

LOL

Retirees have opportunities to travel, and he's done his share of that. They have opportunities to strengthen bonds with children and grandchildren, and he's done his share of that (but is always ready for more). They can golf and garden, and he's almost done his share of that (one senses that he wouldn't mind having a wee bit more time to putt and to putter). But what Bruce Bailey and his wife Sharon have done much more than their share of in retirement (they refer to it as "renewment") is reach out to others. Long involved in marriage ministry, for the past six years Bruce and Sharon have been presenting the seven-week Alpha Marriage Course twice yearly at their Snohomish Community Church to interested couples who need not necessarily be church members, or even Christians, though most are.



In those six years, the two have ministered to 225 couples. They have seen some shaky marriages grow stable and stable marriages grow deeper. Some couples who at the outset were scarcely speaking to each other finished the program closely united. One participant attending with his fiancée found the course so enjoyable and so helpful that he asked Bruce to perform their wedding ceremony (a first-time experience for Bruce!). And other couples who were already enjoying their marriage enriched it by developing their understanding of each other and finding new or better ways to communicate.

The course, the underlying theme of which, Bruce and Sharon say, is "How Christ would want the marriage to work so that it will last a lifetime," has two intertwining strands: learning to develop practical, nuts-and-bolts skills regarding the daily living-out of a marriage, and learning to apply Christian principles within a marriage. The building-block units are: Building A Strong Foundation, Communication, Resolving Conflict, Forgiveness, The Impact Of The Family, Great Sex, and Love In Action. It is all held together by a strong commitment with God in the center of the relationship.

Each three-hour session employs the concept of a special date night. The couples share a candle-lit dinner with other couples, then have their own private table for the teaching session that focuses on a lesson presented to the group via DVD, during which they interact with each other, sharing thoughts about the material presented and practicing how it applies to them.

As a result, most couples better understand how to relate to each other and work together in their marriage. "We're very impressed with the practicality of the course," Bruce says, noting that it has helped his own marriage as well. "As we have grown in our own marriage, we have a passion and desire to help others, too."

"The work is very special to us," Sharon adds. "Helping couples to discover God's perspective on marriage is a wonderful thing. A strong, loving marriage is a couple's greatest gift to their children and grandchildren."

In conducting the course, the two make a good team. Other couples share the work—and Bruce and Sharon are quick to give them credit—but Bruce is the organizer and administrator of the program. He also serves as emcee. Sharon says, "Bruce is very good at perseverance in following up with all the details needed." Sharon is a facilitator, connecting with individual couples in that warm way she has, making them feel welcome and cared for. Bruce marvels at her ability to remember names and details about each participant's life. Judging by the testimonials of those who have completed the program and the interest shown by persons from other churches (one couple they met in Germany purchased a German language version of the course to share at their home church), the efforts of all involved are highly successful.

You might say that "LOL" is Bruce and Sharon's text-message to the world. "Laugh Out Loud?" Well, sure, sometimes—but always "Live On Love."