

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRIES
AROUND THE UNITED METHODIST CONNECTION
Updated May, 2011**

United Methodists throughout our connection give leadership through a variety of marriage and family ministries. We hope these examples will inspire and encourage you in this vital area of ministry. Feel free to contact these churches and/or leaders for more information. The “Marriage and Family Ministry Resources Recommended by United Methodists” document on this website also offers more information about many of the programs mentioned here.

This is in no way a complete report, as it includes only the information that has come my way so far. Please send me information to be shared about your marriage and family ministries. Let’s show what United Methodists are doing for marriages and families of all configurations. If you are not already receiving our occasional e-newsletters directly and would like to do so, please let me know.

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**I. UNITED METHODIST ANNUAL CONFERENCES
WORKING TO STRENGTHEN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRIES**

California-Nevada Conference

Jerry and Sue Angove reported several years ago that Marriage Encounter UM (www.encounter.org) was presenting Engaged Encounter weekends twice a year in the **California-Nevada Conference** for couples in a serious dating relationship or those already engaged, as well as **Marriage Encounter weekends** for couples married at least three years or more wanting to strengthen their relationships.

Glenn and Gwen Tilton, of Sacramento, California, met with Bishop Beverly Shamana following the 2007 Smart Marriages Conference in Denver. Bishop Shamana followed up by attending a *10 Great Dates* presentation by David and Claudia Arp at Rancho Cordova UMC and by using the materials with her husband, then writing an enthusiastic endorsement of the program for the conference newsletter (http://www.cnumc.org/news_detail.asp?pkvalue=466.) The Tiltons wrote a concept paper in 2007 and were awarded a \$30,000 grant from the California Healthy Marriage Coalition to develop Marriage Education classes in the California-Nevada Conference. With this money they hired Colin and Kathy Kerr-Carpenter, a UM clergy couple, to help with this project. Their display table during the 2008 annual conference resulted in 25 churches signing up to extend this work. Glenn & Gwen Tilton and Revs. Colin & Kathy Kerr-Carpenters founded a new Marriage Education ministry: Abide in Love, Healthy Marriage for United Methodists. They developed a new DVD to encourage churches to adopt Marriage Education as a ministry to save marriages, children, and families. Their classes are listed on the statewide website, www.camarriage.com. The Tiltons have also been a Marriage Encounter presenter and organizing couple for 30 years and have led a couples' support group in Sacramento. In their local church, First UMC in Sacramento, the Tiltons have presented 10 Great Dates and Mastering the Mysteries of Love and have scheduled Harville Hendrix's, Couplehood for after Christmas, 2009. They have also written articles for the Conference eConnections newsletter challenging churches to consider a Marriage Education ministry.

Central Texas Conference

The Central Texas Conference Marriage and Family Advisory Council sponsored a training conference in September 2004 and a three-day couples retreat in January 2005 at the Central Texas Conference Glen Lake Camp and Retreat Center, where a new Marriage Ministries Center Lodge was dedicated in January 2004. The website www.glenlake.org provides a link to Marriage and Family Ministries. Additional training events were planned for district marriage and family leaders, as well as conference-wide retreats for couples. Contact Karen Grunderson in the CTC office (karen@ctcumc.org), Terri Ford, Director of Glen Lake (terri@glenlake.org), or Richard & Joan Hunt (r-j-hunt@att.net) for more information. **Richard and Joan Hunt** are also working with Central Texas Conference to provide their required training on "Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct" (PCSM) via internet. The CTC made the PCSM course available for full participation by all clergy in the conference beginning in November, 2008. The Hunts plan to make the *GLCM* internet support system available to CTC clergy in order to get more marriage ministry work into the thinking of clergy and other church leaders. In the spring of 2010, they reported that nine couples participated in a Growing Love in Christian Marriage 8- hour workshop at Texas Wesleyan University in Ft Worth, led by Amy Tate-Almy. The couples received a certificate of completion worth \$60 discount toward the Texas marriage license fee of \$68.

Holston Conference

Pete and Ginny Rowlett, liaison couple for the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment to the UM General Board of Discipleship, presented to their 2003 Holston Annual Conference session a resolution based on one prepared by the General

Board of Discipleship for General Conference in 2004. That resolution included six challenges to the annual conference:

- 1). Encourage pastors to take seriously the importance of premarital counseling for those seeking marriage.
- 2). Recommend that congregations offer classes and programs related to parenting, relationship education, faith formation in the family, communication skills, conflict management, marriage preparation, and marriage enrichment.
- 3). Request that the Board of Ordained Ministry make resources available to those entering the ministry that will strengthen their marriages and prepare them for the particular issues faced by clergy families.
- 4). Instruct the Wesley Institute to provide leadership training for clergy and laity in programs for marriage and family enrichment.
- 5). Charge the Discipleship Team to coordinate a significant response to the urgent need that married couples have to be supported in their efforts to establish and sustain healthy marriages.
- 6). Cooperate with other agencies that are committed to our goals of marriage and family enrichment.

A Conference Task Force was established to assess current marriage and family ministries within the conference and to make recommendations to the 2004 annual conference session. That report noted the following priority needs: marital enrichment events for clergy and laity, training for clergy in marital and pre-marital counseling, a resource center/lending library with relevant materials, expanded counseling services or counseling referral sources, support for single-parent families and their children, support for families going through divorce.

A clergy/spouse marriage enrichment retreat was held in April, 2005; a brief video titled "Marriage and Family Ministry in Your Church" was prepared for use in every local church; resources were reviewed and made available through the conference library; and a list of counseling referral resources was compiled. The work of the Task Force has now been entrusted to existing conference agencies for on-going implementation.

Pete and Ginny Rowlett reported that after attending John Van Epp's training for "How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk" at an ACME Conference, they offered the course twice, both on five consecutive Tuesday evenings. The enthusiastic response of their participants convinced them to bring Van Epp to Knoxville to do a one-day Instructor Certification Seminar for the Holston Conference. Thirty-seven United Methodists attended and become certified, including pastors, teachers, counselors, campus ministers, youth directors, and a person who works with abused women. At least one person from each of the Holston Conference twelve districts participated. Costs were covered by funds from the conference budget and fees paid by participants (scholarship help was made available). Participants report outstanding results from teaching this course and encourage others to get certified online through Van Epp's website (www.nojerks.com).

In the fall of 2009, The Holston Conference held a major clergy event on the subject of Domestic Violence.

For more information, contact Ginny and Pete Rowlett, 10937 Farragut Hills

Blvd., Knoxville, TN 37934-4084, 865-966-9776, p.rowlett@charter.net

Iowa Conference

Dawn Bleeker, former Executive Administrator for Marriage Enrichment, Inc., met with her bishop and with the Iowa Conference Board of Discipleship several years ago to obtain official support for their program. She worked with District Superintendents to schedule workshops to be sponsored by the districts and planned to organize a conference workshop for pastors and their spouses, anticipating that not only would they benefit personally from the experience, but that they would also want to schedule workshops for their congregations. JoAnn Johnson (39197 So. Lake Crest Drive, Tucson, AZ 85739, 520-825-3400, mewinfo@yahoo.com) now serves as Executive Administrator for Marriage Enrichment, Inc.

New England Conference

Jane Ives maintains a list of interested persons to whom she sends information about upcoming events and reports of local church initiatives. She also sends this information out through the conference e-newsletter and sets up a display table at the annual conference sessions. The conference website, www.neumc.org offers a link to Marriage and Family Ministries (under Mission and Ministry) where updated information is posted along with an annotated list of resources available within the conference. In January, 2008, Cliff and Jane Ives led an ACME weekend which served both as a retreat for nine couples and as a step toward leadership training for three other couples.

Virginia Conference

The Virginia Conference partnered with other denominations and local churches through the First Things First of Greater Richmond Marriage Enrichment Coalition to bring Mark Gungor, noted humorist, pastor, and *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage* presenter to Richmond August 20-21, 2010. This event had 1372 participants! Photos & Video clip: <http://www.firstthingsrichmond.org/laugh.html>

II. UNITED METHODISTS WORKING WITH SEMINARIES TO STRENGTHEN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY MINISTRIES

Clark and Ruth Achelpohl, an A.C.M.E. certified leader couple and members of a marriage enrichment support group in Kansas City, Missouri, **have led marriage enrichment events at St. Paul's School of Theology.** (candr-kc@swbell.net)

Several years ago, Jane Ives wrote to **all United Methodist seminaries** offering complimentary copies of the 2001 revision of *Growing Love in Christian Marriage*, the official United Methodist marriage ministry resource, to professors teaching relevant courses. A number of these were requested and sent. In 2010, she sent letters to seminaries encouraging the use of the Smart Marriages conference as an independent or group study. In 2011 she shared with them information about other conferences that offer training that would benefit seminarians.

In 2006, Cliff and Jane Ives led a two-day January Intensive on Marriage and Family Ministries for Bangor Theological Seminary in Bangor, Maine, using the 2001 revision of the *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* and some of the material in the GLCM Training Day Outline (available at www.marriagelovepower.net). The students reviewed a variety of materials and programs and, as they explored their personal histories of family-of-origin and relationship experiences, developed plans for ministries to meet the relationship needs of individuals and families in their own settings.

Richard and Joan Hunt work with Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth and offered GLCM couples workshops and training for GLCM leaders in November, 2008.

III. UNITED METHODISTS INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

After a six-month study of Marshall Rosenberg's *Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life*, ten members of the adult church school class at **John St. UMC in Camden, Maine**, each contributed \$100. to pay the fee for a certified Non-violent Communication instructor to lead a Level 1 workshop at the church. The course was offered free to the community, with a suggested donation of \$10. per participant for resource materials. Over 40 persons from the community attended, expressing great appreciation for this opportunity.

In March, 2009, Jana Staton reported working with the Head Start/ Early Head Start programs in her community, Missoula, **Montana**, to create a Couples Class for parents. After a high school social worker attended the 2008 Smart Marriages conference, she and Jana and another staff member put together an eight-session program. Attendance and response was outstanding, starting with 11 couples the first week, increasing by one couple each of the next two sessions, with 18 couples expected for the fourth session. The sessions focus on developing both skills and positive attitudes. Jana and two other person have pulled this off without funding, by soliciting stores for door prizes (tools from Ace Hardware, dinner at a local restaurant); bringing their own tablecloths, cloth napkins and candles; and recruiting family members to help with child care and set-up. The couples have responded with enthusiasm to learning how to create safe, stable, nurturing homes. For more details call Jana at 406-543-9491.

In September, 2008, the state of **Texas** initiated a new marriage education program called Twogether in Texas (www.twogetherintexas.org), funded through one percent of the federal TANF funds. Texas raised the marriage license fee to between \$67 and \$72 (depending on the county), and provided that any couple seeking a marriage license in Texas can get a \$60 discount on the fee if they participate in a marriage education/preparation workshop of at least eight hours. **Richard and Joan Hunt** worked to get *Growing Love in Christian Marriage* approved as one of the courses to meet this Texas requirement for couples. They work with Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, offered GLCM couples workshops and training for GLCM leaders in November, 2008 and have been in conversation with the Nazarene denomination about working

together on marriage resources and support. In 2009 the Hunts held three successful GLCM training events equipping pastors to offer an eight-hour couples' workshop for which participating couples can obtain a \$60. discount on their Texas marriage license fee. Seventy-eight pastors from three different conferences have participated so far.

Gordon Leeks, an ACME-trained member of St. Philips UMC in Round Rock, Texas, works for the **Texas Healthy Marriage Program**. On May 12 and 13, 2008, this organization held a Texas Healthy Marriage Summit at the Doubletree Hotel in Austin Texas. In April, 2009, Gordon reported that Twogether in Texas had reached over 24,000 participants through almost 2300 courses involving over 900 service providers.

Richard Albertson, a member of Killlearn UMC, Tallahassee, Florida, not only promotes marriage ministries within his own congregation, but also serves as **President and CEO of "Live the Life Ministries," a city-wide ecumenical effort** which includes a Community Marriage Policy; Start Smart, a comprehensive 8-hour premarital relationship education course which includes a premarital inventory, a 50-page workbook, and a 4-hour course, followed by 6-8 hours of mentoring by couples in area churches; training of mentor couples in Start Smart; marriage education courses including PAIRS For Life; Mastering the Mysteries of Love; programs for troubled marriages; post-divorce care; WAIT training to teach teenagers about abstinence, self-control, healthy relationships, and learning the "Sequence of Success" for a better life. (www.livethelife.org , Richard@livethelife.org)

Julie Baumgardner, of Chattanooga, Tennessee, leads a **community organization called "First Things First."** At www.firstthings.org you can see the variety of relationship education and marriage strengthening programs offered to the community: *Connections* relationship education for teens, *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk*, fathering classes, marriage preparation (both faith-based and secular), marriage enrichment, programs for troubled couples, and showings of family-friendly movies in the park. Julie, a dynamic organizer and presenter, **also leads workshops and plenaries for the annual Smart Marriages conference**. She recently served as lay leader at Centenary UMC, where such programs as the Arps' Great Dates and Gary Smalley's "Love Is A Decision" have been well received.

Jerry and Joann Burand, part of the original design team for our Board of Discipleship's Celebrating Marriage program, now retired, **team-taught a course titled "Courtship and Marriage" at Anderson University in Northern Indiana** for over fifteen years, in addition to leading local church weekend retreats. They kept their material updated by participating in the Smart Marriages Conferences. (765-649-2789, jburand@att.net)

Bill and Kathy Dickey, a lay couple at Beckley Temple UMC, in Beckley, West Virginia, are **in conversation with members of the newly formed Beckley Christian Resource Center about broadening the marriage ministry they have brought to their congregation** (see below).

Fred and Kathy Jakolat of the South Reno UMC in Reno, NV, now offer for sale Dr. David Luecke's three books (*The Relationship Manual, Marriage Types, and*

Prescriptions for Marriage) which the Jakolats have used for many years in their marriage enrichment groups. (<http://www.relationshipinstitute.com/>) Fred and Kathy, who have extensive training and experience through ACME, *Smart Marriages*, *7 Habits*, *Becoming Parents*, *Living Love*, *PREP*, *Couple Communication*, and other programs, offer retreats and other events

Karen and Kevin Jeffrey, an ACME trained leader couple who lead retreats and ongoing groups for their local church (Acworth UMC, North Georgia Conference) also served as coordinators for the February, 2009 ACME of Georgia Weekend Getaway at the Winshape Retreat Center in Mt. Berry, Georgia. The theme for this weekend was “Put the World on Hold – Relax, Reconnect, Renew.” Contact the Jeffreys for more information (jeffreymom@comcast.net)

Jack and Sheryl Morrison, members of Memorial UMC in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, provide leadership in their local church and through their **Good Shepherd Counseling Center**, whenever and wherever invited. Jack is a retired UM pastor, holds Marriage and Family Therapy licenses, and is a licensed Professional Clinical Counselor. They promote **Christian PREP** in particular and offer to travel anywhere to train others in the use of this program. The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, one of the most comprehensive and well respected divorce-prevention/marriage enhancing programs in the world, is a skills and principles-building curriculum designed to help partners say what they need to say, get to the heart of problems, and increase their connection with each other. Jack and Sheryl also now offer the John Gottman program **“Bringing Baby Home” for couples who are expecting or who have children up to 3 years of age**. In addition they offer a burnout prevention program for clergy and laity titled “Keeping Your Soul Alive” and a one-day enrichment event for couples.

United Methodists in Richmond, Virginia, work closely with **Marriage Builders Alliance**, which hosts significant marriage education and awareness events, including an annual Celebrate Marriage event in February. Directors Bob and Dianne Ruthazer, although not UM themselves, work closely with **Trinity UMC in Richmond** and often lead **Christian PREP** session in Richmond and elsewhere. A local church Family Life Educator from Richmond, VA reports: “We have used Christian PREP during the Sunday School one-hour time slots for 10 weeks and in a variety of longer evening programs, but we like it best in a one-day workshop format, after which we offer coaching for couples who want to come back during an evening the following week. The skills are very practical and easily presented and applied, with proven long-term reduction in couple "Danger Signs" after this training. Clergy and laity are equally effective leaders, and when Christian PREP is presented by a couple, the personal illustrations and modeling are very powerful. In fact, research has shown such programs within local congregations to be more effective than professional presentations.” (www.FirstThingsRichmond.org) . In August 2008, this organization held a C-PREP with 53 couples! They report a large number of churches offering *10 Great Dates* simultaneously and plans for a Successful Stepfamilies conference in February, 2009.

The **Virginia Conference** and Trinity UMC partnered with other denominations and local churches through the First Things First of Greater Richmond Marriage

Enrichment Coalition to bring Mark Gungor, noted humorist, pastor, and “Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage” presenter to **Richmond August 20-21, 2010**. This conference began Friday evening 7:00 - 10:00 p.m and concludes Saturday 9:00a.m. -12:30 p.m. More information at: <http://www.firstthingsrichmond.org/laugh.html> .

Revs. Keith and Marilyn Hamilton, retired pastors and now members of Grace UMC in Franklin, Indiana, used their ACME training and other experiences to develop materials titled *Relationship Enrichment by Applying Preventative Principles* (REAPP), train leader couples worldwide, and publish materials for relationship and marriage education in a variety of languages. Persons trained through this program now provide leadership in **more than 30 nations in North America, South America, Central America, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and islands of the Pacific and Caribbean regions**. (*Growing in Marital Love* and *Growing in Our Interpersonal Relationships* workbooks in Spanish and English may be downloaded free at their website www.ywamconnect.com/sites/KandMHamilton)

Reports from the Hamiltons’ trainees include the following:

From Rev. Dewey and Kay Findley in Franklin, Indiana: The Findleys held a Marriage Enrichment Workshop in October and November 2008 at Grace United Methodist Church, Franklin, Indiana. They developed a Marriage and Family Ministries Sunday School Class using Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. The children of participating couples also Studied this book and join in activities to strengthen family life. (dandkfindley@peoplepc.com)

From Andreas and Angela Fresz in Germany: "In May and June, 2008, we traveled in Central Europe, where the work is growing. In 15 days we traveled through 5 nations, slept in 7 different beds, attended 3 conferences, met with Family Ministry leaders in the region and facilitated another REAPP Marriage Enrichment Workshop in Romania. Eleven couples from all over Romania came to Oradea and participated in the workshop. Six of them stayed for the facilitator training afterwards. Europe is growing. Please check the YWAM Family Ministries website www.ywamfamilyministries.eu for more reports and exciting events." In August, 2008, they reported: "We returned from Bulgaria Friday night. 18 couples participated in the Marriage Enrichment Weekend (Level 1) and 4 in the Basic Training Workshop (Level 2 training of facilitators)...The results were more than wonderful. God moved strongly among the couples to bring new life and reconciliation of relationships. Two other couples worked with us as a team of instructors. We now have new complete translations of the REAPP books in Romanian and Bulgarian languages." Other outstanding instructors in Europe and elsewhere continue to inspire us, spread the word, and to translate the books into new languages. God is on the move through these precious servant leaders."

From Rolph and Ann Fletcher, Highland Park UMC, Dallas, Texas, who offer REAPP training around the world: “The six beautiful Korean couples we just trained as facilitators in Vancouver (one couple as instructors, Level 3) are all outstanding and already have plans to train others.”

From Georg and Christine Schubert, Germany (May 25, 2008):

Although we live in the country side, life is pretty busy for us. Ministering to couples and families is a big part of our lives. We do this in different ways: leading Marriage Enrichment Workshops and seminars, organizing Candlelight dinners and coaching individual people and couples in working through relationship issues. We are grateful for wonderful friends we're joined with as co-workers, both YWAM family ministries and in our local church and regional ministries. And we are excited about progressing steps toward a nationwide network ministering to marriages and families. The rewarding process of getting to know and becoming friends with workers from a vast variety of denominational backgrounds now pours into corporately getting active in public in order to raise the image of marriage and to speak for the needs of the families. Challenging and exciting! We are headed for Siberia again to facilitate REAPP workshops. We now have the translation of the books in Russian, and are training a team of facilitators and instructors there."

Chris and Angela Nooe, of Commerce UMC in Michigan, have founded **eWay**, a non-profit (501c3) Christian ministry offering pastoral counseling, mentoring and teaching services to individuals, couples, families and churches. They provide Men's, Women's and Couples mentoring programs all designed to foster a fervent desire to walk closely with Jesus Christ and live a life overflowing with His Love. **eWay** offers a full range of services targeted to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals, families, groups and organizations in formats ranging from brief seminars and key-note addresses to weekly series and weekend retreats. Contact them at 248-207-1648, request@ewayministries.org, or www.ewayministries.org.

Rev./Chaplain (Major) Kent L. Svendsen, pastor of First UMC of Forreston in the Northern Illinois Conference worked hard in 2007 to coordinate a community forum on relationship education. Although disappointed by the number of attendees at that event, he reported in June, 2008: "I am now part of the Ogle Country Youth Advisory board which has as a priority promoting traditional families and promoting strong marriages. It hasn't taken off yet but there is some promise for an initiative coming from the schools and the courts system, providing an incentive for those in troubled families and troubled marriages to attend such seminars."

In 1999, **Wesley UMC in Erie, Pennsylvania** 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. The result has been a significant drop in the divorce rate.

See also the 5 Great Dates program offered in the community by Central United Methodist Church in Kansas City, Missouri, as described under #V below.

IV. UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES OFFERING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND YOUNG ADULTS

In early 2011, **Leslie Hastings, an ordained UM deacon**, coordinated the study *Created by God: About Human Sexuality for Older Boys and Girls*, by James Ritchie (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009) at the **Wilmington UMC in Wilmington, Massachusetts**. This program offers a parent session, four sessions for 'tweens, and a final joint session for both 'tweens and their parents. Although it is designed for grades 5 and 6, grade 7 was also included, since this was the first time this church had offered this program. Eighteen students registered even before Leslie advertised it in the local newspaper.

Leslie previously taught the earlier edition of this program nine times in her eighteen years at her former church, the Woburn UMC, also in Massachusetts. At the Woburn UMC, typically half of the participating students came from the community, outside the local congregation. *Created by God* teaches or reviews some of the same information the students learn in school--the anatomy and physiology of puberty and reproduction--but emphasizes how our sexuality fits into the bigger picture of our faith and how to develop non-sexual intimacy. The newest edition includes information on cybersex, sexting, and other contemporary issues. *Created by God* also opens up conversation between parents and youth and hopefully makes it easier for them to communicate about other issues, as well as about sexuality. In the final joint session for parents and youth together, a vocabulary game provides a fun way to practice and get comfortable using the correct language for body parts and sex-related matters. At the end, the parents and youth work in separate groups to write segments of a litany expressing what they want the other group to know about this important transition in their lives. The program can be offered as a six-week series, which is how Leslie taught it in Woburn, or as a weekend event, as in Wilmington, with the parent session held on a Sunday afternoon and the course itself on the following Friday evening, Saturday morning and afternoon. A nurse who is also a Sunday School teacher in the Wilmington UMC taught it, although having such an "expert" is really not necessary. Leslie explains that the leader session outlines are more than sufficient for anyone who is comfortable talking about sexuality and has some experience leading groups of youth. Adult male and female small group leaders are needed for every four to seven 'tweens. A group of ten or fewer could be taught without small group leaders, but in that case, both male and female leaders are needed. A DVD and a CD-ROM provide complete lesson plans and power point presentations, plus several video clips of the program's author. Each clip targets a different audience (church leaders, parents, small group leaders, and so forth); the questions parents may ask, and his answers, are particularly effective. The two print pieces, a student guide and a parent guide, are also excellent. Contact Leslie at 781-935-6511 or leslieahastings@gmail.com.

Carl and Jan Dodd (Bethany UMC, Austin, Texas) active in Marriage Encounter-United Methodist, PREPARE, and Intimate Life Ministries for years, have presented to the youth in their church the Life Innovations course *Building Relationship: Developing Skills for Life* (www.lifeinnovations.com)

Cliff and Jane Ives presented a program on relationships to the youth group at **Green St. UMC in Augusta, Maine**, using communication materials from ACME (www.bettermarriages.com) and "How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk" (www.nojerks.com). They distributed a brochure purchased from the Dibble Fund titled "Ten Things Teens Should Know About Marriage" (800-695-7975, www.dibblefund.org) along with printouts of Neil Ulrich's article "What You Need to Know About Living Together" (www.firstthings.org, click on "Couples" under "Marriage and Family Resource Center.").

V. UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES OFFERING EFFECTIVE MARRIAGE PREPARATION, EDUCATION, AND ENRICHMENT

Trey and Jana Barclay, at Grace UMC in Cape Coral, Florida, facilitate *Family Dynamics* and *Family Dynamics 2*, marriage enrichment events for couples. They also mentor couples in crisis, thanks to the healing they experienced through the Family Dynamics Institute's *A New Beginning* program, which they attended when they were on the verge of divorce. In addition to *Family Dynamics* (www.familydynamics.net), Grace UMC offers programs from the Homebuilders Series by Family Life, *Five Love Language* workshops, a *Fireproof* course using the DVD curriculum by that name, *Boundaries in Marriage*, *Boundaries with Kids*, and classes for singles and parents.

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 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 stated that he found the material 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**, reports that his congregation is in the formational stages of a marriage ministry. They are sending a lay couple for Family Dynamics training and will be offering the 8-week Dynamic Marriage course in the fall of 2011. A May 21st, 2011, "date night" offered a nice dinner, prepared by a member who is a culinary expert, and an evening of fellowship and fun, including viewing of the DVD *His Brain, Her Brain* by Mark Gunger. In July, 2011, couples can participate in "Marriage Down the River," a canoe trip down the Huron River. Couples who get married at Dexter UMC are required to participate in a three-week (three two-hour sessions) marriage preparation class held every spring, as well as 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.

Peoples UMC in South Portland, Maine, offered a Dance and Relationship Education Class for Couples in January 2010, hoping to appeal to those who want to learn to dance for their weddings, as well as 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 led by **Steve and Kathy Beirne**, certified leaders for *Mastering the Mysteries of Love*.

Marjorie Coppock of **Coker UMC in San Antonio, TX**, reports that she orders from Better Marriages, formerly ACME, (800-634-8325) copies of handout brochures to be placed on a rack in the church foyer. These brochures are about 12 pages long and are good guides for thinking through problems that develop in marriage and family relationships. Each brochure costs \$1.60. and about 20 of each title are picked up each year. Marjorie says, "I feel that it is money well spent and encourage others to consider this service to their churches for family education." The titles of the brochures include: "Helping Each Other Cope: In Sickness and in Health," "Creative Use of Conflict," "Enriching Newlyweds," "Creating Intimacy," "Mid-life Marriage: Choices and Chances for Change," and "Building a Better Marriage." For a February 2009 emphasis on marriage and family, she worked through the health and wellness committee to publish in the monthly church newsletter an article titled "Keys to Loving Family Relationships." She also wrote brief pieces for the Sunday bulletins, describing a different relationship key each week: Positive Communication, Conflict Resolution, Money Management, and Attitudes of Gratefulness.

Mark and Kim Karnes, lay members of **Pt. Pleasant UMC in Elk Grove, California-Nevada Conference**, participated in Marriage Encounter in 1999 and in a Home Builders Bible Study in 2006. In 2008 they attended the Smart Marriage conference in San Francisco. Kim also trained with Michele Weiner-Davis in October, 2008. Since then they have coordinated three *Fireproof* movie events; led Fireproof Bible Studies as a six-week Sunday School class and as a six-day format at the California-Nevada Conference Adult and Family Camp; and led the Michele Weiner-Davis Marriage Breakthrough seminar in August, 2009.

Asbury United Methodist Church in Tulsa, OK has an active Marriage Council with representatives from various parts of their Marriage Ministry. Their premarital ministry (Couple-to-Couple), began in 1993, and currently consists of about 30 trained and supervised Support Couples who meet with over 50 couples a year in their homes. Occasionally the church hosts large events, such as the showing of "Fireproof" in January, 2009 (around 600 people attended) and the showing of Mark Gungor's DVD, "Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage" in the summer of 2009 (around 350 people). Every semester the church offers "Dynamic Marriage," with two classes some semesters. In summer 2010 they planned a "Dessert Theater Date Night." At one recent event prizes were given for longest and shortest times married. The longest married couple in attendance had been married 64 years. The shortest length of marriage was a one month! Every Valentine's weekend the church hosts a special time of honoring all couples married 50 years or more. Their names are read during the worship service and they are

invited to stand. In 2009, 200 couples at Asbury qualified. The longest marriage represented was 69 years. The women were all presented with a corsage the day before, and after church that day they were treated to music and a wonderful meal, with wait service by people of all ages. In addition, every other month people who are celebrating “milestone anniversaries” (5, 10, 15, 20, etc. years) are eligible for a drawing to win a gift certificate from a quality local restaurant. Contact **Charlene Giles, M.A., L.M.F.T.**, Asbury’s Director of Care and Marriage Ministries at 918-392-1145 Ext. 109 or cgiles@asburytulsa.org or visit www.asburytulsa.org .

Karen and Kevin Jeffrey, a trained ACME (now Better Marriages) leader couple at **Acworth UMC, North Georgia Conference**, approached their pastor after his sermon series on marriage and offered to lead a couples’ weekend retreat. The pastor agreed, and the family ministries director of the church worked with the Jeffreys to plan this event. Eleven couples participated in the first event, and eight couples participated in a second retreat a year later. The Jeffreys now lead monthly Marriage Enrichment Group meetings for couples from both groups and held another retreat in the fall of 2008. The Jeffreys also served as coordinators for the 2009 ACME (Better Marriages) of Georgia Weekend Getaway at the Winshape Retreat Center in Mt. Berry, Georgia. The theme for this weekend was “Put the World on Hold – Relax, Reconnect, Renew.” Contact the Jeffreys for more information (jeffreymom@comcast.net)

Rev. John and Mary Lou Farmer, an ACME (Better Marriages) trained leader couple at **St. Simons UMC** in South Georgia, report good responses to the video series *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman and *Song of Solomon* by couples’ groups in their church.

Joey and Lisa Putnam and the Marriage Enrichment Ministry Team at **Apex UMC, Raleigh District, North Carolina Conference**, led 5 sessions, involving 37 couples, of an 8-week course for couples using Adam Hamilton’s video curriculum *Making Love Last a Lifetime*. Each session culminated in a pastor-led Marriage Celebration service. [Scores on 41 evaluation sheets that have been turned in reveal average ratings of 6.5 (on a scale of 7) for strengthening of marriage relationships and 6.6 for learning new information that can enrich their marriages]. The leadership team meets regularly to nurture their own relationships and for team building, and they offered *Making Love Last a Lifetime* again in the fall of 2008 and also started groups using the *Family Life Homebuilders Couples Series: Improving Communication in Your Marriage*. They promoted a nearby *Weekend to Remember* (Family Life) event and planned a group outing to see the movie *Fireproof*, with fellowship and discussion time afterwards at a local restaurant. The team continues to look at resources and make plans to build on this strong interest base. <http://www.apexumc.org/ministries/care/marriage/8>

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**, participation in which is now a requirement for those who are to be married there. The Dickeys have trained about eight mentor couples and **have mentored over twenty engaged couples using the FOCCUS Inventory and the**

Marriage Savers Guide to FOCCUS. They also use Dr. Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, assigning that to and discussing it with each couple they mentor. Recently 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 Dickeys' next mentor training event, and one of the pastors participated as well. In February, 2009, Beckley Temple offered the Focus on Marriage simulcast.

Clark and Ruth Achelpohl report that on Valentine's Day, 2009, their church, **Central UMC in Kansas City, Missouri**, launched a 5 Great Dates program based on the curriculum found in Claudia and David Arp's book *Ten Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage*. Ten couples from the church and community signed up to come to Central UMC every other Saturday evening from February 14th to April 4th for a "launch" session, after which they went out on a date with questions about their relationship to discuss over dinner or wherever they chose to go. Childcare was provided for families that need it at the church from 4:30 - 7:30 PM. The church also contacted several nice restaurants in the area to provide incentives such as 2 for 1 deals or 20% off on meals. Couples were encouraged not to "double date," but to spend this time as a couple focusing on their own relationship. The church charges a nominal fee of \$50 for all 5 dates to cover the cost of books and childcare. This group included couples just married, couples with small children, and couples married 30 years or more experiencing "empty nests." Feedback from this experience was very positive.

At **Church of the Resurrection UMC, Leawood, Kansas**, Sherry Danner, LMFT, offers limited onsite therapy for couples and individuals and makes referrals to community mental health professionals. She receives approximately six calls a week from persons seeking counseling. Sherry also supervises two interns who offer counseling services on-site as well. Resurrection UMC offers a broad range of classes, activities, and support groups for all ages and stages, including parenting. For adults, Living Forward classes, workshops, and seminars address physical, spiritual, and emotional concerns and bring together persons who may be dealing with similar issues: divorce recovery, grief, depression, and infidelity. Ongoing support groups serve those experiencing parenting challenges, serious illness, unemployment, infertility and miscarriage, alcoholism, and vision impairment. Grief Care and Divorce Recovery are offered for children as well. David Ramsey's Financial Peace University, Abundant Living Seminars, and Crown Financial Studies strengthen families by addressing financial issues that often undermine marriages. Couples who wish to be married at Resurrection must complete a six session premarital class, which is also open to newlyweds and couples just thinking about marriage. This church also offers Sunday School and evening classes on various aspects of relationship education, including parenting, and a mentor couples program. (www.cor.org)

At **Frazer Memorial UMC in the Alabama/West Florida Conference** (<http://frazerumc.org/>), Ginny and Mike Dietvorst serve as pre-marriage mentor coordinators. Their pool of marriage mentor couples work with approximately 40+ couples a year. Some couples from the community, although not members or marrying at

Frazer, request pre-marriage mentoring from this program.

At **Grace UMC in Franklin, IN**, Rev. Dewey and Kay Findley, Certified Facilitators with Advanced Training through REAPP, offer Growing in Marital Love workshops. They had trained about 50 couples as of September, 2010 and offered another workshop in January, 2011.

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. They are also strongly encouraged to participate in the "Song of Solomon" video series by Tommy Nelson, which is offered twice a year. This church has hosted David and Claudia Arp for a weekend seminar, used John Trent video curriculum, offers Christian PREP, and encourages couples to attend outside seminars such as those by Gary Chapman and Gary Smalley, as well as other marriage enrichment weekends. <http://www.heritageumc.com>

At **Los Altos UMC, in San Jose District, California-Nevada Conference**, Sandra Schwerin Montoya, a lay speaker trained through ACME and Smart Marriages conferences, coordinates marriage ministries. For the fall of 2009, she announced a 10 Great Dates schedule of alternate Friday evenings and later three special sessions focused on topics chosen by previous 10 Great Date participants: Prayer, Sex, and Money. Resources for the sessions are as follows: Prayer – *Couples Who Pray* by Squire Rushness and Louis Duart; Sex – *Sacred Sex: a Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage* by Rev. Tim Alan Gardener; and Money - *Money in Marriage* by Larry Burkett, *Deft-Proof Your Marriage* by Mary Hunt, or *Money and Marriage God's Way* by Howard Dayton. Los Altos UMC is also offering Financial Peace University.

Audrey and D. J. Hubbard describe the ongoing marriage ministry at **Manchester UMC in Missouri**: "Marriage University" offers a *Great Start* program for couples being married at their church, requiring each couple to take the Prepare/Enrich Inventory, attend a wedding workshop, and take an 8-hour class in couple communication (*Talking and Listening Together* from Interpersonal Communications, Inc.) A second 10-hour class called *Thriving Together*, also produced by Interpersonal Communications, Inc., is offered after the first year of marriage. These classes are taught by married couples from the congregation who are certified instructors through Interpersonal Communications, Inc. Couples pay for the *Great Start* program when they make arrangements to be married at the church. These same two courses are also offered to married couples in the congregation and from the community for \$90 per couple, with scholarships for those needing financial assistance. Couples who complete one or both courses are encouraged to join a Marriage Enrichment Group available in the community through the Gateway Chapter of ACME (Better Marriages).

New Fairfield UMC, Connecticut offers a mentoring ministry. During Marriage Week in 2003 they placed articles in the newspaper, held a radio interview, and distributed a flyer inviting the community to participate in a "Building a Marriage that Lasts" Seminar, World Marriage Day Sunday morning services, Wednesday Evening

Worship and Marriage Celebration, a Valentine's Evening Marriage Vow Renewal and Reception, a Men's Sweethearts Breakfast, and a Citizens News Marriage Hall of Fame (recognition of couples married 25 years or more). Mentor couples Jane and Jerry Serfass attend Smart Marriages regularly (jerryserfass@earthlink.net, janeserface@earthlink.net) and also attended the 2005 Marriage and Family Ministry Conference, an event, designed to equip, train, encourage, resource and support church leaders in their ministries with couples, parents, and the full spectrum of family types. They enjoyed both the excellent presentations and the participants' shared commitment to serving God through marriage and family ministries. Check www.amfmconference.com for details, about upcoming conferences.

A member of the **Peralto UMC in Peralto, New Mexico**, reported that the Marriage Enrichment Weekend, Inc. program offered by her church provided a life-changing experience for her and her husband.

Vicki Dale Brown, Minister of Counseling and Family Ministries at **Platte Woods UMC, Kansas City, Missouri**, offers a variety of classes and activities to promote Marriage and Family Wellness including a Marriage Mentor program, Marriage Preparation sessions, parenting activities, and a summer time family retreat. (www.plattewoodschurch.org)

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 Michael McManus at 301-469-5873 for more information about training for pre-marital mentoring.