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Preparing for Marriage

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

“If there is any subject which should be carefully considered, in which the counsel of older and more experienced persons should be sought, it is the subject of marriage; if ever the Bible was needed as a counselor, if ever divine guidance should be sought in prayer, it is before taking a step that binds persons together for life” (The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 175).

Sometimes called premarital education, premarital counseling is intended for couples who are considering becoming engaged or for couples who have already decided to get married and would like to prepare for the road ahead.

Approaches include many formats such as lectures, workshops, homework, group or individual sessions, or a combination of these. They may involve personal and relationship inventories, role-playing, communication exercises and mentoring. Fees may range from about \$250 to \$3,000 depending on the type and duration of the counseling, which can be anywhere from several hours to on-going work for many months.

Research has shown the average couple who participates in a premarital counseling and education program reports a 30 percent stronger marriage than other couples. Couples say that to be effective, in the short- and long-run, premarital preparation needs to be skills-based, include communication and conflict resolution, be presented by individuals who are trained to do so, be collaborative when necessary and not be mandated. When counseling was mandated, the couples received mostly lectures, the pastors were not considered to be good examples, they were not seen as competent, and the participants didn't feel comfortable asking questions.¹

David Olson and associates have developed highly effective instruments used in premarital education and counseling. More than 2.5 million couples have taken one of five print and online scored inventories, which include Prepare (for engaged couples), Prepare-MC (marrying with children), Prepare-CC (for cohabitating couples), Enrich (for those married) and Mate (for couples older than 50 planning marriage or facing life transitions). The new Customized Version of Prepare/Enrich (6th version) is the most

advanced couple assessment tool and is new this year. Many Seventh-day Adventist pastors and counselors use these inventories. Extensive information is found at lifeinnovations.com. If you want to find a trained professional in your area, follow the “Couples” link.

Adventist Engaged Encounter (AEE), a weekend-long enrichment opportunity for engaged and newly married couples, began at Andrews University in 1978 and continued for 26 years, with more than 1,200 couples attending. Some readers of this column likely attended an AEE weekend. The good news is that AEE is being re-established

on the Andrews campus with two weekends scheduled in the coming school year: October 23–25 and March 26–28, 2010. Information and registration materials are available from Andrews University Campus Ministries.

If you are preparing for marriage, an important thing to re-

member is that a wedding is a day, but a marriage is a lifetime. Take advantage of every opportunity to build a strong foundation of understanding and commitment, not only to the man or woman whom you love but also to the institution of marriage—one of God's greatest gifts!

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.



1. Walker, A. B., Nazarinia, R., & Schumm, W. “Predicting the Short- and Long-Term Helpfulness of Premarital Counseling: The Critical Role of Counseling Quality.” Presented at the 2008 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, Little Rock, Arkansas.