

# The Washington Times

Contact the National Marriage Week Executive Director Sheila Weber at [sheila@letsstrengthenmarriage.org](mailto:sheila@letsstrengthenmarriage.org) for more information.

## Pro-marriage campaign grows

Washington Times, January 19, 2010

By Cheryl Wetzstein

In my years of writing about family issues, I've often encountered a dissing of marriage.

Marriage is viewed by critics as a man-made arrangement that is good for men and bad for women. Some say its demands for monogamy are biologically unnatural; others say its promises of "happily ever after" are a myth. In many circles, marriage is something wise people avoid.

For those Americans who don't feel that way about marriage, the cavalry finally may be on its way.

In November, a national campaign called Let's Strengthen Marriage was formed with the goal of getting marriage onto the "national agenda."

The campaign recently held a webinar aimed at encouraging tens of thousands of houses of worship to celebrate National Marriage Week, Feb. 7 through 14.

Religious leaders also were challenged to immediately set up dating and courtship seminars for youth, marriage preparation education for teens and singles and marriage enrichment courses for married couples.

A concerted marriage revival in America's foundational Christian community could lead to a "great awakening" for America, said Jim Garlow, senior pastor at Skyline Church in San Diego, on the Jan. 13 Let's Strengthen Marriage webinar.

"The question constantly arises, can America be saved. The answer is yes, only when we save our marriages first," said the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, who promised to encourage the 25,000 congregations in the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference to mobilize around marriage.

W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, said that the "fortunes of the church basically rise and fall with the fortunes of married families in this country." That's because married couples with children are 62 percent more likely to attend church than childless singles, he explained. Strong families also socialize children into religious traditions and "orient adults to the moral, social and spiritual goods found in these traditions."

With so many adult children of divorce coming of age, a renewed focus on marriage in the faith community is imperative, said Elizabeth Marquardt, director of the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values.

In research for her book "Between Two Worlds," Mrs. Marquardt found that many children of divorce lost confidence in God and their faith. In a real sense, she said, divorce doesn't just break up a family, it "drives children away from the church."

"We cannot stand by and watch marriage collapse," said Chuck Stetson, an investment banker and chairman of the Let's Strengthen Marriage campaign. The decline of marriage in America and the rise of unwed childbearing should galvanize people of faith to step up, he said. "Defeatism is not an option."

The screenshot shows the Washington Times website interface. At the top, the newspaper's name is displayed in a large, stylized font. Below it, there are navigation links for various sections like Home, News, Opinion, Sports, Culture, Communities, etc. The main content area features the article title "WETZSTEIN: Pro-marriage campaign grows" by Cheryl Wetzstein. A small portrait of Cheryl Wetzstein is visible next to the article text. To the right of the article, there are promotional banners for "Deal Of The Day" featuring tulips and roses, and a "Top Stories" section. The bottom right corner features an Allstate logo.

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Others who have aligned themselves with the campaign are Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, and Christopher West of the Theology of the Body Institute. The rise in the U.S. prison population is "insane," Mr. Colson said; "we have got to get marriage right." The Theology of the Body Institute is spreading Pope John Paul II's messages about the powerful, redemptive quality of marital love between a man and a woman. Bishop Harry Jackson, senior pastor of Hope Christian Church in the District, closed the webinar by urging congregations not to allow marriage to be "redefined."

As someone who has been writing about America's "marriage renaissance" since the mid-1990s, when Smart Marriages founder Diane Sollee claimed that term, I am intrigued by what might happen if America's faith communities really realized their capacity to assist men and women in their quest for strong, stable, happy marriages and families.

The Let's Strengthen Marriage campaign summed up the merits of marriage in nine words: "Financial stability. Better health. Less troubled kids. Greater happiness."

I would add a 10th word, "Amen."

• Cheryl Wetzstein can be reached at [atcwetzsteinwashingtontimes.com](mailto:atcwetzsteinwashingtontimes.com)