

# Daily Record (Morristown, NJ)

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### Randolph clerics pen marriage pact

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Article Text:

RANDOLPH -- Leaders of nine houses of worship who want to strengthen the institution of marriage gathered in the municipal building Thursday to sign a covenant to better counsel couples considering marriage, and to help troubled couples avoid divorce.

"When I was 9 years old, my mom and dad announced that the family would be splitting up," said Len Deo, president of the Parsippany-based New Jersey Family Policy Council, at the start of the morning meeting.

"It was a very traumatic moment in my life," said Deo, whose organization helped arrange the Randolph Marriage Builders Clergy Covenant, which includes roughly 70 percent of the churches and synagogues in Randolph.

9 denominations

Eleven clergymen from nine churches and synagogues sat in the chairs designated for the township council and took turns introducing themselves and explaining their positions on the importance of a strong, godly marriage.

"Our culture certainly values and celebrates intimacy," Rabbi Pinchas (Jean-Claude) Klein, of the Mount Freedom Jewish Center, said. "But sometimes what drives them can be temporary, and sometimes they need help fostering that beauty."

The Rev. Luis M. Carrasquillo, of Iglesia Evangelica Alianza, said divorce in his congregation isn't necessarily the problem.

"The divorce rate is not as high," he said. "Some of our people stay together, but it's not a really godly marriage."

Carrasquillo said those relationships might be better fulfilled with religious guidance.

"Both should get the best out of it (and) need God to do it," he said.

The covenant itself, which all of the religious leaders signed in black magic marker, stipulated that each church or synagogue would adhere to certain principles when counseling people considering or in marriage. They included:

- Promoting a God-centered marriage focused on a firm spiritual foundation
- Working with other congregations to share resources and establish a positive climate
- Encouraging and training mature married couples to serve as mentors for engaged, newlywed or married couples
- Normally requiring a minimum of four months of preparation before marriage
- Requiring a minimum of four counseling sessions or a minimum of eight counseling hours utilizing both scripture and a counseling inventory
- Promoting the idea of sexual abstinence outside of marriage, which includes discouraging cohabitation before marriage.

70 percent turnout

The New Jersey Family Policy Council promotes marriage covenants because 75 percent

of most marriages are conducted by clergy members, according to the covenant. Jennifer Bolds, a marriage builders administrator with the council, said letters were sent out to every house of worship in Randolph. She said that the representation in the municipal building Thursday was roughly 70 percent. She said some more liberal congregations likely shied away from participating over competing views on civil union. The remaining churches and synagogues involved with the covenant signing were Bethlehem Church, Chabad of Randolph, Church of Christ, Congregational Church of Randolph, Ironia Free Methodist Church, Hope Presbyterian Church, Randolph Christian Church, Resurrection Parrish, St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Church and St. Matthew's Catholic Church.

The council already established the Lincoln Park/Pompton Plains/ Pequannock Marriage Builders Community Covenant, as well as one in Hanover, which was established in September of 2006 and was the first of its kind. Bolds said it took roughly seven months to establish the Randolph covenant, and that the council is working on bringing one to Parsippany, Rockaway, Denville and Dover.

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