PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING PROGRAM

by

Geraldine M. Blakeman

A Master's Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree
Masters of Arts

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by

Geraldine M. Blakeman

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to develop a counseling program for clergy or other pastoral ministers to use in premarital counseling. This program will be used by the Catholic Community of St. Patrick's in Scottsdale, Az.

In the study, it was discovered that problems in communication, problem solving, and understanding one’s family of origin were the major trouble areas for premarital couples. This Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program will use the Facilitating for Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) inventory to assess areas of agreement and difference with the couple. Facilitators will be trained to lead the discussion between the couple regarding the areas of difference.

The Couples Communication Program (CCP) will be taught to groups of 3-5 premarital couples and will take approximately 12 hours. The couples will learn interpersonal communication skills.

The Pastoral Premarital Program is organized as a 12 week process. While the FOCCUS, and CCP are set programs to be facilitated, discussions on sexuality, intimacy and finances (if chosen) would need to be developed for this Program.
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to Fr. Eric Tellez, Pastor at St. Patrick’s Catholic Community. He was open to discussing my work regarding our premarital program and excited that I would be doing my thesis on this topic. He has been anticipating a program to use with couples preparing for marriage. I have felt very encouraged and supported by him and am grateful for his support. He has been understanding, even though I have not been available on staff as he might have preferred during this past six months. Without his support and the love and support of my husband and children, I am sure this task would not have come to fruition.
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## APPENDIX A - PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING PROGRAM

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CHAPTER 1
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

There is a concern in society over the failing of the family and loss of family values. An opportune time for intervention into the couple's marriage is before the family begins—not at the time it is falling apart. There are few premarital counseling programs available and there seem to be fewer evaluations of premarital processes. As part of a Marriage and Family systems, social constructionism point of view, the underlying belief is that people, in their relationships, are attempting to find meaning in their lives. They may not always know how to go about that. They may not have the tools from their family of origin or their environment to be healthy in this endeavor of finding meaning. The belief among marriage prevention researchers is that if the couple considering marriage can be assisted to look at their interactions before they are in the marriage, it is possible that they may have a stronger marital commitment and understanding.

There was a flurry of research done in the area of premarital counseling in the 70's and 80's, but there seems to be very little in the 90's. Premarital counseling is being done, but not being evaluated and it is being done mostly by the clergy or other ministers. Some programs have been developed to assist with the intervention into the couple before the marriage begins and these are explored. The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is one program for premarital couples which was developed to teach partners skills in conflict resolution and promoting intimacy. How couples handle conflict
predicts future break ups or divorce with a 90% accuracy (Stanley & Trathen, 1994) and so a very important tract. PREP has been tested with positive outcomes of couples communicating less negatively over a period of 12 years (Stanley, et al., 1995). This program is used by clergy in many denominations, mental health professionals and chaplains in the Armed Services (Stanley & Markman, 1998). The Couples Communication Program (CCP) is a 10-12 hour program to teach communication skills to engaged or married couples (Wampler & Sprenkle, 1980) with positive outcomes in short-term skills learned.

Premarital inventories are also used with couples to explore their strengths and growth areas. One such inventory that has been developed is Facilitating for Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study (FOCCUS) (Markey & Micheletto, 1997). This inventory is used in the Catholic Church as part of its marriage preparation and can be adapted for use in other Christian and non-Christian settings. Another inventory used by other churches and counseling services is PREPARE (Fowers & Olson, 1986).

According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, the divorce rate for 1995 was at 4.6% per 1,000 people. Some states have put a mandatory premarital program into effect for couples marrying for the second time to begin to attempt to make an impact in the ever rising divorce rate, especially in second marriages. Couples that come to a church to be married for the first time have a built in way to have a premarital assessment, since this visit is usually a mandatory one. Problematic is the reality is that many clergy or other pastoral ministers may not use this time wisely to assist the premarital couple.

A Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program, which includes a Communication skills component, and an inventory to assess strengths and
areas for growth, designed for use by clergy or other pastoral ministers is needed for this sometimes awkward process. No longer would the clergy need to make up their own process, or do nothing, but there would be something ready for them to implement. There has been some research conducted on the effectiveness of some premarital programs (Bader, et al., 1980; Giblin, 1994; Olson, et al., 1980; Resnick, et. al., 1992; Russell and Lyster, 1992). Some programs are better than others, but nothing has been reported that would indicate any of them being ineffectual.

**Need for the Study**

The Catholic Diocese of Phoenix Marriage Policy states that there be a six-month preparation period for the couple to include a FOCCUS instrument, an Engaged Encounter week-end and input by the Natural Family Planning Office. There are no other resources given to the pastors to assist them in meeting with the couple. Individual pastors may choose reading material to review with the couple, or they may work with a team of volunteers in the parish to meet with the couples for a few times. There is no set program with outlined sessions available to the pastors. Other religious denominations do not seem to have set policies, let alone a specific premarital program.

Through phone calls made to some of the major religious denominations in the Phoenix area, it was found that they do not have set policies for marriage preparation. It is up to the individual pastor to determine what will be done.

This project would develop a program for priests and ministers to have ready to use with their premarriage population.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this project is to develop a counseling program for clergy or other pastoral ministers to use in premarital counseling.
Research Question

What is the content of a training program for clergy or other pastoral ministers to use in premarital counseling?

Definition of Terms

**Catholic Diocese.** This is the Office of the Bishop which sets policies and procedures for the Roman Catholic parishes within a specific geographic boundary.

**Family Systems.** A way of looking at families developed in the 1950's that began to understand that one impacts the whole (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995).

**Social Constructionism.** The belief that there is power of social interaction in generating meaning for people (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). There is power in relationship and relationship is primary.
CHAPTER 2
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

What constitutes marital satisfaction? Researchers have found that there are many elements to marital satisfaction, such as: common outside interests, that the couple agree on issues, that a person feel satisfied with the choice of a mate, that the couple have similar racial background, socio-economic background, religious denomination, intelligence levels and age (Terman, 1938 and Stahmann, 1987). Other researchers say marital satisfaction is attained through the couple’s capacity to communicate and to practice empathic listening with their partner (Gilbert, 1976 and Guerney, 1977). Still other traits that likely produce marital satisfaction and stability are: adaptability and flexibility; empathy; the ability to work through problems; the ability to give and receive love; emotional stability, similar family backgrounds; similarities between the couple; communication (Wright, 1981). More recent research on marriage stability (Robinson, 1994 and Larson & Goltz, 1989) says that the couple’s perception that intimacy, commitment, communication, congruent perceptions of the relationship and their religious orientation are all strengths to their marriage.

Empathic listening, communication, similarities in background, religion, intimacy, common perceptions are some of the common themes in the research on marital satisfaction. That will give the basis as to what topics will be explored as part of this project.
Connected with problem solving is learning communication, conflict resolution and empathic listening which have been proven to be important skills (Bader, et al., 1980; Center for Marriage & Family, 1995; Frey, et al., 1979; Giblin, 1994; Gilbert, 1976; Guerney, 1977; Miller, et al., 1975; and Russell & Lyster, 1992).

Sexuality and intimacy as part of the premarital discussions has been shown as valid in various sources. (Frey, et al., 1979; Gilbert, 1976; and Harper, 1988). There should be time for the couple to state their questions, problems or issues with this area, as well as time for teaching and sharing about intimacy.

With all that has been learned in Marriage and Family Counseling and family systems in relationships, the family of origin is one topic that has become popular and important (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Buckner & Salts, 1985; Cavanaugh, 1994; Giblin, 1994; Russell & Lyster, 1992; and Wood & Stroup, 1990). It is important because it helps individuals starting a new family system explore what each is bringing from their previous system. The couple may not only need to explore their family of origin, but also make some changes in the way they relate. Premarital counseling can assist and facilitate those possible changes and awarenesses.

Religion, children and finances is another area that should be explored by premarital couples. While it is assumed these are valid topics (Olson, et al., 1992), limited research has been done. A few sources have been found in the area of religion as an important topic (Giblin, 1994; Larson & Goltz, 1989; Robinson, 1994; Schumm, et al., 1982; and Weaver, et al., 1997). Discussion about children is assumed to be an important part of communication (Olson, et al., 1992) and finances have been found to be a valid topic of premarital preparation (Russell & Lyster, 1992).
Schumm and Wallace (1979), have stated that six sessions is a good number for premarital preparation. Research done by the Center for Marriage and Family (1995), states eight to nine contact sessions are most valuable. It seems the one get-ready-for-the-ceremony session is useless and over 12 sessions is the least valuable. Stanley, et al. (1995) state that the premarital counselor or clergy person needs to mitigate risk factors and enhance protective factors that are associated with successful marital adjustment before problems develop. Programs are available to do that and need to be promoted outside the research walls of the Universities.

**Problem Solving**

Forming a new family system will involve the issue of problem solving. Some elements of problem solving include communication skills, conflict resolution and understanding the family of origin and their communication patterns.

**Communication:** Good communication skills are needed in a relationship to know when to speak for yourself and learning to own one’s statements and feelings. One needs to give specific examples and add feeling statements in their communication (Miller, et al., 1975). This takes time to develop in a relationship. Knowing this skill would be helpful to the couple and therefore must be covered in an early session of the premarital program.

Some theories of communication state that self-disclosure without reserve is the best method, but there is some debate over that issue (Gilbert, 1976 and Guernsey, 1977). Communication is a two-way street and self-disclosure is fine as well as trust is established in the couple. If trust is not established, the couple is hesitant to self-disclose and so only focuses on negative behaviors. After a while, a couple may choose not to discuss those
negative behaviors and ignore them. There is, however, a positive benefit derived from discussing issues and negativity rather than avoiding or withdrawing according to Noller et al., (1994) and Acitelli, et al., (1993). This can assist with building trust.

When a couple learns healthy communication skills some benefits gained are: increased self-differentiation, increase in the cohesion of the couple, increased empathy, and improved problem solving (Russell, et al., 1984).

It has been discovered by the researchers that couples completing a communication skills program had fewer negative communications in their relationship. This may be so because they are working on building their self-esteem and self-differentiation. As one's self-esteem builds, self-disclosure becomes easier (Gilbert, 1976 and Russell & Lyster, 1992;) and communication with their partner improves. One way self-esteem in individuals is built is by being listened to. The couple can then be more comfortable with self-disclosure. Virginia Satir (1972) discusses four wrong ways to communicate: blaming, placating, being irrelevant, and being super reasonable. It seems she is saying that understanding the wrong ways to communicate makes it easier to work on the right ways. A communication skills program will assist with knowledge about the wrong ways to communicate.

According to research, there will be less marital breakdown when couples engage in a premarital program that practices empathic listening (Bader, et al., 1980 and Miller, et al., 1975). To be listened to empathically means that another is listening to your story and really feeling what you are feeling. The listener is attempting to get inside of the other and what the other is trying to convey. It seems self-esteem builds as one is listened to empathically.
Communication builds as self-esteem builds and so begins a positive pattern in the relationship. To learn and explore this skill as part of a premarital program would be important to assist the couple with their communication process. They would practice this not only during the session on communication, but also as part of their discussions in the other areas of the sessions.

An excellent program to be included early in the preparation process is the Couple Communication Program (CCP) (Miller, et al., 1991). This program covers 10-12 hours of skill building in communicating your story, attentive listening to the other and conflict resolution. The skills learned could then be practiced during the couple's discussions of some of the other topics in the program, thereby gaining some real understanding and experience of effective communication. Research conducted on this program by Wampler & Sprenkle (1980) when it was called the Minnesota Couples Communication Program indicated it has an immediate positive effect on communication skills.

Conflict Resolution: Conflict is a negative term that couples preparing for marriage do not want to discuss, let alone learn about. In premarital counseling, two inventories are frequently used for assessing the couples attitudes and beliefs on a variety of topics. These instruments are FOCCUS (Markey & Micheletto, 1997) and PREPARE (Olson, et al., 1992). Through these instruments couples can begin to discuss possible conflict areas while they are listening to each other with a counselor, clergy, or volunteer present and are not in a volatile situation (Giblin, 1994 and Russell & Lyster, 1992). The PREPARE and FOCCUS inventories are used with clergy or other volunteers who have been properly trained. The instrument most frequently used in the Roman Catholic Church is FOCCUS. This instrument can also be used by other Christian and non-Christian couples, using the appropriately marked questions.
The other program that is used with premarital couples, which is much like CCP, is PREP (Stanley, et al., 1995), which is a twelve hour program teaching skills to couples in handling conflict. This preparation is sometimes used by clergy and is a program as opposed to an inventory, which assesses couple's attitudes and beliefs.

Couples will benefit when they work through conflict effectively because it has been found (Noller, et al., 1994) that destructive communication patterns which cause problems later in marriage are present premaritally. If couples can recognize and understand the benefits for exploring conflict within the premarital counseling process, they will be more receptive to the idea. Noller, et al. (1994) again found that couples involved in discussing their issues and negotiating about them were happier with their relationship than those using avoidance and withdrawal.

In conflict resolution, there seem to be certain family rules that apply. How the conflict is approached affects the way the conflict is handled (Gilbert, 1976 and Miller, et al., 1975). Couples come together with family of origin rules about their intimate family relationships. The topics that can be discussed, the amount of time allowed the topic to be discussed and the guidelines on the discussion are all issues that individuals bring into a relationship. In some families, individuals cannot discuss disappointments or criticisms they may have with other members in the family. This would be a significant piece of information to know about a partner. Exploring the family of origin can assist the couple to delve into their backgrounds and their underlying feelings.

### Sexuality and Intimacy

As stated previously, most people receiving premarital counseling do so through a church. Looking at one study of conservative clergy views on
sexuality, it appears that they see sex between the same sex as wrong, sex between opposite sex couples before marriage as wrong and sex with someone other than the marriage partner as wrong (Kennedy & Whitlock, 1997). There does not seem to be a lot of room to discuss healthy and unhealthy sexual practices with the premarital couple. Communication of what they may need in their sexual relationship or their perceptions of a sexual relationship will need to be addressed by each individual. Therefore, there does need to be an open attitude towards sexuality and intimacy in order to facilitate the couple's communication.

**Sexual Relationship:** Possibly because of their fear of what the minister or priest might think, premarital couples have not rated the topic of sexuality very high to be discussed as part of a premarital program (Russell & Lyster, 1992). Possibly, they think it is assumed that they should know all about sex by now. When the topic of the sexual relationship is brought up in the premarital process, couples may not be aware of the complexity of this area of a relationship.

Acitelli, et al. (1993) found women are more unhappy with their sexual relationship than their husbands when a general context of marital distress was present. Poor communication and sharing of feelings is going to impact the sexual relationship, adding destructive communication patterns begun before marriage. Research (Acitelli, et al., 1993; Fowers, 1991; Noller, et al., 1994) shows it will have a negative effect on the sexual relationship from the women's perspective when there is marital distress. Problems have a way of creeping up when there is marital unhappiness or distress.

Remembering some of the elements that assist with marital satisfaction such as the ability to communicate, feeling satisfied with the choice of a mate,
the ability to give and receive love, it is obvious that the sexual relationship will overlap with all of these.

According to the FOCCUS inventory, the section on sexuality helps to surface attitudes about sex. Dysfunctional attitudes certainly can lead to the inability to discuss sex freely with the partner. The communication skills discussed previously to be learned and practiced will be beneficial during these and future discussions regarding the sexual relationship.

**Intimacy**: Developing intimacy in the marriage is a significant element, as seen in some of the marital satisfaction items discussed in the Introduction. Those elements of satisfaction are empathy, the ability to work through problems, the ability to give and receive love, and emotional stability. There are differing opinions of what constitutes intimacy in marriage (Frey, et al., 1979; Gilbert, 1976; Harper & Elliott, 1988; and Waring, et al., 1981) or even of how intimacy develops. Frey, et al. (1979) state that intimacy and conflict resolution are related. There are three approaches to achieving intimacy through conflict resolution which are the fair fighting method, calm, rational discussion, and sharing hurt feelings. While conflict in marriage is inevitable, there are benefits to learning effective ways to resolve conflict. Those benefits are that partners can grow in intimacy by sharing the underlying hurt feelings that have promoted the conflict (Bader, et al., 1980 and Frey, et al., 1979). Rather than simply acknowledging their anger, and learning to work through it, the couple can grow closer to each other by recognizing their underlying feelings.

Another study looked at disclosure as related to intimacy (Gilbert, 1976). It was found that commitment is a property of intimacy, but that it is unclear as to how self-disclosure fits into that.
Still another study on intimacy looked at how much intimacy is necessary for a relationship? (Harper & Elliott, 1988) It is interesting that some couples desire less intimacy and experience marital adjustment. So what is the marital adjustment of a couple and their perception of actual and desired intimacy? Harper & Elliott (1988) believe that couples will find a balance in their level of intimacy in their relationship and that there is no desired or ultimate level of intimacy. A problem arises when the perceived level of intimacy and the actual level are incongruent.

According to Cinebell & Cinebell in *The Intimate Marriage*, intimacy can grow in marriage in a few different ways. Intimacy grows as couples dare to risk greater openness by being real with each other. In marriages, couples generally avoid "hot topic" in order to get along smoothly, but a wall gets built rather than closeness. As couples learn to be emotionally present to each other intimacy grows. In a climate of trust based on commitment to fidelity and continuity, intimacy grows. It is through all the hurdles that relationships grow, not by avoiding the hurdles. That intimacy is multidimensional was found in the Waring, et al. (1981) study as it was related to the sense of identity and the accurate perception of the spouse’s characteristics. It was also found that choosing a spouse based on one’s neurotic needs seldom leads to marital intimacy.

Some facets of intimacy, according to Cinebell & Cinebell (1970), are:

- Sexual - truly becoming "one flesh".
- Emotional - sharing significant and meaningful ideas and feelings and being heard in those ideas.
- Intellectual - sharing in learnings, i.e., reading a book, attending a lecture and discussing. Sharing in mind-stretching activities.
• Aesthetic - the depth of sharing experiences of beauty in nature or art.
• Creative - having children; helping each other realize their potential as persons - being co-creators.
• Recreational - playing together, not only in bed.
• Work - accomplishing tasks together.
• Crisis - major event pulls a couple together as they work through it and it draws them closer together.
• Commitment - to something bigger than the family.
• Spiritual - involvement together in the search for a deeper meaning - involvement together in church or synagogue stimulates and nurtures. (pp. 29-31)

Sexuality and intimacy are such important topics to be included in the premarital counseling program because it is important for couples to learn what the barriers to developing intimacy might be. According to Cinebell & Cinebell (1970), each person must have a sense of personal identity, as well as a sense of self-esteem. Guilt and stored up anger will inhibit the growth of intimacy.

When couples feel premarital counseling programs are preparing them for the realities of marriage, they will be more inclined to seek help if or when they run into problems later in their relationship (Bader, et al., 1980 and Stucky, et al., 1986). Teaching and discussing about sexuality and intimacy is preparing them for some realities.

**Family of Origin**

Marriage is joining two families in obvious and non-obvious ways. A goal of premarital counseling is to help the couple become aware of those families and what they are bringing with them. The family of origin discussion is one that premarital couples do not think about, but one that is rated most satisfying (Russell & Lyster, 1992; Trainer, 1979; and Wood & Stroup, 1990). This is an area that premarital couples do not consciously think about and as was stated earlier intimacy cannot grow if there is leftover anger or guilt. The
images of life and how life and relationships develop are so engraved into their thinking and acting that these images are not recognized until someone or something brings them to full attention (Trainer, 1979; Wood & Stroup, 1990). To become aware of the family of origin and what, if any, anger or guilt a person is bringing into the new family is critical. Marriage and Family Therapy says that couples bring unresolved issues from the family of origin into the marriage to be worked out there, which many times leads to problems.

What better time than in the premarital preparation period to bring these covert family dynamics to the forefront where they can be dealt with in a rational manner. The Genogram is a tool that has been found in three different assessments according to Wood & Stroup, 1990; Buckner & Salts, 1985; and Giblin, 1994. Originally used in Bowenian therapy, the Genogram was then adapted by many different family therapists. The Genogram is similar to a family tree and assists the couple with looking at their family of origin back at least three generations. When a couple marries, they set their patterns of relating based on their families of origin right away. Looking at their families through the Genogram is very helpful and insightful for the couple. They can evaluate the behavior patterns and communication patterns to see what they might change or do differently. Conversely, there may be some patterns that are positive and the individual would choose to keep those. There may be other ideas and images that need to be reframed and reformed. Some of these ideas are based on the image of mother/father; female/male; husband/wife; communication patterns; decision-making patterns; power.

In the discussion on family of origin, questions need to be asked so that the individual can gain insight into the communication patterns of their parents and grandparents. An important question to ask is how the parents resolved
conflict and made decisions. This is not to say the way the parents resolved issues was always negative. Couples most likely will rely on the way their parents handled issues and do the same. This is a problem when the pattern was negative and the person did not look at a different way of behaving or reacting. Time will need to be spent with the couple practicing empathic listening in order to hear each other's family stories. Discussion then needs to take place on the insights gained and behavior needing to change (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995).

**Religion, Children and Finances**

**Religion:** Similarities in religious denomination are rated with marital satisfaction (Terman, 1938 and Stahmann & Hebert, 1987). In one study of gender and marital satisfaction, religion is a more important part of the marriage for men than their wives (Fowers, 1991). Some positive features of religious participation have been found by Larson & Goltz (1989). They found that church attendance, duration of marriage and satisfaction with family life are the major predictors of structural commitment. They also discussed the idea that leaving a marriage is much more difficult within the religious community because of the obvious constraints against ending the relationship and the supports for staying married. There also may be some benefits to religious orientation in that marital stability and quality are influenced through moral guidance and social, emotional and spiritual support (Robinson, 1994). Robinson (1994) also found that in enduring marriages, couples perceive intimacy, commitment, communication, congruent perceptions of the relationship and religious orientation to be sources of strength in their marriage.

Clinebell & Clinebell (1970) discuss spiritual intimacy as learning about core virtues such as brotherhood, integrity, justice and mercy to name a few,
rather than all the ethical trivia that religion can put out to people. Much of what has been researched has stated that the most important element about religion as part of the marriage is that the couple discuss the issues and not avoid the topic because it might hurt the other. Avoidance of discussion of religion, spiritual issues, or any other topic is detrimental to the relationship.

In using the Genogram, the couple can talk about how faith was transmitted in each family; how death was talked about; what the values were and expressed in each of the families. This could lead to discussion of each individual's views on spirituality and if they are congruent or incongruent within the relationship.

**Children:** Not much research was found regarding the specific topic of children in the marriage. However, the authors of the FOCCUS inventory and the PREPARE inventory bring out issues and outlooks with regard to children as part of the marriage. The FOCCUS inventory includes children and parenting under the bonders of the relationship. Markey & Micheletto (1997) found that the bonders were the everyday life events that either pull couples closer together or tear them apart. So there needs to be some agreement with the couple in this area. An area for discussion would be how children will be cared for if both parents will be working outside the home, outlook on discipline and even agreeing that children will or will not be a part of the marriage.

Research by Giblin (1994) and Fowers & Olson (1986) show that there is little difference in how couples view children in the marriage between happily married couples and couples who divorced or canceled their marriage. So it does not seem to be a major issue in whether a marriage will be successful or not. In a study of gender and marital satisfaction by Fowers (1991), it was found that women in distressed marriages rated differences in parenting higher than
men in distressed and non-distressed marriages. This makes sense because women in distressed marriages are probably viewing many aspects of their marriage as major conflicts.

The topic of children comes under the discussion of family of origin and how parenting was done in each of the couple’s family. This discussion can happen when the couple reviews their genogram as discussed earlier.

**Finances:** There is no discussion specifically with regard to finances in the research as far as being a major cause of marital satisfaction. However, finances are rated as a bonder in the FOCCUS inventory (Markey & Micheletto, 1997) and one of those areas that will pull couples together or tear them apart. Trainer (1979) called finances a part of the contractual part of the marriage and not highly laden with emotion. So it is found that finances should be a part of a premarital program (Buckner & Salts, 1985; Markey & Micheletto, 1997; Russell & Lyster, 1992 and Trainer, 1979) because it is one of those areas on which couples need to have some agreement. Financial matters can also cause an enormous amount of stress to the couple, and so it is important that this area is discussed and some goals are set.

The financial presentation portion of a marriage preparation program was rated highly according to a study done by Russell and Lyster (1992). Younger couples seem to desire information on budgeting, investing and general financial planning. The idea that this topic was more cognitive, made the researchers feel it was better accepted by the participants. Also, the information was delivered by an outside financial planner who offered a lively presentation.

If any of these last three areas are problem areas from the FOCCUS inventory, the couple can use the communication skills learned as part of their
process to assist with the discussion in front of the person facilitating. Again, these areas are part of the marital bonders that can pull couples together or tear them apart. Agreement on these issues will build intimacy and trust in the marriage.

Summary

The research has supported the topics that would be an important part of a program for pastors or other ministers to use in their premarital preparation process. Many of the problems presented after marriage are that the couple is having a difficulty with communication. Hence, this must be a very important part of the preparation process so that issues that are difficult are discussed rather than avoided. Conflict can be worked through rather than avoided or dealt with in an unhealthy or hurtful manner. If there is to be prevention of marriages breaking up before the 10-year anniversary, it must begin with this preparation stage so couples can appreciate all that goes into this commitment to each other and are given the opportunity for insight and learning new skills. A Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program will be developed based on this research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the research project is to develop a counseling program for clergy across denominations to use as part of the premarital process for couples to be married in the church. The research question addressed in this study was: what is the content of a training program for clergy or other pastoral ministers to use in premarital counseling.

Research Design

This project utilized a descriptive research design. Descriptive research is a method used to describe systematically the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

Source of the Data

A telephone survey of the Roman Catholic Diocese, the Episcopal Diocese, an ELCA Lutheran Church and the United Methodist Center in the Phoenix area was conducted. Inquiry was made as to the program and requirements in place for pre-marital couples coming to request marriage in the church. The telephone survey included the following questions:

1) Do you have a marriage policy in place?

2) What do you do to prepare your premarital couples?

A Literature Review was also conducted on marital satisfaction factors, topics that couples feel are relevant, pre-marital programs already in place and
pre-marital inventories developed and researched to assess the strengths and growth areas for couples.
CHAPTER 4
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to develop a counseling program for clergy or other pastoral ministers to use in premarital counseling. This program will be used by St. Patrick’s Catholic Community in Scottsdale, Az. as their Marriage Preparation program.

In the study, it was discovered that problems in communication and problem solving, and problems understanding one’s family of origin were the major trouble areas for premarital couples. This Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program will use the Facilitating for Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) inventory to assess areas of agreement and difference with the couple. Facilitators will be trained to lead the discussion between the couple with areas of difference.

The Couples Communication Program (CCP) will be taught to groups of 3-5 premarital couples and will take approximately 12 hours. The couples will learn interpersonal communication skills.

Sexuality and intimacy are many times difficult topics to discuss with a premarital couple, but important ones because the partners must learn to ask for what they need emotionally, spiritually and physically. It is in this dynamic that trust and intimacy grow. Discussions on what sexuality is to each of them and how intimacy is part of each of them are beneficial between the couple. Also,
some large group discussions with other couples can be helpful because the
individuals may bring with them unhealthy attitudes, fears or hang ups towards
sex from their family and can hear differences and similarities in a large group
setting.

In order for a couple to understand the dynamics in their relationship,
they each need to understand the dynamics in their family of origin; that is, the
family in which they grew up. What are the expectations of each individual of
how a family operates or how a family solves problems? How did their parents
in each family resolve conflicts and make decisions? Why is that important to
their current relationship? What were the values expressed in their family
regarding religion, parenting or finances? What is important for them to keep
and what do they need to leave behind? These are some of the questions that
could be addressed in the discussion of family of origin using a Genogram.

In the marriage preparation literature, the topics of children, finances and
religion are not usually discussed or explored by the premarital couple. How
many children does each person want to have as a part of this marriage? Who
will stay home to take care of the children or are there other ways to consider for
the care of the children? How will they bring the children up as far as a religion
is concerned? How will they practice and develop their own spirituality and the
spirituality of their family? In the area of finances, who will take the major
responsibility of paying the bills and keeping the checkbook? Who will make
decisions regarding investments and how money is spent? Why is this
important now? These are all areas where the couple needs to have
agreement. When agreed upon, they help the couple bond.
Conclusions

From this study and the lack of programs that are in existence, it seems important to provide a Premarital Counseling Program for clergy in various churches of different denominations. Couples coming to the church to be married have an opportunity for some assessment and skill building, whereas, approaching the Justice of the Peace does not afford itself to such a program. The clergy up to this point have not been provided with a clear, understandable way of preparing couples for marriage. A few of them have used some of the programs and inventories that are available, but not within a comprehensive program.

From the survey conducted in this study, the Roman Catholic Diocese has a set marriage policy in place. The policy consists of a six-month waiting period, including taking the FOCCUS pre-marital inventory. It is suggested the couple attend an Engaged Encounter weekend, read materials from the Natural Family Planning office, and do whatever else the pastor chooses to include. There also needs to be a session to plan the Marriage Liturgy and practice for the wedding.

The Episcopal Diocesan policy requires a minimum of three sessions with the clergy. Otherwise, the preparation or counseling is up to the individual. According to the office, some of the clergy use the PREPARE Inventory or the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory is sometimes used.

The office of the United Methodist Center stated that the "Discipline" stated that the clergy need to have due counsel with the parties involved in the
marriage. The office person did not know of any specific programs or policies in place.

The Pastor of LaCasa de Cristo, an ELCA Lutheran Church, stated that there is no common policy for the Lutheran church. He is finding it more and more difficult to fit the premarital counseling into his time schedule. He has three sessions with the couple and does a rehearsal for the wedding. He does not use an inventory or program. It all depends on the couple and what they are bringing. In second marriages, he has at least two sessions with the couple. He also stated that he felt some Marriage Enrichment would be important to have in churches, but was not doing that at the present time.

The goal of offering a premarital counseling program is to impact the number of divorces. Therefore, it seems fitting that the clergy see this process as important, even critical to the couple to be married. Given the divorce statistics, the preparation process must be taken seriously and must be done thoroughly. If the clergy feels inadequate with regards to time or knowledge, the program can be delegated to a counselor or volunteer to accomplish.

In the Literature Review the most important topics to be included in a pre-marital counseling program were communication and conflict resolution. Recognizing this, the Couples Communication Program (CCP) is recommended as part of the pre-martial counseling.

A premarital inventory has been found to be important to assist with the discussion of the couple's strengths and areas of growth for their relationship. The FOCCUS inventory has been chosen because of its adaptability to use in Catholic, Christian (other than Catholic) and non-Christian settings. Another
benefit of the FOCCUS inventory is that it is not dependent upon a professional
counselor to process with the couple. Non-professionals can be trained to
facilitate the couple’s communication about pertinent issues.

Through this inventory and communication program, discussions that are
important to have with a pre-marital couple, including family of origin issues,
sexuality and intimacy, finances, children and religion will be accomplished. As
a result, the couple will learn some tools to effectively communicate about
issues. Trouble areas may surface, and the clergy or volunteer may recognize
the necessity to recommend professional counseling for the couple to better
assist them.

Churches pooling resources and looking beyond their own walls is an
exciting prospect. The involvement of a professional counselor with the
churches to assist in the assessment of the couple and to present the CCP
component is a strength that enhances the preparation done by the clergy or by
a marriage preparation team.

One weakness of the program is that there is no one who is currently
responsible for contacting other churches in a given region to combine efforts in
a marriage preparation program. Another weakness is that the couples will be
participating because it is part of a mandatory program in the Catholic Church.
In those churches where it is not mandatory, the couples may feel overwhelmed
by a 12 week commitment. It will cost money for the training of the counselor in
the Couples Communication Program and therefore a fee may have to be
charged to the couples for this portion. This could be a weakness because
some couples may not be able to afford this training. In the area of sexuality
and intimacy, it still is unclear as to how to present information and facilitate a possible large group process. This would have to be developed further.

This Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program is backed by research in the prevention category; that is, the prevention of divorce and strengthening of marriages. This is receiving more and more attention as time goes on. The Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program is presented in Appendix A. An assumption in using this program is that the marriage preparation process is taken seriously by all parties. It is critical that the couple is asked to make a time commitment to this process. The people doing the inventory and sessions assume that the couples are willing participants who want to understand on a deeper level the commitment they are wanting to make to one another.

Recommendations

According to all that this researcher has read and heard, it is timely for the church to have a comprehensive premarital program in place. In order to strengthen marriages, it will also be important to offer marriage enrichment programs to the congregations.

Research needs to continue in this area and longitudinal studies continued to assess the long-term effects of premarital counseling on the marriage. Can this early intervention really make a difference in helping couples with their relationship? Also, how often is it recommended that couples should reconsider marriage at this time?

More research is being done at the University of Denver and elsewhere on other factors important to a marriage that will lead to a decline in the divorce rate. The Catholic Church is far ahead of other churches in setting a policy of a
six-month waiting period for marriage. When this waiting period is enhanced and supported with a comprehensive program, there would seem to be a better success rate. Other denominations, Christian and non-Christian, can adopt this Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program using the appropriate FOCCUS questions provided. Since most couples are prepared through a church, this would seem to work well.

Marriage preparation is an important part of ministry in the Church. Imagine what it would be like if churches worked together and combined resources to secure the services of a professional counselor for the Genogram and CCP as part of marriage preparation. To assist with this idea, it might have been a good idea to survey more of the churches in the immediate North Scottsdale area to assess what programs, if any, they are using. In the telephone survey that was done, denomination offices or individual churches at random where chosen. While that lets us know what is generally going on, it does not help with implementation of this specific Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program in a specific area.

In preparation for implementing the Pastoral Premarital Counseling Program, training in the Couples Communication Program and the FOCCUS inventory, will need to be obtained. After this training is obtained, the program could be put into place.
REFERENCE LIST


APPENDIX A

PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING PROGRAM
APPENDIX A
PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING PROGRAM

Background

The chief objective of this program is to prevent divorce of couples coming to the church to be married. The research shows that first time marriages still have a 50% chance of dissolving. Something must be done before the wedding to assist couples to be successful in their marriage through gaining new insights and learning skills to improve communication. This program will address areas of concern through various methodologies. This variety will keep the couple interested and motivated to be a part of the program. If there are problems, attempts will be made to address those in a way that can help the couple resolve them before marriage with specific recommendations provided by the counselor working with the church.

The use of the FOCCUS inventory will facilitate discussion, awareness and insight on family of origin issues, sexuality and intimacy issues, and the topics of religion, children and finances. The topics of communication and conflict resolution will also be discussed through the FOCCUS. The most important use of this inventory is that the couples discuss their feelings and thoughts with each other first at home and then with the facilitator. The facilitator does not give a lecture on the topics, but facilitates their discussion process. At times, the facilitator may have to “teach” about the nature of relationships, importance of effective communication, etc., but would identify when those times occur. The research did show that the “lecture method” was the least favorable
or effective method of working with premarital couples. Training will be provided for the facilitators of this inventory.

The Couples Communication Program (CCP) will be presented for a group of 3-5 couples. The couple being prepared in the Catholic church will need to accomplish the CCP within the six-month preparation time before their marriage. Based on the number of marriages in a given 6-month period, the CCP would be offered once or twice, opening the program to other churches in the area. A professional counselor will be trained to facilitate this program for the area churches. A fee would be charged for this part of the preparation to assist the counselor with the training fees. The research is very strong in the area of communication and conflict resolution. This is the major problem that brings couples to marriage counseling. Providing the couples with some skills in this area of their relationship will help them as they work to be successful in their marriage. Because they have experienced this type of program before their marriage, they will be more open to attend enrichment programs that their church may offer after they are married.

To assist the couple in looking at patterns in their family of origin, a session drawing their Genogram would be included. Again the involvement of a professional counselor at this point would be advantageous.

The final objective would be to plan the marriage ceremony. This would be accomplished by meeting with the priest or minister. The research shows that some meetings must be with the priest or minister, or the couple felt that the preparation was inadequate. While the priest or minister would not have to be involved in all the preparation, he or she would be involved in some sessions at the beginning and at the end.
Week One (2 hours)

- Couple meets with the priest or minister
- Couple fills out information forms and sets wedding date;
- Priest or minister explains Marriage Preparation process;
- Priest or minister administers Focuss to couple;
- Couple sets up at least three (3) meetings with their facilitator for the FOCUS;
- Couple and priest or minister determine when the CCP is offered and arrange for couple to take it.

Week Two (1 1/2 hours)

- Couple meets with FOCUS facilitator
- Discusses the categories of Lifestyle Expectations, Friends & Interests, Personality Match and Personal Issues. These are generally areas that will get the couple talking.

Week Three (1 1/2 hours)

- Couple meets with FOCUS facilitator
- Discusses the categories of Communication and Problem Solving

Week Four (1 1/2 hours)

- Couple meets with FOCUS facilitator
- Discusses the remaining categories of Religion & Values, Finances, Extended Family, Sexuality and Parenting, Readiness and the Marriage Covenant

Week Five (3 hours) - Caring About Yourself

- Couple participates in CCP with other couples from area
- Couples will learn the Awareness Wheel and learn to send clear messages
Week Six (3 hours) - Caring About your Partner
- Couple participates in CCP with other couples from area
- Couples will listen to understand, learn listening skills and the Listening Cycle

Week Seven (3 hours) - Resolving Conflicts: Mapping Issues
- Couple participates in CCP with other couples from area
- Couples will learn the processes of conflict resolution, the process and outcome patterns and Mapping Issues (resolving conflicts collaboratively).

Week Eight (3 hours) - Choosing Communication Styles: Ways of Talking and Listening
- Couple participates in CCP with other couples from area
- Couples will learn styles of communication, sending mixed messages and conflict resolution and the styles of communication

Week Nine (2 hours)
- Couple meets with the Counselor to make their Genogram

Week Ten (2 hours)
- Couple plans to participate in large group session to cover topics of sexuality and intimacy or financial planning.

Week Eleven (1 hour)
- Couple meets with the pastor or minister to assess progress and answer any questions or concerns.
- Priest or minister goes over materials that will be used to plan the couple’s marriage ceremony.

Week Twelve (1 hour)
- Couple meets with priest or minister to plan wedding ceremony;
• Couple and priest or minister set time for wedding rehearsal.

Follow Up

• After ceremony church will send a one-year gift subscription to “Foundations”, a magazine for newly married couples in the Catholic Church;
• Marriage enrichment programs will be offered at the church;
• Provide proper resources for married couples, i.e., various community opportunities for continued growth.
• For assessment of Program, the church will send out an Evaluation to the couples;
  • Were they satisfied with the overall process?
  • Did they feel satisfied that they were prepared for their marriage ceremony?
  • What success are they having in communication and conflict resolution?