

A Quick Poll: “How many of you received PMC?” “What was it like?” “What did it consist of?”

Opening Case Study

- You are talking with members after a Sunday gathering a couple come to you all excited and share they just got engaged! They ask you to do their PMC because they want you to officiate their wedding. The man is a member and his fiancé is not.
- After learning more about their story through their PMC inventories, you assign them to a trained PMC couple that will be a good match for both couples.
- A week later, you get a call from the ministry leader who is doing the PMC for this young couple. He stutters and stammers, then briefly explained the awkward and difficult first session with the engaged couple, then launched with a million questions.
- The couple was 30 minutes late—they didn’t say a word,
- The woman started to cry because she just got into an argument with her mom about the wedding and her fiancé just added to the stress. She went on to say she is not sure if the wedding should go on as scheduled ...
- As they told their story, they shared they both came from divorced homes and don’t really understand marriage. The woman also shared she was sexually abused in middle school.
- On top of all of this, at the end of the session when asked about their physical boundaries, they ashamedly admitted they have not been able to control themselves sexually for the past 3 months. She cited their physical encounters made her wonder if he really loved her or is he just driven by lust.
- By the way, the man shared that he can’t control himself sexually since he struggled with pornography since 12 years old.

Issues and Questions to Address for PMC

Pushback Issues (what issues or questions are involved in each?)

1. What is the big deal about PMC—isn’t 1-2 sessions with me enough, because I don’t have more time to give than that.
2. Do you know how many couples are getting married in my church?
3. Why can’t my college minister or single’s minister do all of the PMC?
4. Why didn’t I learn about PMC in seminary?
5. Why can’t I just send them to another church where there is a quarterly group approach to PMC?
6. What kind of time commitment are we talking about here? Aren’t people busy enough with their own work schedules on top of church schedules?
7. Why is this a vital ministry? Where does the bible say a couple needs PMC?
8. What are the long-term benefits of putting in so much time and energy in starting a PMC ministry?

Process Questions

1. Ministry Leaders
 - a. Which couple(s) should I ask to help in this ministry?

Marriage Track—Pre-Martial Counseling (PMC) Ministry

Robert K. Cheong—Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, KY

- b. What does it look like for a seasoned couple to train a couple learning how to do PMC?
 - c. Should only the pastor performing the ceremony do PMC?
2. Counseling Particulars
 - a. What happens when a couple let's you know their wedding date is on 6 weeks? What are the sessions that I need to get in before their wedding?
 - b. What about personality tests or compatibility tests? What do you think about PREP or Prepare?
3. Counseling Process
 - a. Are there clear warning signs for couples that shouldn't be married? What are they? What authority do you carry in suggesting they not?
 - b. How would you approach premarital counseling with unbelievers?
 - c. What are the red flags might indicate that a couple should postpone or cancel the wedding? Is that even something I should be helping them decide?
 - d. What should be different if one or both of the individuals has been divorced?
4. Training
 - a. How do you do PMC? How do I train our people? What topics should I cover?
 - b. What resources do you recommend? How do I get everyone on the same page? Often time people are asking for one book that they can use as a guide to provide PMC.
5. Church and Community
 - a. Why is community so important throughout the journey—from the dating, pre-engagement, engagement, and post-wedding?
 - b. How/when should the parents be involved?
 - c. What amount of confidentiality should be kept, e.g. if the couple confesses to pre-marital sex?

A Biblical Vision of the Church and Our Mission

(Ephesians 4:11-16) *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Background

- Back in 2004, Sojourn asked Karen and me if we would come and train 12 couples because the pastors could not keep up with increasing number of engaged couples.
- Stats—30 couples engaged and married per year (with a membership of 650, average age is 28 years old). 17 couples trained—elders/staff/group coaches/CGLs
- Goal for 2009 is to re-produce another PMC training couple
- Tough to provide dating-type counseling—so much flux and drama mixed with immaturity. See "Questions to Ask Before Getting Engaged" at counseling.sojournchurch.com

Rationale for Training PMC couples

- Great first step into marriage ministry. PMC is like labor and delivery and marriage counseling is like the ER.

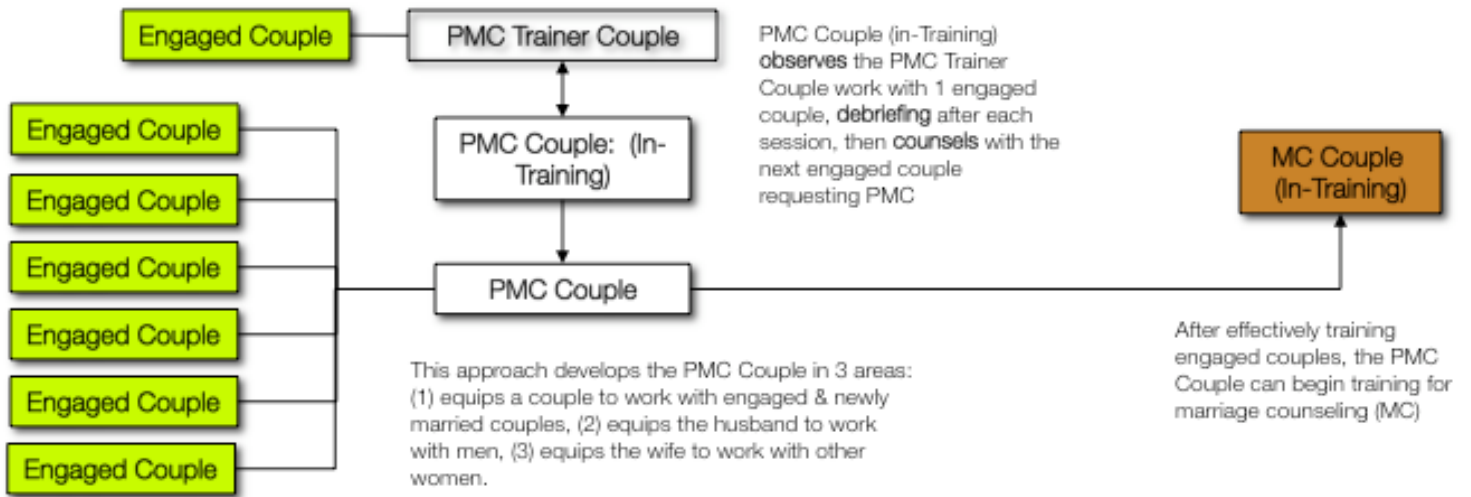
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- Trains both husband and wife—as a couple, as a man, as a woman in issues like:
 - Gospel vision of marriage—as God created, designed, and purposed
 - Biblical manhood and womanhood issues—spiritual leadership, submission, gender differences
 - Spiritual dynamics—as you explore and understand their relationship with God individually and as a couple, how they respond to the realities of life and relationship—issues of the heart—unbelief and kingdom of self
 - Relational dynamics—exploring the heart of the other, family background issues, conflict—confession, forgiveness and love—marriage as a means of gospel change
 - Marriage bed issues
- The basics of marriage covered throughout PMC provides a solid foundation for marriage counseling
- The engaged couple benefits—male/female dynamics, husband/wife dynamics—examples
 - The husband calls out the man for not leading in various aspects in the relationship—ranging from conflict, relationship not centered on Christ, physical boundaries, not preparing to provide—job, insurance, etc.
 - The wife calls out the woman for being overly controlling—not a spirit of submission, disrespecting him, etc.
 - The husband calling out the woman—disrespectful and contemptuous attitude
 - The wife calling out the man—ignoring his fiancé’s fears surrounding protection and provision
- Done in the home—practice hospitality—takes on a variety of forms

Process of Training PMC couples

- Profile of PMC trainees
 - Married at least 5 years
 - Both husband and wife are striving to live out the gospel
 - Functional leader in the church—Group Coaches, Counseling couples, Community Group Leaders
- They shadow a PMC trainer for all 6 sessions—2 hours of PMC + 30 minutes of debrief—question training couple about “content” and “process”
- Despite the celebration of engagement, give a serious charge—the Lord has entrusted this couple to you
 - Don’t be afraid to challenge and probe—we all can struggle with “fear of man.” You will be amazed how deep you can go with a couple in 6 sessions with gospel intentionality by the grace of the Holy Spirit
 - The couple really wants accountability regarding their physical boundaries—
 - Temptation increases after engagement
 - Case—couple engaged in pre-marital sex



Process of PMC with engaged couples

- Note this is not pre-engagement counseling
- 6 sessions spaced at least a week apart, ideally spaced 2 weeks apart—allow time for real life to happen so that it serves as the context for learning and growing
- Review the 8-page inventory to see potential or actual “red flags”
- See Syllabus and PMC Guidelines in appendix

Lessons Learned

- Community is a great filter for helping to “screen” the couple, man, and woman—like family! I imagine those who have a son or daughter who is dating, getting married, or married have some thoughts about this point!
- Wait until all paperwork is submitted before assigning a PMC couple—one way you ensure you get the inventories before your first session
- Equip PMC’s to deal with situations when a member is marrying a non-member—sometimes an issue of conversion—sometimes an issue of language—sometimes an issue of spiritual maturity.
- Just because a couple has been married for many years doesn’t make them a better candidate to serve as a PMC couple

Areas for Growth

- Intentional follow-up with the PMC couple or another older couple
- Integrate financial counseling in a more rigorous way
- Equip the father/mother of the bride/groom for the transition involving “release” as daughter/son “leave and cleave”