

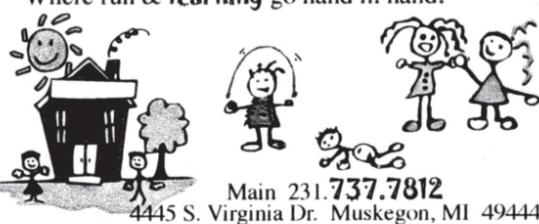
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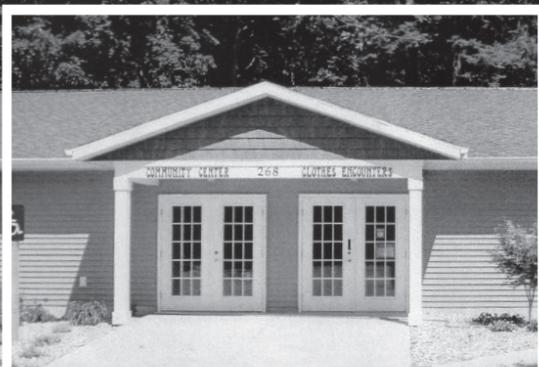
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Living together in Fruitport
News & Commentary by
Eric Wiggin

"I will go," Rebekah said ... and Isaac brought her into his mother's tent and took Rebekah to be his wife. This brief report is about all we know of a young love, an example of God's relationship with His people. The romantic, frankly sexual *Song of Solomon*, too represents the holy wedding of Jesus and the Church (see Revelation 19:7-9).

Teenage Rebekah vowed to leave her parents and live with a cousin she'd never met. They spent a night in a tent. No wedding, no license, no minister. But the basic elements of marriage were met (see Genesis 24:58 and 67).

This is all God requires, apparently. Jesus sums it up thus: "What God has joined together" (see Matthew 19:6).

I recently spoke with a grandfather my age. "It's not natural to make them wait until age 30," he said. "That's not what the Bible says," he added. "First Corinthians 7:1-9," I agreed. At 74, married 50 years with four children, 12 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, I see things differently than I did years ago. What I've learned is we've too long listened to cultural and religious tradition, rather than God, who made the human psyche in His own image. We've "provoked" our teen children (see Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). That is, we've exasperated our youth.

So let's look at today's young Fruitport couples:

- Half of Fruitport residents under 50 have shared a home and bed with another unmarried person for at least three years. Of these, about 27 percent broke up, and 40 percent got legally married. The rest still live together, and most are committed to staying together for life.
- Fruitport's cohabitating singles include girls of 15 and widows past 80, intent on preserving their Social Security checks.
- Michigan is one of three states where unmarried living together is still illegal; 47 states have, since about 1970, repealed laws against it.

These statistics are from data released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, and other sources. They apply to average American communities, like Fruitport.

Fruitport teens who move in together appear to have roughly the same chances of staying together for life as couples in their twenties who have had a big church wedding — a 27 percent "divorce" rate for first-time marriages. The key may be to move in together, not casual sex or a short-term relationship.

- God approves of teen sex. In *The Song of Solomon*, a Bible book about marriage and sex, the bride, like Rebekah, is a teen.
- God approves of sex without a wedding (NOTE: I did NOT say "without a marriage"). The "wedding at Cana" (John 2:1-11), where Jesus turned water into wine, was not a wedding in the modern sense. It was a reception for a couple who may have been sleeping together for weeks. In those days, a man simply went "to take a wife" (see Genesis 11:29).
- God intends for a girl and guy, once married, to sleep together for at least a year before he enlists in the armed services. This often did not happen during World War II. In 1946, the year after the war, America had its highest divorce rate in history.
- Marriage is not made by a church, by a state or by a paper certificate. Jesus said that "God

Edgewood Lutheran Church

(Submitted by Laura Jones, Administrative Coordinator)

Edgewood Lutheran Church has been a part of the Fruitport community for over 30 years. First we met at Edgewood Elementary School, and then at our current church home, 2525 E. Pontaluna Road.

In August, the congregation called Reverend Jessica Riveria-Walker as our permanent pastor. Pastor Jess has been Edgewood's interim pastor since October 2012. Pastor Jess and her husband, Reverend Justin, who serves at Peace Lutheran in Holland, moved to Michigan from Nebraska.

Edgewood strives to be involved in the community. Whether providing a worship service to area nursing homes, participating in the Fruitport Old Fashioned Days parade, or walking in the annual Fruitport CROP Walk, we are blessed to be a part of the Fruitport community.

Recently, Edgewood added on to our building in hopes that the additional space will allow us to better serve our community. The American Red Cross will be utilizing our space in November to host a blood drive. Several women gather weekly to make quilts. These quilts are distributed by Church World Services to people in transition after natural disasters. Please feel free to contact Edgewood at (231) 865-3300 if your organization is in need of a place to meet.

This year, we will again be holding our annual fall

has joined (couples) together" — not man.

Church weddings and marriage as a "sacrament" aren't found in God's Word.

- Marriage, including the "one-flesh" relationship, is a pattern of God's relationship with His people. Marriage without sex does not reflect God (see Ephesians 5:31-32).

I propose a new paradigm for marriage, based on the model of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 24. Rebekah simply chose to go to a foreign land to marry (no wedding) her cousin, Isaac. No minister, priest, rabbi or state license was involved. She simply agreed (Genesis 24:58), he accepted by proxy, and they slept together. A marriage feast soon followed, most likely. There was no "wedding," even though the NIV Bible translators, apparently alarmed at what modern readers might think, wrongly add, "and he married Rebekah" to verse 67, words not in the original.

The Bible is clear that the act of sex is intended by God to seal a lifetime relationship. Anything less is to mock God, since humankind is made in God's image and human sex is intended to reflect Him. We are not animals (see Genesis 1:27).

So what might replace the modern wedding? Consider that until World War II (1941-1945) most weddings, except Catholic, were private affairs in the bride's home. Most lasted for life. Further, most states then recognized common-law marriage: live together and you're married.

Our bipolar, manic-depressive state legislatures have legalized easy divorce, and most, with a few laudable exceptions such as Texas, have dropped common-law marriage from their legal codes, while all but Michigan, Mississippi and Florida have legalized premarital sex in an era where STDs and unwed pregnancies are epidemic.

The 20th century saw a reversal of centuries of early marriage for girls and boys. Yet many Fruitport girls now begin experimenting with serial sexual relationships at 13 or 14, and boys a little older. The result is a tragic inability to focus their sexual energies on one spouse, when marriage or mutual cohabitation finally does occur after years of fooling around. I suggest that this is a destruction of the psyche (soul) with worse consequences than disease or pregnancy.

"Marriage," says Gail Wyatt, director of the UCLA's sexual health program, "is for people who have money and want to spend money just on the wedding itself." More money, of course, is needed for things like health insurance, that a household with only a minimum-wage income can ill afford.

But with Obamacare, things may change. Come January, 2014, it may be possible for a young couple to make ends meet with a single, entry-level wage. As for church involvement, the pastor needs to counsel, certainly. Instead of a big "church" wedding, why not institute a practice like an altar call, in which a young man and girl can simply come to the front to recite their vows at the close of the morning service? Then the congregation can all retire to the church's fellowship hall for a potluck meal and wedding cake. Family and churches might pitch in and help such "kids" through the first several years, with rent money and other needs.

Marriage, in God's eyes is a *family* affair, rather than a church or state relationship (though church and state may have legitimate interests, certainly). Marriage includes a public covenant before God, before parents (preferably), though this covenant need not be written down; and the covenant must then be privately sealed by sex, which makes it permanent. It is a lifetime commitment.

Whether a church — or a license — is involved, a young Fruitport couple wishing to live together, if they are responsible and moral, will seek the blessing of his parents as well as hers, for such a lifetime commitment. To break the commitment once it's sealed by sex is divorce, which God hates so much He considers it a form of adultery (see Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:32). •

festival on November 9, 2013, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The menu includes pulled pork sandwiches and sloppy joes, along with chips, baked beans and desert. Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The cost is \$6 for adults and \$3 for kids under 10. We will also have a white elephant sale along with baked goods and books. There will be tables set up for vendors of Rada Knives, Mary Kay Cosmetics, and Women at Risk jewelry. A portion of the monies raised at this event will benefit Women in Transition. Thrivent will be matching these funds.

Edgewood loves new friends. Please join us for worship and fellowship. Sunday school starts at 9 a.m. followed by the service at 10 a.m. •

Fruitport District Library hosts preschool storytime

(Submitted by the Muskegon Area District Library)

Every Tuesday at 11:15 a.m., preschoolers ages 2 to 5 and their caregivers are invited to the Fruitport branch of the Muskegon County Library, 47 West Park Street, for terrific books, fingerplays, crafts, music, movement and pre-reading games and more with Miss Allison.

The current session continues through December 10. Please call 865-3461 or visit the Fruitport library to sign up. •