

DATE: May 1, 2019

FROM: Lorrie Gramer

M: 815-289-0523

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARRIAGEBUILDING USA KEY TO DRAMATIC DROP IN DIVORCES IN DUVAL COUNTY

JACKSONVILLE, FL— Good news for Jacksonville: Divorce is down, and MarriageBuilding USA was a part of making it happen!

The Florida Times-Union

Sunday, June 24, 2018

Divorce Rate Drops in Duval

When this headline came out in the local newspaper, many were excited, but none more than those who were helping make it happen!

It all started in 2016. Live the Life Ministries, Inc., a Florida nonprofit dedicated to strengthening marriages received a 3-year Grant from the Culture of Freedom Initiative (COFI) to see if they could have any significant impact on Duval County and the city of Jacksonville's divorce rate, specifically through the faith-based community. Lorrie & Don Gramer, Founders and Executive Directors of MBUSA, enthusiastically entered into a consulting agreement with Live the Life Ministries to join in this effort by working with the 19 Catholic parishes in the County.

It was the perfect storm -- passion for marriage education, a receptive faith-based community, funding, and the strategies and resources to teach relationship skills, save marriages and create a culture of marriage.

The idea was to empower the churches and flood the community with high-quality marriage-related programs and resources in as many churches as possible. For the Gramers this meant raising up marriage champions...whom they call *Marriage Angels!*® “Few people really want to get divorced,” says the Gramers, “we need couples in the Church ‘looking out for one another,’” they add, “offering a solid VISION for Catholic marriage, teaches actual SKILLS to

improve communication and problem solving, and offers on-going SUPPORT giving couples continued encouragement and the care of the church as the people of God.”

40% of Duval County is Catholic, so finding a way to impact those parishes was critical. And the Gramers were up for the job. “Having spent almost 40 years ourselves working in the field of marriage and family in the Catholic Church,” the Gramers said, “we have often wondered what kind of impact we may be making in the Church -- for the first time, we had a means to find out.”

Imagine how exciting it has been once the results started coming in. By the end of 2017, we saw the divorce rate dropping in Duval County, with an accumulative drop of 28% by the end of 2018.

Credibility for the initiative has been provided by a study from W. Bradford Wilcox director of the National Marriage Project of the University of Virginia and Spencer James, assistant professor of the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University.

“As family scholars, we have rarely seen changes of this size in family trends over such a short period of time,” they cite. “We think the change in divorce rates in Duval county is real and larger than any of the changes observed in comparison counties,” they added.

Of the 19 Catholic Parishes in the target county, 14 became involved. The Gramers began meeting with pastor, helping form marriage ministry teams, offering trainings and working to put many high-quality marriage programs in place throughout the city’s Catholic parishes.

“We have the support of Bishop Estevez, Mike Day as Director of the Office of Family and a number of good, solid priests who care about the marriages under their care. We now have marriage champions all over the city of Jacksonville and active marriage ministry teams.

MBUSA has entered its next phase in Jacksonville, with Parish “Proof of Concept” Grants through the Catholic Marriage Initiative (CMI) Fund Each allows for the full implementation of the Marriage-Building Parish model being fully developed by MBUSA in both English and Spanish. Both the model and the possibility of Parish Grants will be “rolled-out” this Fall to other diocese and parishes around the country.

Find out about resources available through MarriageBuilding/ConstruyendoMatrimonios USA at www.marriagebuildingusa.org or by contacting MBUSA’s National Office at 815-289-0523.

Keywords: marriage, divorce, marriage-building, Catholic leaders

#####

