So you want to start a ministry to marriages, but you're not sure where to start. A great place to start is by understanding why marriage ministry is important to a church's overall health and ministry. Oftentimes the evangelizing, discipling, and equipping that a church desires to do through followers of Christ are hindered by the struggles in couples' marriages. By helping couples move beyond the struggles caused by sin to oneness in Christ, you produce two strong disciples, and they are better equipped to minister to others.

The Impact of a Marriage Ministry

Research shows that more effective ministry takes place in churches comprised of couples with healthy marriages. When church members divorce it can end a Sunday school class or small group, create a leadership void, and hurt relationships within the church overall. The results of a well-designed, effective marriage ministry will reverberate throughout a church:

- Secure, healthy, mission-minded families are central to the church fulfilling the great commission.
- Healthy, honest, Christ-centered marriages are the lighthouse of hope to young couples and struggling married couples. More experienced married couples can be instructing younger married couples.
- Healthy marriages are vital to church health. Strong marriages produce healthy families, church leaders, and generous tithing, and provide manpower for church outreach.

Key Components of a Marriage Ministry

No two churches are alike, so a marriage ministry plan designed as a one-size-fits-all really won’t work in every church. A good plan takes into account a church’s vision, culture, structure, and demographics. Below are 5 steps to creating a marriage ministry that have taken many church leaders from “We don’t know where to start” to “This is something we can do.” The steps are not a list of things to do but instead provide a framework for developing a ministry that will be unique to your congregation.

**STEP 1: PRAY**

Ask the Lord to give you a vision for discipling married couples in your church and couples who are preparing to marry. Ask your church's prayer team to intercede on your behalf as you plan the ministry and on behalf of the couples in your congregation.

**STEP 2: REVIEW YOUR CHURCH’S VISION**

The vision statement answers the question, why does our church exist? All of the ministries of a church should support the church’s vision. Therefore, the church’s vision statement becomes your starting point for determining the marriage ministry vision statement.
Review your church’s vision statement to make sure your ministry to marriages supports the church’s overall vision. Refer to your church’s vision statement continually and ask, “Does our plan for ministry to marriages align with this vision?”

The benefit of aligning your plan with the vision of the church is to obtain buy-in. If you are a lay leader, the pastor and key leaders of the church are more likely to support a ministry that supports the church’s overall vision. If you are the pastor, key lay leaders and the congregation will see that your plan for ministry to marriages supports the church’s overall vision, creating easier adoption.

**STEP 3**

**DRAFT YOUR WHY**

The vision statement you draft for your marriage ministry answers the question, “Why have a marriage ministry?” Your why is the reason you are going to invest people, time, and resources into marriages. With the church’s vision statement in mind, draft “your why” for marriage ministry. Your why can be based on biblical principles and practical reasons. You might take some of the language from your church’s vision statement and weave it into your why. As always, allow the Spirit to lead you.

A clear “why” to marriage ministry will help you:

- COMMUNICATE to your church the vision for the ministry
- INSPIRE lay leaders to engage with you in the ministry
- ATTRACT couples to commit to intentional discipleship
- ENERGIZE your team in the tough times.

Ask the Lord to help you draft a vision statement for the ministry that aligns with your church’s overall vision.

**STEP 4**

**IDENTIFY YOUR WHAT**

What should be your focus in helping couples? In marriage ministry, what you should focus on generally falls into four categories:

1. **Prepare** persons who are unmarried and persons who plan to marry to be strongly rooted in Christ
2. **Establish** couples who are in the first five years of marriage to continue to grow in their relationship with one another and with Christ
3. **Enrich** all married couples as they continue to grow in Christ and live out their faith
4. **Restore** couples who are struggling or in crisis to each other and to Christ.

**Demographics:** Your church’s demographics can be very helpful when determining your focus. Do you have more single people than married? How many married couples are in blended families? How many couples are experiencing a marital crisis? Do you have members actively serving in the military? Demographics will help you determine if you need to be preparing couples for marriage, guiding couples as they establish their marriage, giving couples opportunities to enrich their marriage, or helping couples restore their marriage.

Based on the demographics of your church, determine what categories you will focus on. Give specific attention to blended families and military families. Both face challenges beyond traditional marriages. They need our support and help.
With your what—the ministry’s focus—in place, ask, “How is the best way to deliver ministry content in our church?” It is helpful to align how you deliver the marriage ministry content with your church’s structure and culture.

**Structure:** Church structure refers to how the church is organized to deliver content to members. In most churches the organization supports a weekend sermon, so when the pastor is preparing a sermon he knows the church can provide the support he needs. The same is true with how you deliver marriage content. Deliver content in a format that the church is structured to support. If your church is organized to support small groups and large-group activity, then use both. Ensure that how you deliver marriage content aligns with the support you can get from the church.

**Culture:** Church culture includes the preferences attendees have for receiving content. For example, if you like to deliver content through small groups but the members of your church don’t prefer small groups, it would be best for you to deliver the content in another way. Participation will be heightened when content is delivered in the way members prefer.

### Structural Options for Content Delivery

Most churches rely on three methods for content delivery: large groups, small groups, and one-to-one interactions. Based on what you know about your church’s structure and culture, how is it best for you to deliver marriage content? This chart may give you some ideas for how to deliver content that both the church’s structure supports and the culture embraces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ONE-TO-ONE</th>
<th>SMALL GROUP</th>
<th>LARGE GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MENTORING</td>
<td>SMALL GROUPS</td>
<td>SERMONS EVENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESOURCE LIBRARY</td>
<td>CLASSES</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BIBLICAL COUNSELING</td>
<td>SUPPORT GROUPS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL MEDIA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Once you have your why, your what, and your how in place, you are ready to start your ministry planning.

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For 40 years FamilyLife has been helping couples and churches to effectively develop godly families who change the world one home at a time. We are a ministry of CRU, formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ. We can help you develop a plan for marriage ministry that takes into account your church’s vision, culture, structure, and demographics, and aligns with God’s design. If you would like to talk further, contact us at 800-358-6329 or email us at ministryadvisor@FamilyLife.com.


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