

Adopting a Successful Strategy for Marriage/Family

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

Jesus said we are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Then that would make the church the salt shaker. Salt keeps things from rotting. God is calling the church to spread the salt...to stop the rot in our society.

Looking at what has been happening to families since the sixties; you can't help but see that the very foundations of the family are rotting away. While the divorce rate of 50% remains about the same since 1975, the number of unmarried couple households has multiplied ten times over. There were about 500,000 unmarried couple households in 1970. By 2005, that number had increased to around 5,000,000.¹ The so called "progressive" voices proclaiming "Marriage is dead... obsolete!" have almost succeeded in their agenda – in only one generation. But **marriage is God's idea**, His creation. It is the foundation of the family, and that's why it is under such heavy assault.

Marriage and the family in our society have never needed "salt" more than they do right now! However, **the hard reality is that the divorce rate is the same inside the church as it is in the world.**² The rot is not only 'out there' – it is 'in here'! The church needs to *look honestly* at this serious condition and address it effectively. Something has to change or we will not be able to stem the tide of divorce in the church any more than in the world. But if we successfully help couples in the church build strong marriages and families, *they* will spread the salt in the world and help preserve the marriages of their friends and families.

We must strengthen the foundation of the family—the couple – for when the foundation is strong, the whole structure will be sound. But **how can a church strengthen couples?** Does simply waiting until a couple is having problems and reacting with counseling truly strengthen the

foundation? Doesn't it make more sense to proactively make the foundation strong and secure *before* it starts to crumble? We know of no better way to do this than by helping each couple discover their mission as God's team. When a husband and wife **discover the purpose God has for them as His Team**, they can have a shared mission. When a couple owns a shared mission, they will walk in the same direction, together on the same path.

So...**where do we start?** We start with that "honest look." Every church desiring to make a difference in the marriages and families in their congregation must first sit down and honestly, even brutally, **evaluate every program they offer in light of how it affects the family.** Does the program help or hinder families to bond together? Does it separate the couple, or does it unite them? Does it help husbands and wives discover their mission as God's Team, or fragment them into individual positions in order to fill the empty slots and keep the programs running?

Evaluate every program by how it affects the family.

Too often, our church programs pull spouses in different directions instead of drawing them together. Suppose we need to fill a position in the youth department and another in children's church. Our tendency is to ask one spouse to serve in the youth department and the other in children's church... right? But what if we asked them what their mission (or calling) was **as a couple**, and if serving in one or the other of these ministries would be part of that mission? Serving as a couple would help **draw them together as a Team, and benefit the church** by being more effective in *their* ministry. This couple would also impact other couples in the church by

modeling what a Godly husband and wife Team looks like.

Aquila and Priscilla are a classic example of a couple in Scripture who had discovered their mission as God's Team. We first meet them in Acts 18:1-4. They are Jewish refugees from Rome, living in Corinth. Tentmakers like Paul, they open their home and business to him, for he lived and worked with them while he stayed in Corinth to preach the gospel. Verse 11 tells us Paul stayed at least one and a half years in Corinth. That's a long time to keep a house guest but, as far as we know, Aquila and Priscilla did just that.

If Aquila and Priscilla had written their mission statement, it would have read something like this: To serve God together with an open home for spreading the Gospel and making disciples for Jesus Christ.

Look at how everything they did had that singleness of purpose. In Acts 18:18-19, they accompanied Paul to Syria. They literally pulled up stakes (tentmakers, remember?) and moved lock, stock and barrel to Ephesus, where they stayed to help that fledgling church. Again we find them opening their home, this time to the church in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19).

One Saturday, they were in the synagogue and heard a new arrival to Ephesus speak. Apollos was a...*learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.... When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.* (Acts 18:24-26 NIV) They invited him home, probably to dinner, and filled him in on 'the rest of the story.' In fact, they must have had him over many times and mentored him in the ways of the Lord extensively, because by the time he arrived in

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Achaia, he... *vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.* (vv. 27-28 NIV)

There is one more mention of Aquila and Priscilla we'd like you to look at in Romans 16:3-5. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.* (NIV) We don't know how this couple risked their lives for Paul. Perhaps it was during the riot in Ephesus, which exploded one time when Paul was preaching. Whenever it was, we all owe them our gratitude for risking their lives to save Paul's. This truly was **a couple on mission!** In fact, they were risking their lives on a daily basis when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. They had fled Rome years earlier, during the reign of Claudius Caesar. When they moved back to Rome, Claudius' son Nero was in power. You remember Nero...the Emperor who lit up Christians as torches for his garden parties. *Every Christian...every Jew...was in danger every day under Nero.* Yet a Christian church met in their home! We can only imagine the magnitude of the risk they were taking. But they knew they were God's Team. And because of that, they were ready to **go anywhere He led; anytime He directed; and do anything He called them to do!**

Wouldn't you like to have a church full of couples like that? Couples who

know God's calling on them as His very own Team?

Encourage couples to serve the Lord together as His Team.

Bill and Bridget Dunk, a young couple on staff with us at GTO Marriage and Family Ministries, already knew they were God's Team when we first met them in June 2005. They were sold out to God and to their mission. They told us their passion was to serve God by preparing engaged couples to build strong marriages God's way. We asked them, "Might God want to stretch your mission a little to include married couples?" They didn't think so, but were open to His direction.

Since then, they have become the Marriage Leaders in their home church. This past spring, they held their first Marriage Tune Up conference and saw God do amazing things in couples' lives through them. They are an effective Team that serves in ministry in their church, as well as in GTO, as they teach and coach pre-married **and married couples** how to build strong, Christ-centered marriages according to God's blueprint. In fact, that's their new mission statement... stretched a little bit by God.

Having a church full of couples like this requires a paradigm shift in our thinking. We must start re-thinking our church programs, evaluating them in light of the impact they have on the couples and families we serve.

Programs that disconnect rather than unite couples and families need to be thrown out in favor of something that will draw couples and families together. We should start thinking of each couple as a Team, and treating them as such, by **encouraging them to serve the Lord as His Team.**

This won't be an overnight process. Not only must we be open to the Holy Spirit **retraining us**, but we need to proactively train the couples we serve to **become the Team God wants them to be.** This will include...

(1) Teaching them that **they are indeed a Team**, just like Jesus said in Matthew 19:6 – *So they are no longer two, but one.* (NIV) This is a completely new concept to most Christian couples.

(2) After they wrap their minds around that truth, help them learn to pray together, seeking God for *His call* on their lives as *His Team*. What mission is He giving them?

(3) Encourage them to write their mission statement in a plain, understandable way.

Then couples will be able to evaluate **everything in light of their mission** – every activity, every ministry request, and every program they consider. This will prevent detours and give them a sense of fulfillment and bonding like they've never experienced before. And your church will be full of committed couple Teams – God's Teams – like Aquila and Priscilla.

¹ www.biblenews1.com/marriage

² www.barna.org

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