

# Findings

Dedicated to the Preservation of the Family.

## Marriage Savers

### Is There Hope For Today's Families?

By Cheri M. Jimenez



There is little doubt that the breakup of the nuclear family is one of the most pressing domestic problems of our time. David Ellwood, one of America's leading social scientists

concludes, "The changes in the structure of the family are probably the result of some sizeable and largely unstoppable changes in social and economic patterns."<sup>1</sup> With the collapse of marriage leading the way for the disintegration of the family, many policy makers are asking—what can be done?

Troubles in the institution of marriage can be seen in the following statistics: six out of ten new marriages end in divorce, the cohabitation rate has soared seven-fold since 1960 and the number of never-married adults has doubled from 21 million in 1970 to 44.6 million in 1994.<sup>2</sup> While the U.S. has the highest divorce rate in the world, we are also seeing the marriage rate fall 41 percent from 148 marriages per 1,000 women in 1960, to 87 marriages per 1,000 women in 1990.<sup>3</sup>

While data strongly suggests that the real divorce rate has yet to level off for those marrying in the late 1970's, the proportion divorced within five years was 22 percent; for those marrying in the early

eighties, the proportion divorced within five years nudged up to 23 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Comparing current marital status in North Carolina with the rest of the nation, the divorce rate was 58 percent, just about the national average.<sup>7</sup> This steady increase of divorce in America is not just one more shift in history's long and irreversible pattern of change in family. It is a social disaster.

#### Who Pays the Ultimate Price?

Divorce is a disaster for children. Each year over a million children are being torn apart from parents who divorce, and another million are born to unmarried parents.<sup>8</sup>

Almost one-third of all American children, and two-thirds of African American children are born out of wedlock.<sup>9</sup> By 1994, almost 40 percent of never married women in their thirties had had an illegitimate child.<sup>10</sup> Some 15.8 million children, nearly triple the number in 1960, are now living with a single parent.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the majority of American children in the 1990s will not live with their natural father and mother.<sup>12</sup> In 1960, 7 million children

were living without fathers.<sup>13</sup> Today, the number is 24 million, according to the National Fatherhood Initiative.<sup>14</sup> Those growing up with only one parent, compared to children with both parents, are three times more likely to have a child out of

wedlock, 2.5 times more likely to be teen parents, twice as likely to drop out of school and three times more likely to commit suicide.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars and advocates alike cite a constantly replenished body of evidence showing that when it comes to unemployment and dead-end jobs, involvement with drugs, crime or incarceration, nothing protects a child better than growing up in a two-parent home. Of course, as more children lack the experience of growing up in that kind of family, the harder it will be for them to create one as adults. The ramifications are far reaching, but there is certainly no doubt that children are harmed by divorce.

Not only are the children harmed, but adults also experience great pain and emotional turmoil from the breakup of the family. And when children of divorce marry, they are much more likely to divorce themselves. "They more often escalate conflict and reduce communication" with a spouse than those from intact homes.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Judith Wallerstein, who followed 60 divorcing families for 10-15 years, writes in her book *Second Chances* that in two thirds of the former couples, one partner is unhappy, lonely, anxious, depressed or financially precarious ten years after the divorce.

In another 25% of the couples, both former partners are worse off, and in only 10% of the cases do former partners reconstruct happier, fuller lives after a decade.<sup>17</sup> Divorced people live shorter lives. Divorced men are twice as likely as married man to die in a given year from heart disease, stroke, hypertension and cancer, and four times more likely to die in auto accidents and suicide. And divorced women are two to three times as likely to die of all forms of cancer as married women.<sup>18</sup>

#### NATIONAL STATISTICS:

Divorces tripled from 1960 to 1980, then leveled off, mainly because the marriage rate plummeted.

Year	Number of Divorces <sup>4</sup>
1960	390,000
1970	708,000
1980	1,189,000
1990	1,182,000
1995	1,169,000

The cohabitation rate has soared seven-fold since 1960.

Year	Cohabiting Couples <sup>5</sup>
1960	523,000
1970	1,589,000
1980	2,220,000
1990	2,856,000
1994	3,661,000

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## The Natural Disaster Syndrome

Today's marriages are built on ever shifting sands of changing feelings and circumstances—not on a rock of commitment. Many find excuses to walk away from marriage vows, spouses and children because it is just plain easy to do so. According to studies conducted by George Gallup, what sparked three-fifths of divorces was simply poor communication.<sup>19</sup>

But despite the discouraging statistics, the longing for marriage has not subsided. While there is easy divorce, easy cohabitation, easy sex and even easy unwed motherhood—marriage remains an almost universal aspiration. Over the past thirty years a consistent 96 percent of the American public has expressed a personal desire for marriage.<sup>20</sup> Almost three-quarters of Americans believe that “marriage is a lifelong commitment that should not be ended except under extreme circumstances.”<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the failure of marriage has been treated as a natural disaster, with an attitude that this pain and sorrow cannot be prevented. In her book, *The Abolition of Marriage*, Maggie Gallagher expands this analogy, “The best we can do in the face of this mystery [divorce], we are told, is to be like the Red Cross after a storm: go through the wreckage, pick up survivors, and carry on.”<sup>22</sup> Ms. Gallagher goes on to assert that “there is comfort in treating the collapse of marriage this way: If divorce and illegitimacy are inevitable, then no one must take responsibility for the devastation. If there is no solution, there is no problem.”<sup>23</sup>

## Real Solutions that Communities Can Adopt—Now!

There is much talk about marriage rehabilitation in the public policy arena, from welfare reform to limiting no-fault divorce—but few will make it their mission to strengthen the institution of marriage. Mike McManus is an exception. After his own almost ended, saving troubled marriages has become a passion for him. McManus challenges the lethargy of our time when he says, “It is time for Americans to get out of the business of merely managing the decline of the family and begin the far more challenging but exhilarating task of recreating marriage. In that way, and only in that way, love will not only endure, but also triumph.”<sup>24</sup>

Author of *Marriage Savers* and *Insurance Marriage: 25 Proven Ways to Prevent Divorce*, Mike McManus is founder of the Marriage Savers Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. His organization works in

conjunction with churches to establish a community awareness of seven principles that will help marriage be successful. McManus is quick to point out that three-fourths of all first marriages are blessed by the church, and within the last generation, over half of those marriages have failed. The assumption is that the church has had clear access to these couples but has not used that access to prepare couples for the lifelong commitment, to deepen existing marriages, or to save troubled ones.

In many cases, very few pastors have ever preached on divorce, let alone cohabitation or adultery. McManus confirms that “too many churches are simply blessing machines or wedding factories, grinding out weddings on Saturday, with no strategy on how to help those couples be successful.”<sup>25</sup>

“That can all change,” contends McManus, “when churches take seriously their responsibility to prepare young and engaged couples for a commitment they will make for a lifetime.”<sup>26</sup> In his book, *Marriage Savers: Helping Your Friends*

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and *Family Stay Married*, McManus outlines reforms that any church can use.

The central idea behind the reforms starts with a church utilizing those in the congregation with solid marriages as mentors. These marriage mentors take responsibility to help train and advise engaged and younger couples to communicate, resolve conflict, and cherish one another. With almost three decades of marriage experience with his wife Harriet, McManus agrees that “solid married couples are an untapped treasure of the church.”<sup>27</sup>

## Seven Goals of Marriage Savers

You and your church can help couples achieve these seven goals:

(1) **Keep your teenager chaste.** When 1.1 million teenagers get pregnant a year, they are not learning discipline needed for a lifelong marriage.<sup>28</sup> Rather, promiscuity is preparing them for divorce or welfare. Also, if teenagers are chaste that will decrease their chance of cohabitation. The National Survey of Families and Households found

that couples living together have a 50 percent higher rate of divorce or separation than marriages without premarital cohabitation.<sup>29</sup>

(2) **Avoid a bad marriage before it begins.** Research shows that by taking a premarital inventory one can predict with 80 percent accuracy who will divorce. To meet those needs, Dr. David Olson, created a questionnaire called PREPARE (Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation) to be given to couples that are considering marriage. Two premarital inventories called PREPARE and FOCCUS are taken by more than 250,000 couples a year now. Better broken engagements than broken marriages.

(3) **Give “marriage insurance” to the engaged by providing them access to older couples with solid marriages.** This is the building block of Marriage Savers to use married couples with 15–45 years of marital experience to consider being a “mentor couple” in the church. This gives young couples an opportunity to tap into the wisdom of a husband and wife whose marriage has worked. Every church has couples with solid marriages who really could be of help to other couples, but have never been asked, equipped or inspired to do so.

(4) **Strengthen any existing marriage.** One of the most successful marriage saver is a movement called “Marriage Encounter,” which is active in a dozen denominations. Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekends prompts nine out of ten couples to fall back in love. These weekends are designed for intensive reflection and dialogue to help communication skills between a husband and a wife. The Marriage Encounter Weekend/Program stands as the central positive experience of most couples with over half of the couples participating in the weekend program consider their experience of it as “excellent.”

(5) **Save the troubled marriages.** In one church, seven couples whose marriages once nearly failed, met with 40 couples headed for divorce and restored 38 of them. The unique emphasis in the program is that all of its leaders are couples whose own marriages nearly failed. They share how they overcame adultery, alcoholism, etc., and they inspire couples in hurting marriages to try new ways to love each other. Also, the involvement of mentoring couples in the church and Marriage Ministry has enabled healing for many marriages.

(6) **Spark reconciliation of the separated.** Those who are separated need to be helped to reconcile. The most effective

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single answer is “Reconciliation Instruction,” a process created by Dr. Jim Talley that involves couples writing in a workbook and talking over a four-month period to rebuild their relationship. Of those couples who completed the four month course in the past, 40 percent to 70 percent were able to rebuild their marriages.

(7) **Push down a community’s divorce rate by Creating a Community Marriage Covenant.** A Community Marriage Covenant involves pastors of all major denominations in a community drawing up a covenant to agree on minimal standards of marriage preparation before they will marry a couple.

### **Community Marriage Covenant**

With this last goal as a catalyst, marriage reform is multiplying across America. The Community Marriage Covenant (CMC) encourages pastors, bishops, and rabbis in the community to agree to several basic elements of premarital training spread over a four-month period. Furthermore, congregations pledge to cooperate to achieve these goals. These agreements all require a minimum preparation period for engaged couples. During this time couples receive

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marriage counseling which includes a relational inventory and training to resolve conflict. Also stressed in the covenant is helping married couples enrich and strengthen marriage and encouraging couples who are experiencing difficulties in their relationship to get help.

McManus confirmed, “When congregations work together, the divorce rates do come down. They do make a difference.”<sup>30</sup> For example, look at the results of Peoria, Illinois, Community Marriage Covenant. In 1991, when the policy was adopted, there were 1,210 divorces in Peoria County. Only one year later, in 1992, there were only 947 divorces. And the following year in 1993, there were 997 divorces and 984 in 1994. A goal was not only being achieved in those churches participating in the Community Marriage Covenant, but for the entire metropolitan area, the divorce rate plunged by a fifth. Peoria is not the only city seeing results. Divorces fell by 11% in Montgomery, Alabama and Albany, Georgia, and by 40% in Modesto, California after a decade.<sup>31</sup> To date, 72 cities have formed Community Marriage Covenants.<sup>32</sup>

### **Application in North Carolina**

Back in 1997, Rev. Jim Glasgow of Wilmington, North Carolina, struggled as he read the following, “America is the most religious Western nation, but it also has the world’s highest divorce rate.”<sup>33</sup> For years, Glasgow said, he had watched the breakup of families. His wife’s parents are divorced, and his own parents came close.

As frustration turned to discouragement, Rev. Glasgow felt helpless to do anything about this current trend in marriage. He then remembered the old saying, “Don’t do nothing, just because you can’t do everything.” Rev. Glasgow remembered how many times in his past that he had done nothing, because he couldn’t do everything. He could no longer stand by and do nothing.

Rev. Glasgow knew he didn’t have “...the answer but was committed to finding an answer.”<sup>34</sup> And that is when he heard of Mike McManus and Marriage Savers. After several months of preparation from local clergy in Wilmington, Rev. Glasgow formed a steering committee and invited the McManuses to a Marriage Saver Conference.

The Wilmington conference brought 60 local pastors and priests, from independent churches to every major denomination, to discuss what their community could do to prevent divorce and strengthen marriage. Out of this conference came a Community Marriage Covenant signed by all the participants committing themselves to work together to enrich marriages and significantly reduce the divorce rate in Wilmington.

Rev. Jim Glasgow shared that his commitment didn’t solve all the problems, but it had given the community a foothold, a beginning, a common goal. The Wilmington CMC group has agreed to meet quarterly for mutual encouragement and to share resources they found effective. At their first training event, 25 pastors spent a full day being equipped by Mike McManus to use the ENRICH Premarital Inventory. After a year, the church now has 13 mentor couples who have been trained and are presently working alongside 13 young couples in their first year of marriage.

Rev. Glasgow concluded, “There are many new beginnings in our community. And, yes, we recognize that we have only begun, but we now know we are not alone; we understand that we, together, can do something even if it’s not everything.”<sup>35</sup>

While it is too early to measure the

success of Marriage Savers in Wilmington, it is clear that the community will continue to promote lasting marriages in order to establish healthy families for the future. With the national interest of communities to establish their own Community Marriage Covenant, Marriage Savers has been profiled on the “ABC World News Tonight,” “NBC Nightly News,” “CBS 48 Hours” and on “Oprah” with curious admiration. Mike and Harriet McManus are showing that these social ills can be solved and that change can be monumental.

### **Legislative and Legal Solutions**

Public policy has also weakened marriage by promoting no-fault divorce. In 1978 North Carolina adopted its version of the no-fault statute, which allows any person to leave any marriage, at any time, for any reason or no reason at all. If one spouse files for divorce, the other spouse can do absolutely nothing legally to stop him or her. With divorce so easy is it little wonder that the divorce rate has increased in America.

Another approach to address runaway divorce rates include revising current divorce laws to include a higher fault-based standard. This type of initiative is designed to protect the legal right of the spouse who desires to preserve the marriage. In North Carolina, current law gives all the legal power to the spouse wanting to end the marriage, and none to the spouse who wants to remain faithful to the marriage covenant.

With many different solutions on the table, many states including North Carolina, are weighing new limits on divorce. In the last few North Carolina legislative sessions, a number of bills have been introduced dealing with marriage and divorce reform.

### **Why Marriage Matters**

The emphasis on prevention that has influenced medicine is now making more and more sense with marriage reform. “This is what Marriage Savers is all about,” says Mike McManus, preventing unhappy and destructive marriages before they even begin seems like a logical place to start.”<sup>36</sup> Researchers may continue to quibble over laws, statistics and theory, but for every child born in a successful marriage, statistically one more adult enters the marriage pool with a behavior advantage.<sup>37</sup> That child, multiplied again and again, can begin to reduce the dimensions of divorce. ¶

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## Additional Notes:

Michael McManus writes a syndicated newspaper column, "Ethics and Religion," and co-directs Marriage Savers with his wife Harriet. Marriage Savers Institute has a vast resource collection of books, videos and tape series to aid churches and communities. Mike and Harriet McManus travel the country speaking and have recently become certified as national trainers in the PREPARE/ENRICH inventories, so they can provide a more complete experience for the clergy and lead mentoring couples in cities adopting Community Marriage Covenants. "Our entire aim is to raise up little platoons of mentoring couples in congregation who are real Marriage Savers," concludes the McManuses. "We want to train up both clergy and couples with at least three potential mentoring couples from each church, so that when we leave town, the pastor has a cluster of trained couples that he can begin working with immediately to introduce marriage-saving reforms to the congregation."

## Additional Resources

### Marriage Savers Inc.

Mr. Mike McManus  
9500 Michael's Court  
Bethesda, MD 20817  
301-469-5870

### FOCCUS

Family Life Office  
3214 North 60th Street  
Omaha, NE 68104  
402-551-9003

### True Love Waits

127 9th Avenue North  
Nashville, TN 37234  
800-LUV-WAIT

### PREPARE/ENRICH Inc.

P.O. Box 190  
Minneapolis, MN 55440  
612-331-1731

### Engaged Encounter

Mike and Kathy Chavez  
8699 Pinyon Street  
Buena Park, CA 90620  
714-821-8680

### Worldwide Marriage Encounter

1908 E. Highland #A  
San Bernadino, CA 92404  
800-795-LOVE

### Marriage Ministry

6999-2 Merrill Road, #283  
Jacksonville, FL 32277  
904-724-2563

### Relationship Instruction

Dr. Jim Talley  
11805 Sylvester Drive  
Oklahoma City, OK 73162  
405-720-8300

## Endnotes:

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15. *National Survey of Families and House holds* conducted by Larry Bumpass and James Sweet at the University of Wisconsin. Estimates are based on interviews with 13,017 respondents in 1988-1989.
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21. Blankenhorn, Ibid.
22. Maggie Gallagher, *The Abolition of Marriage: How We Destroy Lasting Love* Regenery Publishing, 1996), p. 9.
23. Gallagher, p. 10.
24. Telephone interview with Michael McManus, President of Marriage Saver Institute, January 13, 1998.
25. McManus, Ibid.
26. McManus, Ibid.
27. McManus, Ibid.
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30. McManus, January 13, 1997.
31. Telephone interview with Michael McManus, President of Marriage Savers, August 11, 1997.
32. McManus, Ibid.
33. Telephone interview with Reverend Jim Glasgow, Associate Pastor of Myrtle Grove Presbyterian Church, September 30, 1997.
34. Telephone interview with Reverend Jim Glasgow, Associate Pastor of Myrtle Grove Presbyterian Church, September 23, 1997.
35. Glasgow, Ibid.
36. McManus, Ibid.
36. Paul R. Amato and Brian Keith, "Parental Divorce and Adult Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53 (1991): 54. See also, P. R. Amato and B. Keith, "Parental Divorce and Well-Being of Children: A Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 110 (1991): pp. 26-46.

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