* Marriage Savers; www.marriagesavers.org.

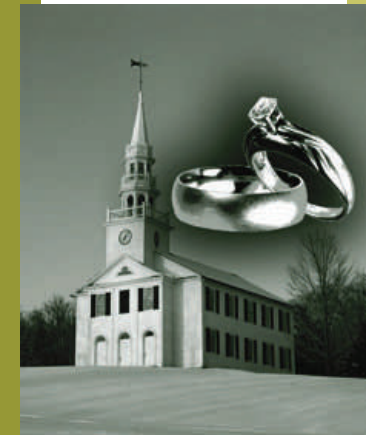


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Community Marriage Agreements



Why Community Marriage Agreements?



Marriage: Since 1980, Wisconsin's marriage rate has dropped 36%.^{*} Nationally, it has plunged 50% since 1970.^{**} Fewer people are choosing to marry. The number of adults between the ages of 30 and 44 who never married nearly tripled from 7% in 1970 to 20% in 2005.^{**}

Divorce: In Wisconsin in 2008 there were 1.9 marriages to each divorce.^{*} For every two marriages in a given year, there was one divorce. In 2008 alone, 16,885 minor children were affected by divorce in Wisconsin.^{*} Nationally, 40 million children have been affected by divorce since 1970.^{**}

Living Together (Cohabitation): Cohabitation has become the dominant way male-female unions are formed. In 1960, 430,000 unmarried couples lived together but by 2005 that number increased 12 fold to 5.4 million.^{**} In 2000, Wisconsin had the 16th highest cohabitation rate in the nation at 9.6%.[†] Couples who marry after cohabiting are 50% more likely to divorce than those who do not.^{**}

Unwed Births: In 2006, unwed mothers birthed 1 of every 3 babies born in Wisconsin^{*} and almost 4 out of 10 born nationally.^{††} Today, cohabiting couples are as likely to have children as married couples. Research conclusively shows that children born to unwed mothers are at risk economically, physically, educationally, socially and in many other areas.

^{*} Wisconsin Department of Health Services

^{**} Marriage Savers; www.marriagesavers.org.

[†] 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

^{††} U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

What is a Community Marriage Agreement?

A Community Marriage Agreement (CMA) is a commitment among clergy (of any denomination) and sometimes of community leaders to take specific steps to strengthen the institution of marriage in their community by implementing proven reforms for couples both before and after a wedding. A CMA outlines a series of commitments the pastors and leaders agree to incorporate in their churches in regards to couples desiring to be married, as well as married couples and crisis marriages.

CMA's can be made between pastors in one denomination or association, or across different denominations in a community, county or neighboring counties. If your church is uncomfortable joining an inter-denominational agreement, then we suggest forming an initiative among the churches in the county or neighboring counties from the same denomination.

CMA's often include a public confession by the signers acknowledging the church's lack of investment in marriages and the resulting devastating consequences for families. With a desire to turn this tide, the signers publicly agree to raise their investment in marriage preparation, marriage enrichment and services to rescue struggling marriages.



What Do the Signers Agree To?

Each Community Marriage Agreement is unique to the specific community. The clergy publicly commit to implement proven reforms to make healthy marriages a priority in their congregations. They commit to do a better job preparing couples for a lifelong marriage, enriching existing ones and saving those in crisis.

Most Community Marriage Agreements include the following elements:

- Requiring a waiting period of 4 to 6 months from engagement to wedding.
- Recruitment of mentor couples within the congregation.
- Requiring rigorous marriage preparation including pre-marriage inventory administered by a trained mentor.
- Mentoring by a solid married couple.
- Providing enrichment for all marriages on a regular basis.
- Efforts to restore struggling marriages with mentor couples.
- Offering support and assistance to couples with stepchildren.

