

National Marriage Week USA—February 7 to 14th, 2017
**A campaign to encourage marriage,
reduce divorce rates, curtail poverty, and benefit children**
<http://www.marriage-weekinternational.com/>

Starting in early February, we have the opportunity to join with other churches and organizations to bring attention to the value of marriage and to the many resources available to help couples succeed in developing healthy, enduring relationships. Marriage Week International (<http://marriage-weekinternational.com>) and National Marriage Week in a variety of countries, including the USA (www.nationalmarriageweekUSA.org), are calling for hundreds of diverse organizations to plan marriage building activities throughout the year. **Although not everyone will marry, it is vitally important that we equip those who do to develop lasting healthy relationships, which benefit not only the couples themselves, but also their children, as well as the communities in which they live.** Healthy marriages generate personal happiness, health, productivity, and prosperity. Healthy marriages provide the most dependable context for raising children. We know that children growing up without the nurturing support of a stable family are more prone to school failure, delinquency, and other problems that can be very costly to society at large. Singles, therefore, benefit from being part of communities which include happily married couples.

Let's make National Marriage Week just the beginning of a year-round effort to teach young people **effective relationship and communication skills** and encourage them to complete their education, marry, and then have children, not the other way around. Let's provide **rigorous marriage preparation** to get couples off to a good start, using proven resources such as mentoring programs and premarital inventories. Let's offer ongoing support to couples, especially parents, as they journey through predictable life stages and deal with **both expected and unanticipated challenges**. Let's make sure people know about **effective interventions for those in crisis**, creating a context of hope that personal and relational growth is possible and that difficulties can be overcome. Preachers can use anecdotes from marriage and family life to illustrate such concepts as **commitment, unselfishness, forgiveness, and intentional caring**. Display helpful books and share reviews of them in church newsletters. Offer short-term studies on marriage, parenting, elder-care, finances, coping with illness, etc. Establish support groups for those dealing with similar issues. Recognize and celebrate wedding anniversaries and other significant family events. Encourage every couple to do something to nurture their relationship on a regular basis.

Visit www.marriagelovepower.net for "Best Practice Articles and Recommended Resources" on a variety of topics related to marriage and family life. Search for them by title or topic at www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries. You will also find a Directory of United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministry Resource Persons and a schedule of Upcoming Events and Training Opportunities on both websites. At www.nationalmarriageweekUSA.org, you will find a schedule of upcoming events, to which you are encouraged to add your own. More information will be forthcoming as Marriage Week committees ramp up their planning and promotions. Start now to bring together members of your congregation and/or community to take advantage of and participate in this international campaign. Follow these links for a bulletin insert, an interest survey, a sample press release, and a flyer/poster.

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