

Church provides alternatives to singles bars

By Richard Lech
staff writer

The statistics are grim. Half of all marriages end in divorce. Seventy percent of all second marriages fail. And 90 percent of all third marriages don't last.

Andy Morgan, the new minister to single adults at Ward Presbyterian Church in Livonia, figures it doesn't have to be that way.

Morgan said that by taking an active role, churches can help change those statistics for the better. It has been shown nationally that churches that offer a singles ministry, premarital counseling and a divorce-recovery program can help cut those statistics to below 10 percent, he said.

"As a church, we have two choices," Morgan said. "We can sit back and watch and shake our heads or we can jump into the community and work with the community in this area to make a difference."

WARD CHURCH took the plunge nearly a decade ago with its Single Point Ministries.

Single Point has offered a variety of support services for singles, including twice-yearly divorce-recovery workshops, special seminars and social activities. A key part of the program has been marriage counseling that helps couples decide if they really are ready to tie the knot.

Single Point has become a singular success, drawing people from a 60-mile radius, Morgan said. Its Sunday school singles fellowship regularly draws from 300 to 375 singles. Single Point also brings in big crowds to its Friday-night special events, which include group discussions, speakers and concerts.

One of the most exciting things about this ministry is the ownership that the singles have of it," Morgan said. "It's their ministry. It's not me, or Tim (a previous minister) or anybody else coming in and doing the ministry. They come in and say, 'We'd like to do this.' We just give them an avenue where this can be done."

MORGAN ASSUMED the singles minister position Nov. 1 after Tim Jackson left to start a singles ministry at a 6,000-member church in Phoenix, Ariz. Morgan said he plans to continue the successful Single Point ministry, while adding some new twists of his own.

Since coming to Ward, he has helped



ART EMANUELE/Staff photographer

Andy Morgan lived the singles life, owned a bar and became an alcoholic before turning to Christianity. Now he directs a program for singles at Ward Presbyterian Church in Livonia.

start Focus groups, small groups that meet throughout the geographic area served by the ministry and involve the members in Bible discussion and civic projects. He also has been instrumental in adding a drama group that is working closely with the ministry's musical group.

Morgan said he brings an unorthodox viewpoint to the ministry because of his background. Before becoming a Christian and entering the ministry, Morgan was heavily involved in the "swinging singles" lifestyle.

HE LIVED in a huge singles com-

plex and owned a singles bar outside of Chicago.

"I guess my early adult life was centered around singles," he said.

But when his life in the fast lane led to alcoholism, Morgan sought out another way of life and found it in religion. Today, he sees programs such as Single Point Ministries as an alternative to the singles bar scene he knows only too well.

"Its focus is Christian, with the emphasis on wholeness. We emphasize that one is a whole number, and that you don't need someone else to fulfill you. You don't have to be on this con-

stant search for fulfillment. "Most of the people who come here on a regular basis do not see this as a dating service. They look at it more in the realm of developing friendships and some support. It's not that people don't date and develop relationships, but it's done without the pressure of having to do it."

THIS FOCUS on "wholeness" is a key to the marriage counseling Morgan offers through the program. He requires that anyone wishing to be married by him go through a minimum of eight weeks of counseling.

"I believe that if a person makes that kind of commitment and that kind of communication with one another and has the freedom to be open in front of that third person, then they've got an excellent chance of making it."

During his years of counseling at other churches, Morgan has found that about 20 percent of the couples decide to either cancel the engagement or at least postpone the marriage until they feel they're really ready for it.

"Then they're able to enter the marriage or engagement without the pressure that, 'You have to meet my needs,' and enter with the feeling that, 'I'm going to help you grow as an individual' and there's a world of difference between the two."

MORGAN SAID he usually won't even consider marrying a divorced person until at least two years after the divorce. Statistics show that most marriages made during that time period — made on the "rebound" — end up in failure. It normally takes some time for a person to untangle his or her own identity from the other person they've been bound up with for so long.

"It takes a period of one to two years to really realize who you are as an individual."

Yet Morgan feels going through the extensive counseling will help make the marriage work out much better the second or third time around.

"THEY'VE ESTABLISHED lines of communication that maybe, weren't there in the first relationship."

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No longer single, Morgan and his wife, Gwen, have a 16-month-old son, Mitch. Morgan earned a degree in theological and historical studies at Oral Roberts University and did work toward a master's of divinity degree at McCormick Theological Seminary, Northern Baptist Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Seminary.

He served as the pastor of single adults at churches in Tulsa, Okla., and Chicago, where he had a singles radio

discussion show. He also is a member of the National Association of Single Adult Leaders.

He first became involved in singles ministerial work when one of his college professors asked him to help start a singles ministry at his church.

"Now I really can't see myself doing anything else," Morgan said. "The level of openness, honesty and intimacy shared by single adults is just exciting."

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