

## Intimacy Marriage Communion

*Each person must come to rejoice in their perennial garden, with its buds and leaves and blossoms growing at their own pace. Timing is everything. There is a window of opportunity set before each of us. How we use that window of opportunity makes a world of difference in our marriages. When all is said and done, what will matter is that we gave our whole hearts to marriage.*

*When we give our whole hearts in marriage, we take delight in giving. When the joy of giving leaves the marriage, giving in to intimacy follows. To give is an expression of one's willingness to share with another. When spouses are willing to share secrets of their hearts out of a caring spirit, genuine love is evidence; moreover, trust is built, and the marriage is sustainable. A lack of trust in marriage leads to giving in instead of giving. To give in is to respond to a seductive stimulus, too often driven by coercion. When a spouse gives out of a sense of duty or even fear, the whole heart is not in the giving. To give in is to come around to, but to give is to initiate.*

### Introduction

As a teenager growing up a half century ago in a small Georgia town, my generation was steeped in a dual morality regarding sex and marriage. This schism produced adults who preached one thing and practiced another. On the one hand, it was taught that “good girls” didn’t “mess around.” On the other hand, it was said, “boys will be boys”; they were expected to “sow their wild seed.” Society tolerated, if not encouraged, “bad girls” *giving in* to boys in premarital sex, but “good girls” were supposed to *give* themselves in marriage. In church, however, we learned that premarital sex was wrong for girls and boys and marriage was a holy institution, whereby making vows before God was to be taken seriously. As a consequence of the holy marriage, we were told that the bed was undefiled. Can you see the morality duality? The same adults, who were sexually permissive outside of church, were also strict to a fault in church regarding what they allowed, clearly evidencing a dual morality. This moral duality also expressed itself in the broader society in terms of how the roles of males and females were perceived. Consequently, I was left wondering if I was free to choose the moral precept for Sunday, living the permissive morality during the rest of the week.

To confound the matter, the permissive practice of dating was sanctioned. Girls were allowed to date as early as 14 or 15, though most parents required a chaperone, often a younger sister who conveniently disappeared at the high time of the date. By age 16, even among stricter parents, girls were allowed some dates without little sister tagging along. Dating, however, generally excluded having sex, but kissing and caressing were tolerated. “Good girl” dating often led to the “bad girl” and boy sexual relationships. While the good girls knew how far to go, and boys generally respected their wishes,

(though not without testing their character), the boys often turned to “bad girls” to sow their wild oats primed by “good girls.”

This paper examines the politics of dating to show how the moral duality exercised in the dating game has had a profound adverse effect upon marriages. For instance, when boys came of age and married “good girls,” the permissive practices in which they were previously engaged trumped Sunday morality. Consequently, they continued their relationships with the “bad girls.” When their marriages ran and now run into problems because the illicit sexual exploits of the husband are made known to their wives, they respond in two ways: putting up with their husbands’ unfaithfulness, as an act of pseudo forgiveness or engaging in an extra marital liaison as payback to their husbands. Both responses suggest that the fate of the marriage depends more upon the behavior of the wives rather than upon that of the husbands.

On the one hand, women, for centuries, have been trained in domesticity. Women were expected to uphold the values of stability, morality, and democracy by making the home a special place for their husbands. This could include overlooking the husband’s indiscretions. Consequently, the responsibility fell upon the wives to “save face” and, likewise, save their marriages. On the other hand, should the wives engage in a extra-marital affairs in response to their husbands’ affairs, marriages could easily fall apart, not because of the husbands’ lack of faithfulness, but because the wives themselves are being unfaithful.

Many wives hope that their husbands will change. In some cases, the couples seek to work out their marital problems via counseling, but the counselors sought all too often were the same ones practicing the dual sexual morality mentioned previously. If the couple seeks out counselors in their churches, the couple is likely given a Sunday morality message that married people abstained from sex outside of marriage, and that marriage was a commitment between two consenting adults of the opposite sex to love, cherish, honor, and even obey, in sickness and in health until death.

The hypocrisy or amorality of my childhood ushered in a call for even greater freedom to express sexuality in the manner of choice with whoever is chosen. The Sunday morality, exposed as hypocrisy however, brought about a change of behavior among many couples who did not wish to be seen as hypocrites. They sought to perfect their marriages by becoming perfect wives or husbands in their spouses and society’s eyes. Perfectionism (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) has been defined three dimensionally to include: 1) Self-oriented perfectionism where the individual requires the self to be perfect; 2) Other-oriented perfectionism is interpersonal where others are required to be perfect (Hewitt & Flett, 1991); and 3) Socially prescribed perfectionism as a belief that others hold unrealistic expectations for the self. Individuals holding to this view seek to meet these unrealistic expectations, not being satisfied unless they are able to do so. It is related to hostile-dominant characteristics (Hill, Zrull, & Turlington, 1997). These three dimensions of trait perfectionism have been known to cause a wide variety of problems including depression, anxiety, personality disorders, suicidal ideation and

attempts, eating disorders, and migraine headaches (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Rather than solving the marital problem, perfectionism exacerbates it.

In addition to the various mental and physical effects perfectionism can have on the body, they also can put a strain on a marriage, inadvertently causing the bond to demise. Most of us know of marriages where one spouse may say they love their husband/wife but they cannot tolerate him/her. One reason may be found in traits of perfectionism. The one who is practicing perfection can't seem to get the other to carry out the same mission. As a result, one or the other will soon begin to despise or even hate the other. This is one of the most difficult types of situation to rectify in a marriage because it requires both parties to examine themselves thoroughly, as well as, their having a desire for the marriage to work. In a study of 76 recently conjoining couples, published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, when one partner was a perfectionist, both felt unsatisfied and less able to adjust to marriage. Perfectionism (being demanding and overbearing) is a personality trait many experts consider inherited.

In this paper, intimacy is discussed as an illicit or unlawful practice. My argument is simply that when couples seek this aspect of intimacy, they seek the unlawful. Rather than an intimate relationship, I argue for communion or fellowship in marriage. I begin with a discussion on traditional morality and the changing values over the course of my childhood to adulthood, a period spanning 60 years. The section entitled, "Unlawful Desire then Seduction afterward Intimacy," follows this section. In it, intimacy is defined as a euphemism for illicit sexual relations. Intimacy begins with a questionable desire which is nurtured by a serpentine or seductive process. In the next section I argue for a transition from intimacy to marriage to communion and examine several types of marriage. Afterwards, "The Basis of Successful Marriage" as espoused by The Ellison Model follows with a definition of the Model and reveals how its inclusive community building values can assist individuals in transforming their marital lives. Finally, a fresh approach to resolving marital conflict concludes the discussion.

### **Traditional Marital Morality and Changing Sex Values**

Traditional marital morality has taken a beating due to the belief that it prevents sexual pleasure because it is said to focus solely on procreation in marriage. Today's morality is said to reflect an age of sexual enlightenment because frozen stored up desires of shackled individuals have been liberated. The old marital morality is said to have played out in the late 1960s with the advent of the Counter Culture Age. However, to the degree sexual liberation did take place, it did so for "good girls" because boys and "bad girls" were never shackled. To the contrary, traditional marital morality did not discourage sexual pleasure; it fostered sexual desire between two people in the bonds of holy matrimony. In reality, the new morality has not been all that it is cracked up to be. The fact of the matter is that "everybody's not doing it" in the enlightened 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Trend watchers tell us that couples are engaging in less sex today than did their parents in the sex uptight '50s (Perel 2003: 67). The question is, "Why?" Part of the explanation for this is found in the movement toward perfectionism. Another part is related to a change in values effecting changing roles of women in society. Today's wives are more inclined toward

careers outside the home than wives a generation or two ago. Affirmative action has opened doors for women of which previous generations could only dream. More and more, men are giving up their role as sole breadwinner, and some give up their jobs to care for the children because their wives have better paying jobs. Moreover, the society is more permissive toward alternative marriages including same sex marriages. These changing values are confusing to many and create more pressure on already strained marriages.

I recently dealt with a husband and wife marital problem stemming from the wife working and the husband remaining at home to keep their child. The husband gave up his job to keep their child because his wife's job paid substantially more than his. He, however, had become quite bitter and rebellious against his wife because, according to him, she treated him like one of her employees. His desire to engage in sex with his wife had waned, and he was thinking about leaving her. In seeking to understand why, the husband said that his spouse works too much and that he was tired of begging her to cut back on her work. The wife, on the other hand, felt that she had to work long hours to maintain their standard of living and to please her bosses. She could not understand why her husband was ungrateful. After all, she said that all he had to do was to baby-sit and keep the house. The household lacked peace, and the two argued about everything. They got angry over little things, and each felt lonely though they lived in the same house. The relationship was characterized as an adversarial marriage. This couple found deliverance when they realized that the wife possessed a controlling spirit and the husband was desirous of a consensus building relationship.

A controlling spirit does not spring up suddenly; it is nurtured over time. For example, in the case of the wife, she had a relationship with her father where he was said to have been wrapped around her little finger. This no doubt led to the working of the controlling spirit in the daughter, just as we have seen above that unfaithful husbands entered into marriages nurtured on a diet of Sunday morality and weekday sexual permissiveness. In the example cited above, the wife was able to get what she wanted from her father. She wanted affection, and she got it. She also wanted the same relationship with her husband; however, he grew up in a family where consensus building was prized in reaching family decisions. He wanted his wife to reason with him over her work schedule so that they might share quality time together. This couple was obviously traveling different roads leading to nowhere until they desired a change in their relationship. Dialogue was the key to this marital problem. To have dialogue, couples must be willing to hear what each has to say. It is the hearing ear that opens up possibilities to resolve long standing marital problems. Once dialogue commenced, they were able to acknowledge their faults to each other, and the wife found out that she did not have to make every conference and work late each night in order to maintain her position. Their sex life was rekindled leading to a better home life for all.

The manner in which the above marital situation was turned around is not in question. There is general agreement that honesty and dialogue are important to recovering marriages going in the wrong direction, but not all experts agree as to when this should be practiced. According to Perel (2003), American therapists have it all wrong in

advising couples with marital problems to ‘really get to know’ their partners in bed. Perel offers instead the following:

*Ironically, some of America’s best features—the belief in equality, consensus building, fairness, and tolerance—can, in the bedroom, result in very boring sex. Sexual desire and good citizenship don’t play by the same rules. Sexual excitement is often politically incorrect; it often strives on power plays, role reversals, imperious demands, and seductive manipulations. (p. 68)*

In a word, Perel says that relationship building strives on intimate sexual excitement not honesty or open dialogue. He seems to prefer to a serpentine or seductive method in sex over honesty and open dialogue. Seduction is the twin of intimacy, an enticing unlawful work. When seduction is prized in couples’ sex lives, what’s to keep it from working in other areas? Seduction is not a good practice in marriage because it is a deceptive method of getting what one wishes; it does not built trust, and is, therefore, dishonest. Once the other party determines that he or she is being manipulated, resentment is often the response as in the example of John and Susan.

Before marriage, John was known as a great cook, and Susan was impressed with John’s thoroughness in preparing dinners. He knew every spice in the book, and he would grind the spices with his very own grinder. He would serve dinner under candlelight and at times, he would even serve them outside, pretending to have his very own sidewalk café. Susan was sure that John would make a perfect mate for her. They dated for two years, and then, decided to marry. As it turned out, John did very little cooking once they got married. In fact, it has now been two years since John last made one of his special dinners that so pleased Susan.

Susan saw John as a caring, sharing and loving romantic, tenderhearted and capable of nurturing; this is why she married him. After three years, Susan wonders how John could have changed so drastically. Today, Susan sees him as a self-centered, authoritarian, moody husband, unwilling to share in household chores though both work and now have a one-year-old daughter. Susan has come to the conclusion that John wooed her, even seduced her into having sex and later marriage. Susan feels bitter toward John and wants a divorce because according to her, she is not living with the man she bargained for. She accuses John of using false pretenses, to first get her in bed, and afterward, to marry her so that he might have sex on demand and a servant to boot.

### **Unlawful Desire then Seduction afterward Intimacy**

Have you heard the expression, “I want to get intimate with you”? This is a common expression among those who desire a close personal relationship involving sex. In a popular song, the writer spells out just how close he wants to get and leaves little to the imagination regarding the rest. Lately, I shared with a group of trainees that *The World Book Dictionary* (1985) defines intimacy as follows:

- A familiar or intimate act

- A close acquaintance
- A euphemism for illicit sexual relations

Most people don't have a problem accepting the first two definitions, but the third causes some to question a life-time usage of the term. For example, I redefined intimacy using different words but maintained the spirit or intent as follows: *Intimacy is an expression of carnal desires between two individuals void of a lawful relationship with God.* I then shared my definition with the trainees mentioned above attending a seminar I was holding on Marriage and Family Relations. At first, one of the persons in the group refused to believe that intimacy could have a negative connotation. He said, "Thirty-Three years of living has taught me otherwise. And though I read the definition, I yet refused to accept it." He went on to say, "It was only upon deep reflection that I came around to accepting the definition." What troubled the young man was that as a Christian, married with the sanctioning of the Church, he often told his wife that he wanted to be intimate with her when he had sex in mind. Was he in an euphemistic way telling her that he no longer wanted to engage in sex under the covering of marriage, but instead, he wanted to do 'the wild thing'?

I reasoned with the trainees that *if the act of intimacy is defined as an unlawful sexual relationship, then the process is seduction driven by lust or desire that is also unlawful.* To this came the response from one member of the group that there is Biblical evidence for the point I had made. She cited a New Testament scripture (James 1:14-15): "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death." I defined seduce to mean 1) "to tempt to wrongdoing" (2) "to entice to unlawful intercourse" (Guralnik, 1984). Then I set forth the proposition: *Intimacy is a close personal relationship. When the relationship is sexual, it is unlawful, but a close personal relationship without sex is not intimacy.* Failing to get the dialogue going based on my proposition, I encouraged the trainees to think of marital intimacy as personal familiarity between a husband and wife. However, communion should be the goal of marriage, and it is based on friendship or a shared vision of oneness in the family. This brought about a response from the student who had related intimacy to the Bible.

She made three points that I will now share. According to my definition of intimacy, the trainee said that she and her church also had been *teaching intimacy instead of communion.* To her, communion was a better descriptor for the relationship between husband and wife when the marriage is sanctioned by the church and is holy before God. The second point was *that marriage is first vertical then horizontal.* She explained that true Christians are first married to God in a spirit of fellowship and then to their spouses. Without the marriage to God, the husband and wife are engaged in an unlawful relationship. Needless to say, there was a spirited discussion that followed among those who affirm Biblical doctrines as a guide to marriage and those that did not. Those who affirm Biblical doctrines were generally in agreement that marriage is ordained by God and that couples are bound to God by his Holy Spirit. Those holding other views

generally saw marriage as a social construct. Both groups thought that marriage served a useful purpose in society and without marriage, chaos would likely occur.

After the seminar, I talked to the young lady regarding her views on marriage, which brings us to her third point, a scripture found in Genesis 3:16, which reads in part, '*your desire shall be unto your husband.*' She explained that Genesis 3:15 reveals that Eve committed spiritual adultery by turning away from fellowship with God and with her husband, Adam. She indicated that Adam and Eve had a relationship with God built on trust, honor and respect; in a word, they had sweet fellowship or communion. Then she said the following:

*Adam and Eve spoke as did God and were of the same mind and judgment as God. They were in such agreement with their Creator that only one will—the will of God— dominated in the kingdom. When Eve desired a relationship with another lover, she did so to the peril of herself and her husband. Her actions affected the horizontal relationship with her spouse because Adam agreed with his wife's rebellion. Their previous relationship of communion or fellowship with God took a downward spiral to one of intimacy characterized by sex because the lover which Eve sought was unlawful in the kingdom of God, making their relationship with him unlawful, and ushering in free will. The man and woman were free to choose good or evil, heretofore a concept foreign to them. By acting upon the word of the usurper, they were introduced to another's will, presented as free will, but at a cost of being stripped naked of their previous glorious status with their Creator. Afterward, Adam and Eve, having fallen to intimacy, brought forth children in intimacy after their image.*

*As for the woman's desire being unto her husband, she had divorced her former lover and caused her husband to do likewise. They were engaged in a new unlawful marriage without the holy vertical covering. Their new husband was an outlaw who deceived them. Adam and Eve went from communion with God to an intimate relationship with an outlaw in the kingdom. To correct the situation, it is necessary for them to go from intimacy to marriage back to communion, where marriage refers to a unity bond between them and communion being the restoration of the fellowship lost.*

There are four points that I wish to stress from the above:

- Getting close to someone may be seen as a work of intimacy
- Marital passion (tense emotions) is a desire to form an even closer relationship
- Intimacy is viewed as a present experience
- Intimacy involves reciprocity

Thinking further about the subject, I concluded that the young woman would have a hard time selling her point of view to many who called themselves Christians. She definitely would have a hard time convincing humanists and others who do not believe as she does. Having said this, I hasten to add that she struck a responsive chord within me. I know that in popular culture, “getting close” to someone is a work of intimacy. Moreover, I understand that marital passion is a desire for an even closer relationship whether marriage is seen vertically or horizontally. Additionally, intimacy is a right now experience. This is captured by the words of the song, ‘If you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with’ or ‘what’s love got to do with it’? Finally, intimacy is not a one way street; it needs an object or being to express its passion. This makes it reciprocal.

### **From Intimacy to Marriage to Communion**

If one accepts the definition of intimacy to mean an illicit form of sexual expression, same sex unions would no doubt fall under the definition, so too would premarital sex and plural marriages, all of which exist to some degree in the United States. The question then is, how can the illicit tag be remedied? One way is to make intimacy legal. This could be done by Congress passing a law to remove the illegal status of intimacy or the states could pass their own laws, as did Vermont when it legalized same sex marriage. Such action, however, would no doubt run into serious opposition from religious organizations and traditionally-based family organizations. Another way might be to seek to change the behavior of those who engage in the illicit relationships. Conservative religious groups have long sought to evangelize those they believe to be lost, among whom are some engaged in illicit sexual relationships. Their message is that the Bible supports marriage between a man and women as the only acceptable form of marriage, and sex outside of marriage is a sin. Their preaching has yielded some success, but the problem persists. For example, research on **[footnote]** divorce shows that for every two couples marrying, one will end in divorce. If this trend continues, it will no doubt lead to a redefinition of marriage.

Experts have sought to understand the inner workings of marriages as a response to the divorce crisis. Their goal is to identify types of marriages in an effort to help couples better understand their mates. For example, Olson and Fowers (1993) identified five marital types from a study of nearly 7,000 European-American couples. The five types developed by Olson and Fowers are vitalized, harmonious, traditional, conflicted and devitalized. Olson teaming with Lavee (1993) in a separate study added financially focused and balanced to the list. Luecke’s (2003) book dealing with types of marriages is written to help couples understand their own as well as their partner's personality. He focuses on similarities in the marriage as a stepping stone to help transform differences in marriage from a problem into an asset. For those of you familiar with Myers-Briggs, you

no doubt know that he applies Jungian personality type theory to help explain the interaction of married couples. He outlines four types of marriages:

Sensing and Thinking  
Sensing and Feeling  
Intuiting and Thinking  
Intuiting and Feeling

I, too, have developed training centered on types of marriages, but unlike those focused on personality types of couples or the smorgasbord approach used by Olson et al., my types include carnal, emotional and spiritual. My approach is inclusive of all marriages whether sanctioned by religion or government. It outlines qualities of marriages based primarily on carnal relationship, emotional relationship and spiritual relationship. I also contrast marriages historically based on carnality, emotionality and spirituality. I have outlined my approach below as follows:

### **Qualities of Marriage based primarily on Carnal Relationship**

The focus is on self gratification

- The parties focus on outward appearance (e.g. beauty, fitness, youthfulness)
- Continued sexual attractiveness is key to sustaining the relationship
- One spouse may be viewed as a trophy

### **History of Marriage Based on Carnality**

**Marriage as a Contract** Arranged marriages historically were the norm.

- Husband had duty of support.
- Wife had duty to perform services.
- Parties could terminate the marriage only if one of the parties was not performing his or her duties (finding of fault).

### **Qualities of Marriage Based Primarily on Emotional Relationship**

- Typically intense and passionate from the outset
- Because feelings are strong confused with Spiritual
- Passage of time causes passion to wane
- Relationship subject to volatility
- Spouses experience many ups and downs

### **History of Emotionally Based Marriage**

- Contract basis for marriage emphasized less.
- An emotional connection (love) becomes the preferred reason for marriage.
- Parties can terminate marriage in most states without a finding of fault.

### **Qualities of Marriage Based Primarily on Spiritual Relationship**

- Basis of relationship goes beyond sensual desires or intense feelings
- Deep level of commitment
- Continuous courtship

- Relationship moves beyond emotional love to unconditional love
- Spouses treat each other as they would like to be treated
- · Great Mystery Unfolded by Paul
- ··Wife submit, husband love
- ·Husband savior of the body
- Submitting one to another
- Love of God shed abroad in your heart

### **The Basis of Successful Marriage as Espoused by The Ellison Model**

The Ellison Model is referred to as a holistic, economic and efficient method of delivering services. It is holistic in that it involves a community of people acting in concert to perform organizational tasks. It teaches unity of purpose, the sharing of ideas, and inclusion. The model stresses economy of scales, expanding limited resources by involving partners in a community-building effort. The model is also efficient in that it is simple to use and can be implemented by a large range of organizations as well as couples in a marital relationship. It is product oriented as evaluation is based on whether the project objectives are accomplished via the team approach. Finally, the dramatic interactive diversity-training model teaches community development as people successfully work together in a compassionate spirit to complete a given project and demonstrate a genuine community building effort. It is the community building aspect that shows promise in assisting couples with conflicts in marriage. The community building model is outline in Graphic 1.

The graphic is composed of two circles, one within the other. The outer circle denotes discommunity building while the inner circle denotes community building. The values associated with discommunity building are: disrespect, dishonor and fear, and the motive driving the relationship is hatred. Discommunity building begins with the couple in a state of diversity or separation. The model addresses instances of conflict based on diversity issues. Diversity is shown to be negative where the couple sees each other as being different, as weak or as outcasts. Their view of each other shapes the way they related to each other in marriage. Because they lack respect for each other, they attempt to build community, based on a narrow or sectarian approach. I call this building work discommunity, meaning a cooperative, because the building work does not foster community among all who comprise the family. For example, the husband might live in the house but refuses to adequately provide for the needs of the wife and children, though his needs do not go lacking. In this example, the husband is a cooperative of one. Of course his attitude shows dishonor to the wife and children, and as a consequent, disunity or singularity, focusing on one member of the family rather than the whole, is evident. The home environment does not breed trust, but instead fear is evidenced.

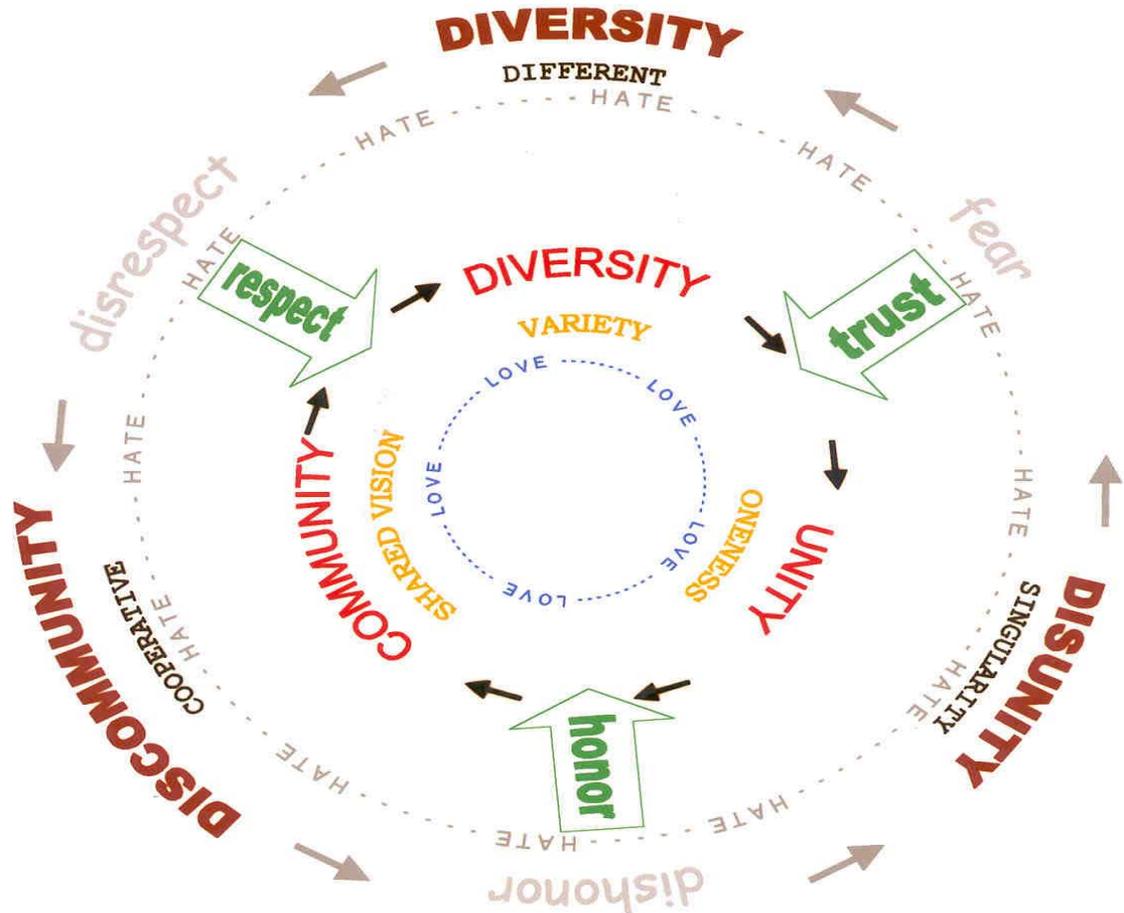
The inner circle denotes community building, were the salient values are: trust, honor and respect. To move from the discommunity building relationship to a community building one, the husband and wife will have to have a will to resolve their differences. It is through a mediator that the two will be able to work out their

differences in a caring, sharing and loving manner. The mediator's role is helping to transformation the discommunity work to a community building work. He or she is trusted by the couple because he or she is known as an honorable person in the community, one who is highly respected. Hence, the mediator's job is to demonstrate these values in dealings with them that the couple might embrace them. He or she is a mentor to the couple as well as a role modeler. As the couple embraces the new set of values, they begin to see each other in a different light, though they are still in a state of diversity. Diversity, however, does not carry the negative connotation, instead it means variety in the sense that they are different in height, weight, age, aesthetic tastes, etc. As the couple comes to appreciate their diversity, they are able to move to unity, meaning oneness of mind. In this state, their goal is to work for the good of the whole family. As they do this, community begins to take shape. Community is reached when the two manifest genuine love toward each other; and they become friends, holding a shared vision of inclusion for their family.

Graphic # 1

# BUILDING THE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

*The Discommunity, Definitions, Motivations and Values of Each*



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Conflict resolution is a valuable skill for married couples to possess because they invariably encounter problems dealing with each others as well as children and extended family members. Being aware of their own approach to conflict resolution can help them to work on any harmful tendencies they possess. Many couples are able to manage conflict in a healthy, productive way, but some find it hard because they are prone to getting defensive or angry? Two words define defensive: suspicious and protective. Suspicion is rooted in doubt; it breeds mistrust, and mistrust leads to feelings of anger. Anger, like all emotions, must too be managed, but because it is an emotion, the person controlled by anger is more likely to “strike out” rather than calmly deal with a matter. Their approach is a form of self-protection. Conflict resolution skills seek to mitigate the anger--to teach another way to approach life’s situations.

## **Working through the Problem**

I use case studies exercises to assist couples in dealing with their conflict. My approach is to use a case that parallels the couples with the conflict. Some times, I intentionally draw upon cases different from the couples' situation in order to help them grasp the bigger picture of conflict resolution. When this occurs, I tie the case to the present situation during discussion. Each is based on real situations where mentors are sometimes used to assist in resolving the conflicts. In other cases, the couples are able to work through their own problem. Which ever method is used, one thing is certain; all cases are in search of a solution to conflict. The couples are asked to share their thoughts as to how best to solve the conflict in the case. They are instructed that they will get the best results from the exercise if they are honest, trustworthy, friendly and inclusive in outlook. Again, I remind the couple that they must adhere to The Ellison Model's caring, sharing and loving principles in critiquing the case as well as with each other. An example of a case follows:

### Case # 1 Interfering In Her Business

Mary and Sarah are middle school students in Miami. They have known each other since the first grade. The two girls were best friends until Tony entered in the picture. Tony is a popular student well liked by the girls. Mary accused Sarah of "interfering in her business" and broke off speaking to her because she told Mary's mother that Mary was with Tony on at least three occasions when her mother thought Mary was out with Sarah.

Now Mary is not allowed to go out at night unless an older brother or sister or her parents accompany her. Mary is bitter at Sarah, and she has begun to play hooky from school to see Tony. When Summer Institute 2002, held at the University of East Florida (UEF), time came around, Mary's parents allowed her to attend on her mentor's recommendation that she would keep an eye on her. At the last minute, Tony also decided to attend Summer Institute 2002, something Mary's parents were not aware of.

The Institute went smoothly until the last day when Mary's parents found out that Tony had also attended the Institute. In a prearranged meeting with Mary's mentor, the parents scolded her for not being honest with them. The mentor tried to explain that she had no control over who attended or did not attend the Institute. Moreover, she explained that while she knew about Mary's behaviors prior to the Summer Institute, she was not aware that Tony was attending the camp. Furthermore, she felt that she had done her job well because there were no serious complaints registered by students, faculty nor administrators at UEF. Besides, Mary had shared with her that she knew that she was wrong in seeing Tony behind her parents' back and that she had ended the relationship with him.

The parents were very adamant in their position. They felt that the mentor had deceived them and that she was a poor role model for their daughter. They also called the director

of the Summer Institute and the head of the mentoring program to complain about the matter. Afterward, the parents felt a sense of satisfaction because they were able to express how deeply they felt betrayed by the mentor. Knowing their feelings, the director of the Summer Institute decided to meet with the mentor. The director explained the situation from the parents' perspective, and asked the mentor to share her story. By this time, the mentor was offensive because she felt the director and the parents had ganged up on her. Still she politely explained what had occurred, but she left the meeting feeling that she would not serve as a mentor again.

### **Diagnosing the Conflict**

The first step in conflict resolution is to properly diagnose it. At this level, the focus is on identifying the problem. In the medical field, for example, a doctor may read a blood test to diagnose the patient's problem while in conflict resolution; the boiling point pressure gauge is read.

### **Analyzing the Conflict**

Analysis may be seen as part of the diagnostic process or as a sequential step following the diagnosis. In our example above, the doctor takes care in interpreting the results because a good diagnosis is verified in the analysis. To resolve conflict, analysis is also important. Questioning, probing and exploring different sides of the issue will yield unbiased results. To analyze is to examine by study. This entails considering the nature of the conflict, and its possible effects on others (Is it contagious?) Also analyzing conflict might determine other problems associated with the conflict. For example, doctors have found that patients who suffer with psoriasis, a skin disease, are prone toward arthritis. In the case of conflict, out of a single conflict, other conflicts may arise. Finally, analysis may reveal certain limitations or restrictions this conflict might impose on an individual.

### **Prescription to the Conflict**

Continuing with our medical example, the doctor prescribes after the diagnosis has been verified through thorough analysis. Prescription is the doctor's recommended remedy to treat the problem. This may require medication. In conflict resolution, prescription is the instruction given to the warring parties to overcome their plight. A strong dose of advice is sometimes required.

### **Monitoring the Results**

The doctor does not prescribe and then leave the patient to fend for him or herself. Instead, repeated visits to the doctor's office are required in order for the doctor to monitor the results. To resolve conflict between two people, repeated sessions might be required in order to work through the problem.

### **Revising Prescription**

The good doctor is not afraid to revise the prescription if it is not making the patient better. In conflict resolution, mid-term corrections may also be needed. If the prescribed strategy is not working be opened for revision.

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