

**MARRIAGE MATTERS JACKSON
HEALTHY MARRIAGE AGREEMENT
CLERGY LEADERSHIP STATEMENT**

Preamble

Our concern as area clergy is to promote lasting marriages under God and to establish spiritually healthy families. Since almost 75 percent of marriages are performed by clergy, we are in a unique position to dramatically affect the marriages and families in our community. We are deeply troubled by our country's epidemic of marital instability and divorce, and feel it must be directly addressed by the faith community. Therefore, we have the responsibility to develop programs for preparation, enrichment, restoration, and relevant support and resources. Our purpose is to enrich marriages and to significantly reduce the divorce rate in Jackson County.

We Believe:

- God established marriage to be a lifelong, monogamous relationship between a husband and a wife.
- Marriage, as a divine institution, has both unitive and procreative purposes, and is therefore the divinely intended context for personal and sexual intimacy, and the nurturing of children.
- The breakdown of God's design for marriages and families with its subsequent personal and social ills demands a pro-active, redemptive response from God's people.
- Marriage is a primary foundation of a stable society.
- Strong, healthy marriages enrich and strengthen our community.
- Families with whole and healthy marriages are the optimal environment for raising children.
- Sexual abstinence outside marriage and faithfulness within marriage is the choice for sexual expression that contributes most to stable, healthy marriages and families.
- Cultural transformation is required to reduce the frequency of divorce in Jackson County.

We Resolve To:

By our signatures below, we witness our commitment as leaders and members of the Jackson faith community to speak with one voice in promoting and providing the best possible support to those who seek and choose marriage. Therefore, we will...

- Encourage a courtship of at least one year.
- Promote pre-marital preparation for couples wishing to be married four to six months before the wedding, ideally entailing a minimum of four sessions and including a pre-marital inventory, and participation in a relationship skills program.
- Provide marriage enrichment opportunities, such as classes, small groups, and/or retreats, to build and strengthen marriage.
- Promote and provide restoration services - counseling, mentoring and/or retreats for marriages in crisis.
- Provide learning, growth and support opportunities for blended families.
- Encourage chastity outside of marriage by raising awareness of the documented negative effects of premarital sexual activity and co-habitation.
- Build partnerships with churches, courts, business, institutions, counselors and agencies to share resources and create a positive climate in which marriages are helped to succeed.
- Provide training, supervision, and motivation to insightful, stable married couples who may serve as mentors to work with seriously dating and engaged couples, newlyweds, blended families, and those experiencing marital difficulties.

We Acknowledge:

- Many in our community are in single parent families. In no way do we intend this policy to make a judgment on their family context, nor do we wish to exclude them from the benefits of participating in our family enrichment programs.
- This policy necessarily addresses heterosexual marriage and families. It is not intended to make any comment upon the values or choices of those who might make alternative lifestyle choices.
- The painful and dangerous reality of abuse within marriages and families. We advocate for safe and loving relationships. In no way should this policy be construed to imply that abusive domestic relationships be endured or tolerated.
- Some clergy or people of faith may not share the beliefs expressed in this document. We appreciate that differing traditions share the same goals regarding the health of marriage and family. This covenant does not propose to supersede the programs, practice, or theology of any clergy or faith community.

Name / Title

Date

Church / Institution / Organization