**Community Development Small group minutes Jan 19, 2024**

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**NAR meeting in Arizona**

WE CAN ALL DO THIS: LME couples need to model marital unity in our churches, neighborhoods, towns

**Community characteristics:**

* Must be uplifting. Leaders need to guard against toxic behaviors (gossip, destructive interactions)
* Activities should include some depth, some benefit for relationships, create a need and hunger for community membership
* Inclusive of unencountered couples not to ‘pressure’ to attend but to enjoy socializing
* Initial seeds of community begin on the weekend between presenters and rookies. We should emphasize ongoing community/ follow-up during the weekend. Plant desire for follow-up community involvement and support.
* Include 10/10… this may be the only time they use this tool

**LME experience Follow-up:**

* After LME experience its essential so new couples are encouraged and don’t feel forgotten. Phone call/ letter/email is a good start but activities (virtual or in-person) vital. The key is to develop relationships with newly encountered couples
* One suggestion is to create a new couple role, Post Weekend Contact Couple for every area/ district who would be in charge of keeping newly encountered as well as uninvolved LME couples alerted to the ways they can plug into weekend admin support, social events, journey group (in person and virtual). They would be the master of the area database of couple contact info. Ohio used to have Shepard Couples to oversee follow-up for specific couples. Introduced themselves via video on last day of encounter weekend.
* Coordinate workshop days for all couples to both reinforce and introduce LME concepts (feelings vs thoughts) Example Feb 10 3-hour virtual workshop in Ohio ‘5 Love Languages’ including small group break out to encourage interaction.
* Ohio offers a variety of events to socialize and build interest and involvement in ministry service. They have a procedure for surveying couples before they leave the weekend on “how would you like to be involved in our ministry?”
* Ohio’s secret is scheduling things the leaders themselves want to do and inviting others to join in! One example is a Covered Bridge Tour.
* Blessings of community include having a safe place to resolve conflicts within a marriage.
* Networking done in this environment can be life-saving (David Fell connected patient with brain surgeon)
* Can build motivation for a follow-up weekend (Veteran’s Weekend or Retreat).

**Overcoming obstacles:**

* Difficulties arise when one couple is doing all the work to plan, coordinate, host and lead an event/ journey meeting. Piazza’s experienced this both hosting events at home and leading a monthly virtual group. Answer is to delegate to others… while encouraging all couples to contribute and benefit from this membership.
* Many times, couples need to be invited multiple times. Get them to come once to experience community with couples.
* Create a set of steps to follow up with new couples to hold activities/ workshops. Ohio plan Journey group events to attract and retain couples (unencountered included)
* Another suggestion is for GLM website to have resource list of activity ideas to develop relationships and build community. (couples bible study, romantic dinners, sports events, annual retreats, newsletters)
* Involve the children in the development of healthier communication in a parent’s marriage. Include them in sing-off. Include child-care in weekend workshops.

* Maybe consider a National Retreat rather than International Marriage Encounter Reunion
* Kevin Guynn mentioned a book: ‘Leading with Soul’ by Terrence Deal explains how to introduce LME to established groups
* PROMOTE Online community serves a purpose for couples who have no local connections to a journey group. Goal is to have monthly virtual journey groups for every time zone (district)
* Counter resistance to community and invigorate relationships and encourage couples to prioritize connecting with others.
* Interfaith Journey groups and social events
* Use technology to combine in-person and zoom