Ruptured and fractured family relationships are so common that almost no one can claim to be unaffected by divorce. The staggering increases in the national divorce rate during the last decade have left us with good reason to conclude that the "typical American family" is a family in the process of degenerating. Much of the effort and energy of government is currently focused on remedial and compensatory programs to aid victims of families which are ailing or have collapsed. Family-maintenance education and marriage and family counseling are close to the very core of contemporary pastoral priorities.

No one would be helped much by finding a place to lay the blame for this unfortunate phenomenon. Some very vocal people in our society are even applauding the demise of the family. At best, we can say that many of those who do choose to marry have entered that union poorly prepared for the pressures and responsibilities which they are sure to encounter.

Couples anticipating marriage at Fort Lewis and its surrounding communities have easy access to a progressive and vital alternative to ill-begun marriages. The Marriage Preparation Course is a continuing group preparation program sponsored by the Fort Lewis chaplains.

Background of the Program

Post-wide marriage preparation classes began at Ft. Lewis in 1971 under the aegis of its creator, Chaplain (CPT) Tom Smith. The original format for the course, still adhered to, included four evening sessions in any given month. Each session, lasting two hours, covered a different aspect of the marriage relationship. Completion of the course required attendance at each of the four classes, though not necessarily in sequence.

While records for the beginning years of the program are no longer available, we know that 200 participated in the program in 1973, and slightly over 300 in 1974. The completion rate for both years was around fifty percent.

The initial success of the course could be attributed both to the devotion of its originator and to the strong support of the program from the Post Chaplain. In 1972 it became a post policy for all couples, who

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