HOW TO START A COUPLES GROUP IN THE CHURCH

Relationship Ministries Department
Allegheny East Conference
Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists
Dr. John A. Trusty, Director
Step 1 - Establish a Marriage Team

A marriage team consists of one or two couples who can work together to develop your couples group. In all congregations, there are couples who have healthy marriages. Try to select married couples who can mentor others. The benefits of two couples working together are to help share responsibilities and open the door for collaboration.

Step 2 - Determine Marriage Ministry Objectives and Goals

We call this step setting up the couples group for success. The Family Ministry leader must meet with the two couples to establish the purpose of the ministry. There must be clear goals and objectives. To alleviate discouragement and burnout, use enthusiasm and motivation to keep your couples focused and motivated. To help you develop your goals and objectives, please consider the following suggestions:

- Decide if the group is only for church members only, or church and community.
- What time of the month should the group meet? Chose a suggested time until you have your first couples group meeting.
- Pay attention to the calendar to determine the best time to launch the program.
- Develop a list of expectations and ideals that may take place during your couples group.
- Have a simple outline to envision what your group meetings will look like (opening prayer, meet, greet and welcome any new couples, introduce the topic of discussion and the couple leading the discussion).
- Determine the time frame of your group meetings.
- Always have handouts.
- Chose a Couple Group name.
Step 3 - Diagnose the Need the Ministry Will Meet

It is common knowledge that all couples need regular marriage enrichment, that all marriages go through different seasons, and that most couples experience similar relationship challenges. Assessing the specific needs of couples in your congregation ahead of time will result in better planning, focused implementation and results that are more successful.

- **Ask couples what they want and need.** Give people what they want, and the chances of their showing up to class are much greater. With that in mind, survey couples on issues they are dealing with in their marriage, topics they are interested in, and relationship skills they lack. This can be done before, during, or after Sabbath service, through e-mail, or through a letter campaign. The feedback from couples in the congregation will provide the team with ample input on the best way to launch the Marriage Ministry.

- **Pick how much the Couples group will be doing.** While the term Marriage Ministry seem straightforward, it may be broadly defined to include a wide range of ministry focuses including premarital ministry, marriage enrichment, and ministry for troubled marriages.

Step 4 - Plan the Marriage Ministry Work and Work the Marriage Ministry Plan

Sometimes ministry results fall short of expectations. After the fact, the “woulda, coulda, shoulda” second guessing begins and momentum and excitement fade quickly. Many of the hindsight insights could have been addressed ahead of time with thoughtful consideration and constructing a detailed plan.

- **Get leaders trained as soon as possible**
- **Lock in dates, times and locations.**
- **Keep the end in mind.**
  What is the ultimate goal of the Ministry? If it is reduced to reaching an attendance goal, recouping the financial costs, or to “just do something” for marriages then the writing is on the wall for the group. If the goal is to help couples thrive in their marriages, then the group will stay encouraged that their contribution is making a difference in the world. And that can be the best motivation there is.
Step 5 - Spread the Word about the Marriage Ministry

So, you’ve got a strategic plan, a Marriage Ministry event or group meeting. While some subscribe to the “if we build it they will come” theory, reality shows that no one will show up unless they’ve heard about it. Marketing the Ministry is essential to ensure marriages improve.

- **Give people something to look at.** Create a marketing strategy that includes print and online promotional pieces. People are inundated with many different messages vying for their attention. A brochure, a poster, an electronic image can inform, remind, and persuade couples to attend the Marriage Ministry Group.

- **A personal invitation can go a long way.** Get in front of as many people as possible.