

## NOTES from Marriage Focus Group 7<sup>th</sup> February 2011 at St John's (Methodist).

PRESENT: Rev John Clark (Chair) SBC; Janet Stenner (SBC); Peter Halden (Chair, CTiS&D) (St Andrews); ; Rev John Boardman (St Johns); ; Ken & Chris Steel (SRC) ; Roger Pullan (St Gregory's); Syd Platt (SBC); Sue Kistruck (HTLM)/St Catherines); Peter Sebbage (St Gregory's). APOLOGIES: Godfrey Miller; Sheelagh Ruse; Tim & Joy Ayrton; Stuart Ayling; Jane Kohler; Lynda Sebbage., Marilyn Platt.

1. John C began with reading Hebrews 13 vv4-5 and prayer.
2. Notes from the Relaunch on 9<sup>th</sup> December, and a summary given to the Enabling Group, were read.
3. Thanks to Sue for the Notes of 7<sup>th</sup> Feb. She prefers not to be the Secretary. Roger will do it pro tem.
4. **Marriage Prep and Counselling:** (i) Ministers normally do this for church people and we must avoid encroaching. But non-churched often have no prep. We need to be 'out in the market place.'  
(ii) Syd outlined his proposals for Marriage Preparation & Support:
  - Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) have prepared a **Marriage Prep Course** (5 sessions) and a **Marriage Course** (7 sessions) for those already married (see attached list of topics ). Both are good: they use married couples (who have done the relevant course themselves) as presenters. To run a course here, we would need 5 couples to take part, and 2 couples as leaders. The format of these courses is like Alpha: a nice meal, presentation, then couples' discussion & addressing questions raised on issues.
  - Suggestion: try to get a number of couples to attend a day seminar at Rayleigh Baptist Church on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March. Led by the originators of the Marriage Courses. Nicky & Sila Lee. This will give them vision for the courses. Syd to send details to MS for email.
  - Don Cooper (Rayleigh BC) has run HTB courses – willing to come to speak to MFG. Maybe ask him to mentor our group in its early stages. If suitable, ask him to speak at September CTiS&D Forum.
  - **Future of 'Prepare & Enrich'?** Maybe dump it, but first discuss this with others (eg with Tim & Joy Ayrton). The 'training' for this was poor but some positive results.
  - **Professional Counselling:** Needed for those who need deeper help. Good intentions and a listening ear are no substitute when serious problems arise. Syd is in touch with Susie Donaldson at **INSPIRE** Christian Counselling centre in Ipswich. Inspire is willing to offer counselling 'surgeries' on request. We need to discuss logistics & cost with her.

**ACTION:** Syd to do this & report back to us. Syd is Rep for the Association of Christian Counsellors & has access to a database of accredited counsellors and recognised training organisations.

### (iii) OTHER POINTS MADE:

- We need to attract folks to church weddings, even if no church background. Relationships offer a real opportunity for sharing our message.
- Some newlyweds might appreciate an older couple as 'mentors'.
- The public environment today is vastly different from years ago: so many have no stable parents to be guided by, and mobility means parents are often far away. Expectations from marriage are low ('10-year contract')?
- Commitment is anathema to many people today. The role of men is also confused: no longer breadwinners. Peter S suggested that the planned MiCS conference in March might have a focus on marriage.
- There is a huge task ahead. But a journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step.
- The bible does not actually say marriages have to be in a church building (*but note: in a civil wedding, the law says no 'religious' words or songs are allowed.*)
- Celebrate long lasting marriages – eg silver weddings. Christian couples should be a demonstration of Love.

- Actively offer our Marriage Prep / support courses to non-church people as much as to church people.
  - Gay relationships are a live issue. Take care in our publicity to keep within the law, and be ready for opposition to traditional views.
5. **Publicity coordinator:** we must actively seek a suitable person to head up a small team. Use our existing CTiS&D publicity team & outlets where possible. Other points:
- Update the **Marriage Booklet**, print say 200 copies for use eg at Sudbury on Show, K&F, Council Info office etc.
  - Look into doing some Market Research: eg a questionnaire for use at events like Sud. On Show, Party in the Park, or on Market Hill, asking for views on marriage and whether a Relationship Course would be welcomed. Ask Marie Talbot if she would design a short questionnaire.
6. **Presence at MARRIAGE FAYRES:** The value of this has been questioned, but we can see the point of being present where couples may be at an early stage of thinking about where to marry. So do this if we can find people to attend. 3x2-hour sessions, usually on Sundays. Fayres are at The Mill Hotel on 13<sup>th</sup> March and Stoke by Nayland (Golf Club?) on April 17<sup>th</sup>. Stoke costs £100. Mill cost: TBA.
7. **'EXPLORE'** schools programme. John B. has seen the Explore video and is happy to take this into local schools, as/when agreed by the Heads. He has introit to Sudbury & Cornard Upper schools, and Uplands & All Saints Middle Schools. He will need couples to join his team. Some will be mature in age: offers already from Stenners and Sebbages. Syd and Marilyn Platt have previously been used by "Students exploring marriage" & offer their services. Invite Copemans. Younger couples also needed: Stuart & Jude Ayling probably willing (Stuart has done this in London schools); look around for others, nearer teens' age.
8. **Royal Wedding:** Could be a point of reference for us in highlighting marriage but time is short.
9. **AOB:** Roger has spoken to Tim Ayrton to clarify some issues. We want No 72 to be part of our total programme.
10. **NEXT MEETING: 11<sup>th</sup> April (time and location not finalised)**

### **SUMMARY: AGREED ACTIONS:**

1. Syd will co-ordinate our agendas for both marriage preparation AND marriage support
2. ADVERTISE for couples to go to Rayleigh on 26<sup>th</sup> March. CTiS&D can fund anyone who needs it. *(Syd to prepare a Note to circulate, with poster, via MS)*
3. Syd to ask Don Cooper to come to an MFG meeting *(the April one??)*
4. Roger & Peter H will work together on updating the MF Booklet.
5. Have a MFG presence at Sudbury on Show (18<sup>th</sup> March); maybe also at Party in the Park. *(Who will do this?)*
6. Ask Marie Talbot if she would design a short questionnaire *(Roger or Peter H.)*.
7. Look into having more books on Relationships / Marriage available to the public. *(Suggestions to Roger)*.
8. Discuss our strategy re gay relationships, at next meeting.
9. Advertise for people to run a stall at local Wedding Fayres: feed names to John C. Janet & Sue can show them what to do. *(John C to prepare a Note for M Snow to circulate?)*
10. John B. will contact his schools about possibilities for the 'Explore' programme. Look for couples willing to join the team. JB to invite Ian & Joy Copeman to join the team.
11. John C will meet with Tim & Joy to discuss mutual cooperation, and clarify what level of counselling expertise is on offer at No 72.