

Strengthening the ties that bind

by Joelle Steffen
of The Review staff

SHEBOYGAN — Pastors from 17 denominations in Sheboygan County joined together on Valentine's Day and signed an agreement to protect marriage.

This year, Valentine's Day fell on the last day of National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14), making the timing of the event, a mass signing of the Sheboygan County Marriage Covenant, most appropriate.

So far, 49 pastors from 17 denominations have signed the marriage covenant, which outlines five areas that these pastors agree are important to help prepare engaged couples for marriage.

Charlene Lammers, executive director of Great Marriages for Sheboygan County, briefly outlined the five areas at the event, which was held in the Rocca Room at the Mead Public Library.

The first point, encouraging active participation in the church, was elaborated on by Pastor Les Kuiper of Christian Reformed Church in Oosburg.

He said that one of the reasons for the high divorce rates among couples who marry in the church

Great Marriages for Sheboygan County aims to make marriage last in Thursday's

The Review

period to six months or more if they could.

The covenant also outlines four pre-marital counseling appointments, a signing of a declaration of love and an agreement to attend post-marital nurture sessions a year after the wedding.

"It kind of calls attention to the significance of the covenant they are entering into upfront," said Kuiper.

Six years ago, Kuiper formed a similar covenant and worked to get Oosburg area pastors to sign on. When Lammers found out about the covenant, she undertook to involve all county pastors, forming Great Marriages for Sheboygan County.

"We're here to address the broken families and reduce divorces in this county," said Lammers.

Kansas City, Kan., outlined how the covenant can help area churches promote marriage.

"Divorce is a systemic problem in our society," said Meyers. "It's the root cause of almost every social ill. Getting to the root cause is dramatically the thing we need to do."

Meyers encouraged the pastors to think of each marriage as strategic.

"It's not a 50-50 proposition," he said. "You can change that statistic."

Meyers said that in the 10 years since he and Sullivan started enacting the marriage covenant in their community, divorce rates have dropped 40 to 50 percent in their area. He added that in the more than 100 wedding ceremonies that he's performed, only two have ended in divorce.

"I know our culture doesn't always care about what works all the time," he said. "They have more felt needs."

Meyers said that one of these felt needs is trying out marriage by living together, or cohabiting. Meyers described cohabitation as a cancer.

"It's the worst thing they can do," said Meyers. "There's not been one study that shows the



REV. JOE COTTAM (above) of St. Mark Lutheran Church in Sheboygan signs the Sheboygan County Marriage Covenant at the Mead Public Library in Sheboygan Thursday. Guest speakers pastor Leroy Sullivan (below, left) and pastor Jeff Meyers have worked together for 10 years, travelling around the country to discuss the success of the marriage covenant in their areas. — Review photos by Joelle Steffen



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The first point, encouraging active participation in the church, was elaborated on by Pastor Les Kuiper of Christian Reformed Church in Oostburg.

He said that one of the reasons for the high divorce rates among couples who marry in the church is because they're not committed church members.

"It's fairly easy to become a part of the church and people have various reasons for being a part of the church, so it's natural that they should reflect the culture," said Kuiper.

The second area is a minimum waiting period of four months from engagement to marriage.

Guest speaker Jeff Meyers of Christ Lutheran Church in Overland Park, Kan., said that he encouraged pastors to extend that

period to six months or more if they could.

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"It kind of calls attention to the significance of the covenant they are entering into upfront," said Kuiper.

Six years ago, Kuiper formed a similar covenant and worked to get Oostburg area pastors to sign on. When Lammers found out about the covenant, she undertook to involve all county pastors, forming Great Marriages for Sheboygan County.

"We're here to address the broken families and reduce divorces in this county," said Lammers.

Lammers quoted statistics saying that 86 percent of marriages in the U.S. start in the church; however, despite the origins, about half of marriages currently end in divorce.

Lammers said that since so many marriages begin in the church, then it's the church's responsibility to find the cause of these divorces and to promote stronger marriages.

Meyers and another guest speaker, Leroy Sullivan of Bread of Life Outreach Church in

Kansas City, Kan., outlined how the covenant can help area churches promote marriage.

"Divorce is a systemic problem in our society," said Meyers, "It's the root cause of almost every social ill. Getting to the root cause is dramatically the thing we need to do."

Meyers encouraged the pastors to think of each marriage as strategic.

"It's not a 50-50 proposition," he said. "You can change that statistic."

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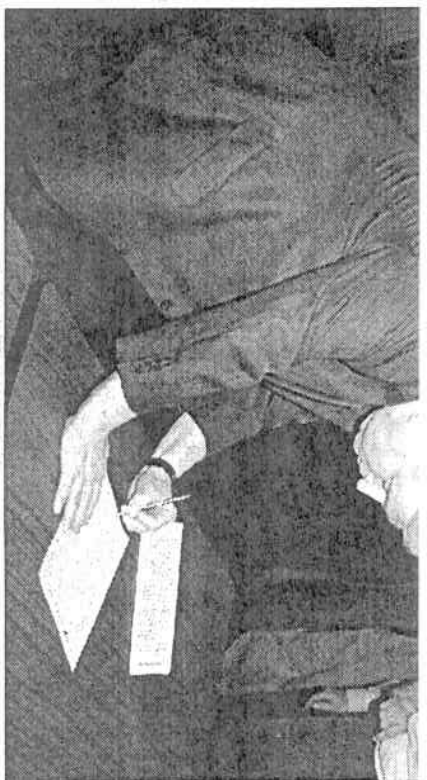
Meyers said that one of these felt needs is trying out marriage by living together, or cohabiting. Meyers described cohabitation as a cancer.

"It's the worst thing they can do," said Meyers. "There's not been one study that shows the positive effects of cohabitating before marriage."

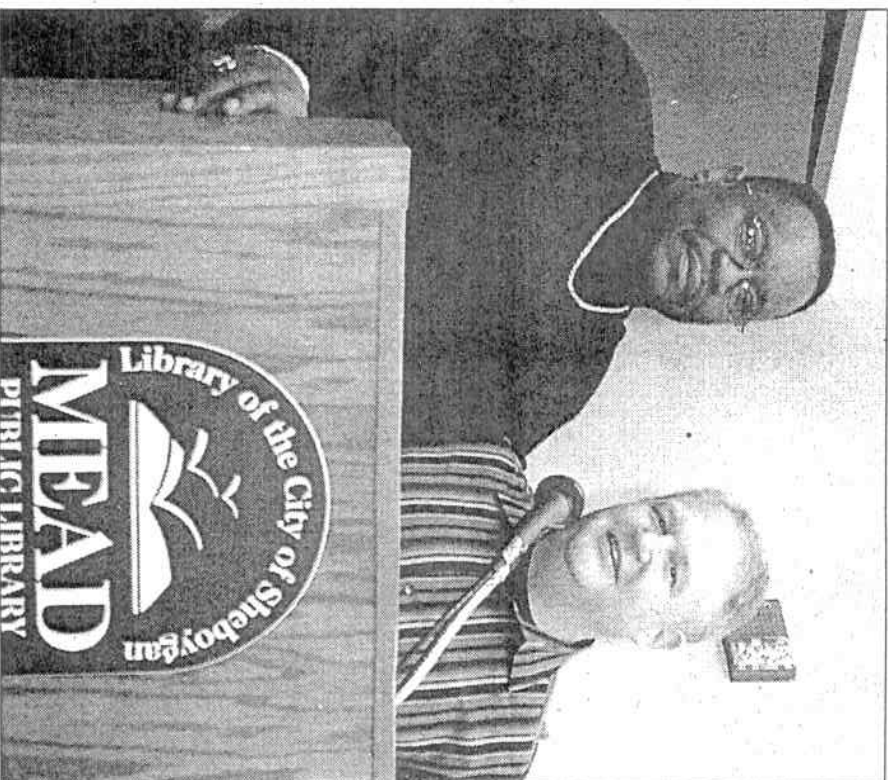
Sullivan also encouraged pastors to take a strong stand against cohabitation because it weakens the image of the church.

Meyers relates Sullivan's words, "I'll never forget what he said, 'In our culture, in our church, in our city, the church is like the emperor with no clothes. She thinks she's all that, but society looks on her, and she's

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Trumpet is her hallmark

County pastors sign marriage covenant

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transferred her union membership to the Chicago Musicians Union.

While reviewing the help-wanted ads, she noticed one placed by a trio, soliciting a trumpet player, to form a four-piece combo for performing in nightclubs. She applied and was hired.

"We played six nights a week from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m.," she said.

Benninghaus has fond memories of those gigs. One of these follows.

"I was never a drinker," she said. "The first week I was with the combo, a customer asked me if he could buy me a drink, and I said, 'No, thank you.'"

"The bartender then told me that if the owner had heard me refuse the drink, he would have fired me on the spot," Benninghaus noted. "Because that was money coming into his business. So I told the bartender that I don't drink."

"The bartender said I should not refuse any drink that was offered, but that he would put his hand over the liquor-bottle spigot and then give me just coke to drink."

She played with the combo for about a year and was then asked to join a 12-piece young women's

of 1946. She and her husband were married in 1956. They spent nine years residing in Sheboygan, before moving back to Plymouth.

In 1972, Benninghaus transferred to the former Prangeway store on the west side of Sheboygan, and transferred again in 1991 to the Prangeway store in Plymouth. She worked there until the store closed in 1996 - having spent 50 years (1946-96) with the H. C. Prange Co.

Meanwhile, in 1965, she once again joined the Plymouth City Band and has been a member since then.

Every noon of the first Tuesday in the month she plays trumpet at the Plymouth Senior Center meal site with Don Krauss, who plays the organ.

Her life's chapters have been punctuated with music. Trumpet playing does present one challenge though, she admitted.

"You have to practice to keep your lip up," she said.

Obviously, Benninghaus has succeeded at doing that for more than 72 years, when she first tooted on her \$5 trumpet.

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naked. This (the covenant) puts clothes on her."

Meyers said that if a couple lives apart during the four to six month before marriage, then the relationship will have a better chance.

"They can begin to build the skills of friendship," said Meyers.

He explained that common wisdom says that cohabitating before marriage is smart because it allows each person to see if they are compatible before marrying.

"They think they're doing the right thing," said Meyers. "They're trying to practice, but marriage is one shoe that you cannot try on before you buy it."

Meyers explains that cohabitating can develop limiting patterns of thought that follow a couple into marriage.

For example, because a cohabitating situation is a loose commitment, once married, the couple may continue to be in an "as long as this makes me happy" instead of a "to death do us part" mindset.

Meyers said that in a successful marriage, the couple isn't trying to find compatibility but building it, but that cohabitating before marriage can damage that building process.

Lammers cited statistics showing that cohabitation, even when it leads to marriage, is generally unsuccessful.

"The breakup rate of cohabitating couples is 85 percent," said Lammers. "Forty

percent of these couples break up before marriage and 45 percent divorce after marriage."

Sullivan added that this message should be brought to the cohabitating couples with love.

"We have been given the answer to the problems in our society, and we should bring them not with the stick, but with the hand of love," he said. "You can't curse those who 'you want to bless.'"

PUBLIC HEARING VILLAGE OF CASCADE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a public hearing will be held on Tuesday, March 13, 2007, at 7:30 p.m. at the Village of Cascade Hall located at 301 First Street, Cascade. The purpose of the hearing is to consider the following conditional use permit: The request submitted by Wil Dutter and Don West of Western Skies, LLC of 835 Main Street Belgium, Wisconsin for the properties located at 111 and 113 Madison Avenue, Cascade, Wisconsin, to be used for the purposes of a commercial design and photography studio.

The public is invited to attend and be heard. The Village Board will meet immediately following the public hearing to act on the conditional use request.

SHERRY GALLAGHER, CLERK
VILLAGE OF CASCADE
WNAXLP

VILLAGE OF CASCADE NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Public Hearing will be held on Monday, March 12, at 6:00 p.m. at the Village of Cascade Hall located at 301 First Street, Cascade, for the following purpose:

1. To consider granting a variance to the Congregation of Our Lady of the Lakes for the properties located at 111 and 113 Madison Avenue, Cascade, Wisconsin. The variance requested is for Fifty-one (51) feet of street frontage instead of One Hundred (100) feet of street frontage for .70 acre parcel.

Sherry Gallagher, Clerk
Village of Cascade
WNAXLP

READ FATHER'S DAY!