



Church offers free class designed to enrich marriages

Monday, September 27, 2010

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Valley News Dispatch

Lost jobs, the recession, road construction and sports teams -- it all takes a toll on countless marriages, and St. Andrew's Anglican Church in New Kensington wants to help.

Supported by a federal grant, the church will offer a six-week, free marriage-enrichment class beginning Oct. 6.

"Marriages are strained because of demands and the choices out there that couples need to balance," says the Rev. John Bailey of New Kensington who has been providing pre-marital counseling for more than a decade.

He practices what he preaches as he has been married to his wife, Karen, for 17 years and has three children.

Bailey was looking for an opportunity to create a program benefiting couples, because, he says, "the ministry needs to touch needs felt in the community."

He received a letter from TWOgether Pittsburgh, a coalition of nonprofits including the National Fatherhood Initiative and the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh. TWOgether Pittsburgh is a five-year, \$8.35 million federally funded project to strengthen marriages and families in the region. The program is paid for by a grant from the Administration for Children and Families, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Earlier this year, the Pittsburgh-based group commissioned a study of 400 married individuals across Pittsburgh and found that 53 percent of the respondents said that heavy construction and traffic were a source of marital stress, as were local sports teams.

TWOgether Pittsburgh offered to take care of expenses for the marriage series at St. Andrews.

"I thought, this could be an answer to my prayers," says Bailey who has met with the Pittsburgh group and will teach its curriculum for the six classes.

There's not a divorce crisis prompting the marriage series, according to Bailey, but these have been tough times for couples to weather.

"The thing isn't so much if people are staying together, but how good are they? I want the kids to see a more stable home."

Participants in the marriage-enrichment program will take a pre- and a post-assessment of their relationship. Class topics include understanding a couples strengths, the effects of a couple's family of origin, being assertive and an examination of marital hot-button topics such as communication, conflict resolution, finance, sex and intimacy.

Bailey is quick to stress the classes will be more education-based, not "emotionally based."

"It's going to be counseling," he says. "It is not going to be overly intense. No one is going to be laying on a couch sharing deep thoughts."

The classes will be guy friendly, according to Bailey. In fact, an official from TWOgether Pittsburgh who developed the curriculum said, "There will be no man bashing."

Bailey promises to make the classes fun. "We hope the people who participate come to realize that, 'Hey, we're not the only couple that struggles,'" he says.

It's also important that the couples feel that if they work on a problem together, they have the confidence to tackle the obstacles.

Bailey encourages couples to attend all the classes and says, "you spend most of your life married to one person, and I think it's worth six nights to figure out how to make it better."

Read more: http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/valleynewsdispatch/living/s_701169.html