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### **NEW BILLINGS PROGRAM AIMS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES, COMMUNITY**

Billings, MT—National non-profit organization Communio is launching a Billings city-wide platform to help strengthen marriages and improve the community by identifying family issues through big data. Billings will be the first such program in Montana and one of just four U.S. city-wide platforms launched since Communio officially began in January 2019, according to Montana Director Eric Hutch. Others are in Denver, Austin, and Odessa, Texas.

The Communio approach yielded dramatic results elsewhere during its pilot phase. Jacksonville, Florida had previously led the state with an extraordinarily high divorce-rate. Following a three-year Communio program, the divorce rate dropped 24 percent and is now the lowest of all large Florida counties after more than 50 churches adopted Communio's model.

Communio works with Christian churches to identify a community's greatest threats to families and marriages through data and analytics, then addresses them through programming that focuses on improving relationships. The data informs a specific strategy for each community.

"We are just getting started, blazing a new trail in Montana," says Hutch, who started his role in September. The vision is for the program to expand throughout the state; he has visited with pastors at numerous churches to build a foundation. The Billings platform has room for a dozen churches with four already joining the program. It's offered free to area churches through a three-year Gianforte Family Foundation grant.

"The family unit drives faith," Hutch says, "which leads to stronger communities and improved wellness for our society as a whole." Communio programming helps to identify ministry gaps for four types of relationships: healthy dating, engaged couples, marriages in crisis, and marriages in general.

According to Hutch, "We identify needs through a digital platform, leverage pastoral relationships, invite churches to participate, and then share best practices that programming can address." In addition to data derived through community assessments, church members take part in digital surveys and personal conversations. "We help people both inside and outside the church. Once we identify gaps, the church leadership decides what they want to do and we help them execute," he explains.

More information is available from Eric Hutch at 406-208-5899.

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