



Web site designed to help marriages stay strong

Chaplain Ernest P. Jay West (center) performs a "Reaffirmation of the Marriage Covenant" with his wife, Pam. At left are Sgt. Jonathan and Mary Fleenor; on the right are Capt. Erick and Lisa Segarra. Photo by Mike DuBose.

**A UMNS Feature by Kathy L. Gilbert*
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Marriage starts looking dismal if you are gazing through lenses focused on the rich and famous. Think David Letterman or South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford. The roving eyes of the Tiger (Woods, that is) make him just the latest "serial adulterer" to fall from grace.

But if you step back and look at marriage through the lenses of faith, it can be a blessing, said one United Methodist pastor who has spent years developing an online marriage assessment designed to bring couples closer together.

The Rev. Jay Tenney, pastor of Barnesville First United Methodist Church, said long-lasting relationships must be created in God's image. The key to a lifetime of happiness, he said, can be found in Galatians, Thessalonians and Ecclesiastes.

- Galatians 5:13: Serve one another in love.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11: Encourage one another and build each other up.
- Ecclesiastes 4:12: A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

"I think that what we see on TV is definitely playing a factor in the acceptance of infidelity. It sometimes seems that being unfaithful is glamorized, while the costs and consequences of infidelity are minimized. Divorce is often portrayed as a quick and easy option," Tenney said.



Rev. Jay Tenney

Tenney said he has found many couples want to improve their marriages, but need help finding the right resources. *"I have also found that a lot of people may not seek out counselors or pastors when they need help,"* he said. *"However, in today's world many of them are willing to go online. With this in mind, I developed a marriage coaching Web site called MyMarriageCoach.com."*

The Web site has a quiz designed to give couples a *"quick snapshot of their relationship,"* Tenney explained. Each person answers 100 questions that evaluate key areas of marriage, including faith, finances and communication. After they complete the quiz, the couple gets a report that includes a relationship profile that points to the strengths and weakness of the marriage. They also get a targeted list of resources based on their profile.

Couples are encouraged to share what they have discovered with pastors or counselors. *"It isn't intended to be a substitute for professional counseling, or for couples whose marriages are in crisis,"* Tenney said. Quiz takers answer questions like *"My husband values my opinions"* or *"My wife supports me spiritually."* *"As a pastor, I'm also excited about how the site challenges couples to consider what role God and the church plays in their marriages,"* he said.

"Response to the site has been incredible," he said. An article about the site was posted on the North Georgia Annual Conference Web site in November and two local newspapers wrote articles about the site in early December. Since that time, more than 170 couples have signed up to take the assessment. *"This affirmed the tremendous need for this type of resource and that huge numbers of couples are out there searching for help online,"* Tenney said.

The most important ingredient to a strong marriage is God, he said. *"God unites couples in marriage. If we allow God to be the center of our relationships, God will help hold everything together."*

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