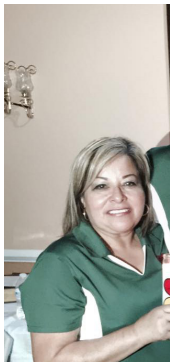


## Faith through relationship

Worldwide Marriage Encounter is unique in our world and in our church. Through our intersacramentality (ecclesial teams consisting of a married couple and a priest) we live our spirituality by bringing each other and others to Christ. Together, we are missionaries, sent into the world to witness to the joy of relationship with God and with each other.

When the Church and the world see couples and priests in loving relationship, the value of Marriage and Holy Orders is loudly proclaimed.





### From the editors

We hope you enjoy this collection of history, memories and anecdotes compiled to commemorate the 50th year of Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

Putting this book together has been a labour of love, brought about through the grace of God, the true author. Although it contains some historical content, this is not a history book. It barely scratches the surface.

It is our dream that this project will encourage you to continue to collect stories and document the evolving history of this amazing worldwide movement. It's important that we not only remember the past but celebrate the present, and charge forward, in faith and love, towards the next 50 years.

“Thou hast seen nothing yet.”  
 - Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote

With our love, in His service,

Jamie and Connie McNeill  
 Prince Edward Island, Canada  
 Encountered 1994

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Designed and edited by James and Connie McNeill  
Prince Edward Island, Canada

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APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE  
IN SINGAPORE

Singapore, 27 November 2017

No. 1055/17/S

Your Grace,

I am forwarding to Your Grace the Holy Father's message for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International Ecclesia team Couple of Worldwide Marriage Encounter:

*«The Most Reverend William Goh  
Archbishop of Singapore*

*His Holiness Pope Francis asks you to convey his greetings and prayerful best wishes to the members of Worldwide Marriage Encounter as they mark the fiftieth anniversary of the movement's foundation in 2018. The Holy Father joins you in giving thanks to Almighty God for the many graces and blessings received through the organization's mission, and he encourages all married people to grow in their commitment to each other, and to deepen their fidelity to the Lord, "for the sacrament of marriage flows from the incarnation and the paschal mystery, whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one with us" (Amoris Laetitia, 74). Commending all members of Worldwide Marriage Encounter to the intercession of Saint Joseph and of Mary, Mother of the Church, Pope Francis cordially imparts to them his Apostolic Blessing.*

*Cardinal Pietro Parolin  
Secretary of State»*

I take this opportunity to convey my best wishes and prayers on the above-mentioned occasion.

With every best wish and sentiments of esteem, I remain

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Msgr Yovko Pishtiyski  
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

---

His Grace Msgr. William Goh  
Archbishop of Singapore  
Archbishop's House  
31 Victoria Street,  
Singapore 187997

*(with enclosures)*



DICASTERIUM  
PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA

Message of His Eminence, Kevin Cardinal Farrell  
Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life  
to  
Worldwide Marriage Encounter  
on the Occasion of their 50th Anniversary

Vatican City, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

Prot. N. 2017/232-II/21

With deep pastoral concern for every child's best interest and development as secured by a loving and stable home grounded upon marriage, Fr. Gabriel Calvo inspired in Spain, in the 1960s, the very beginnings of the Mission and Spirituality of your widespread International Association of the Faithful, known as *Worldwide Marriage Encounter*.

Having so much enriched the lives of hundreds of thousands of the Church's Faithful and indeed, of people of all faiths, it is therefore, wonderful to look back and see how so many Faithful and people of good will, together with countless Members of your Association, have been inspired by an increased awareness of the value of human formation and wellbeing within the natural institution of the family under the committed union of a father and mother.

While gladly acknowledging the assistance always of married couples since the beginning of your apostolic outreach, the Church has additionally experienced the joy of seeing how only, within a space of a few years, this wonderful movement of the Holy Spirit began to quickly spread into other countries, only to be further enriched by the apostolic efforts of Fr. Chuck

Gallagher S.J. and his team, as they gave to your Association its most effective means for the spread your Mission and Spirituality throughout the world, namely, the “marriage encounter weekends”.

In helping married couples and families live their relationship and their call to holiness with the specialised support of your community, the Church has always been pleased to acknowledge the fruits borne out of your ministry, which has provided spouses, religious and clerics with a privileged platform of spiritual and human formation for their respective vocation in the Lord.

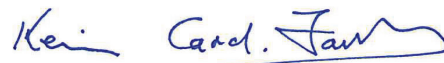
With countless Members present already in 93 countries from within the large family of nations, the Church is today delighted also to acknowledge how the *Worldwide Marriage Encounter* has shown evident signs of the Holy Spirit’s actions and inspiration within the lives of its Members; for whenever and wherever these embrace the practice of corporal or spiritual works of mercy towards the sick, the elderly living alone, and the poor, or even commit to greater parish life, it is clear that their discipleship and call to holiness are being both strengthened and abundantly fruitful.

For such reasons, and on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Worldwide Marriage Encounter*, it is our privilege to express our hopes and desires for this Association’s Mission and Spirituality.

May you find increased enthusiasm and support at all local, diocesan, regional and national levels within the Church around the world, so your families and Members are better empowered to transform both home and community in your Christian calling to be *sacraments* of Christ’s oblation love for all.

To the Association’s Members, its *Ecclesial and Continental Teams*, and to its *International Coordination Team*, my blessing and my prayerful assurances in Christ our Redeemer.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Cardinal Farrell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kevin Cardinal Farrell

# *Fifty years and counting...*

What a great milestone it is for us to celebrate 50 years of dedicated service to the Church and the world. This is an occasion to look back, celebrate and move forward with renewed vigour and confidence.

We are living in the best of times. Why? It is because the need for marriage strengthening has never been greater. If WWME were a business, that is how we would be looking at the situation. Lifestyles have changed with a much faster pace of life, more material distractions and a mentality that says, "if something doesn't work, throw it away and get a

new one". Marriages tend to be treated in the same way. The true meaning and joy of marriage seem to be beyond the reach of many.

Our dear priests play a critical role in parish life – they planted the seeds of our relationship with God and gave us formation to be decent human beings. We applaud our dear priests who have answered the call to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, Our Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve. Yet the institution of the priesthood has been severely tested in recent times. Now more than ever we need new vocations to

*L to R :  
Fr. Nathaniel  
Gomez, Shelley &  
Daniel Ee, WWME  
Global Leaders  
with His Holiness,  
Pope Francis*



the priesthood and married couples need to work more closely with our priests in the parishes, whether they are in WWME or not. Together we can be a potent force to build a stronger church and a better world.

## ***We may be the only Gospel of love that some will ever encounter in their lives.***

With all that is happening around us, the need for the service of WWME is even greater today. We are asked – is it still relevant today after 50 years? We get the same response when we met couples, priests and religious whether it is in Mexico, Kenya, Fiji, China, England or Cuba. They tell us, “the Weekend has given them an invaluable insight into understanding self, spouse and how God is in the centre of their relationship and that has transformed their lives.”

The world offers us countless pleasures – power, money, fame. Yet we all know that even when these are attained, they do not bring joy. In Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, specifically in Chapter 4, Pope Francis wrote that “in marriage, the joy of love needs to be cultivated and this joy can be experienced even amid sorrow”. How true this is.

On our weekends we are invited to be vessels of contagious love. When others see how we love each other despite our challenges, how we pick ourselves up after hardships and disappointments, they would be ‘infected’ by us.

As we walk passionately and with great faith beyond 50 years, our prayer is that God can use each of us to be his authentic agent of love, in whatever situation we are in, such that we continue to bring the

Good News through our weekends and enrichment programmes to every parish, diocese, country and continent.

Let us be the best walking, talking, breathing billboard of Worldwide Marriage Encounter. Then we would be truly living out our sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders!

On 10th Sep 2016 at St Peter’s Square, Pope Francis addressed the 4000 strong crowd of WWME communities at a Saturday Papal Audience. These were his words to us all:

***“For all of you in Worldwide Marriage Encounter, I thank you for all the good you do to help families! Go forward!”***

Let us entrust ourselves to the Lord and be his instruments of love and humble service. After all, WWME is not really about us as a couple or priest. It’s about our Heavenly Father pouring out his unconditional love on us and challenging us to love one another as Jesus, His Son, loves us.”



God bless, with our love,  
Daniel & Shelley Ee  
with Fr. Nathaniel Gomez  
International Ecclesial Team



# Relationship, Spirituality & Evangelization

Our movement has been growing from these roots since 1968 when Fr. Chuck Gallagher, S.J, a youth retreat master in the United States, built upon a program developed by a Spanish priest, Fr. Gabriel Calvo, and formed the Marriage Encounter movement. Fifty years later, married couples, priests, and religious worldwide are continuing to change the world through relationship, spirituality and evangelization.

## Our Name

Worldwide Marriage Encounter - our name defines who we are (spousal) and what we do (encounter, or meet, one another). Worldwide means open to all, and the word clearly reflects our unity. Marriage refers to the spousal relationship between a man and a woman.

## Our Values

Worldwide – in 94 countries throughout the world – the same concepts and values guide our movement, which provides married couples, priests and religious an experience of deepening relationships in Catholic tradition. Living the spirituality of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Movement leads to renewal in the Church and change in the world.

## Our Logo

The Worldwide Marriage Encounter symbol was created in 1969 by Dennis Wheeler and Fr. Chuck Gallagher. The intertwined wedding rings represent husband and wife; the cross represents Christ and the priest; the heart symbolizes life and love.



## Our Song

The Seekers' song "I'll Never Find Another You," also known as "There's a New World Somewhere," was adopted as the official song of Worldwide Marriage Encounter (used with permission).

Participants of Worldwide Marriage Encounter programs, experience being welcomed and loved through,

- a renewal of their dreams
- a conversion of self, and with their spouse and God
- and the comfort and security of belonging to a community of believers.

## Vision

*Love one another as I have loved you.  
John 15:12*

## Mission

*To proclaim the value of Marriage  
and Holy Orders in the Church  
and in the world.*

## Spirituality

*Faith through  
relationship.*

# The Holy Father blesses our movement

On September 10, 2016, more than 4000 Worldwide Marriage Encounter couples, religious sisters, 70 priests and three bishops attended a special celebration and Mass at the Vatican. Also present were Antonio and Louisa Carvalho, the European Ecclesial Team couple and Fr. Antonio Delmastro.

Daniel and Shelley Ee and Fr. Nathaniel Gomez, the International Ecclesial Team representing our movement, met personally with Pope Francis. The Holy Father offered his blessings and support for Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

***“For all you participants in Worldwide Marriage Encounter, I thank you for all the good you do to help families! Go forward!”***

The ecclesial team presented the Holy Father with a picture book of the WWME communities and its major events

worldwide, as well as a report on Marriage Encounter. It was a momentous occasion for our movement, and personally fulfilling for the participants.

Daniel and Shelley Ee: The three of us felt immense joy and were humbled to be able to greet the Holy Father on behalf of WWME. We will always remember his warm smile and gentle clasp of hand as he said thank you and encouraged our movement to carry on serving.

Antonio and Louisa Carvalho, European Ecclesial Team couple: We were energised by the large WWME presence with couples (many with families) priests and religious coming from all over Europe and the rest of the world.

Gene & Maggie Tokraks, North American Ecclesial Team Couple: What a wonderful time for couples from across the world to be gathered together at the Vatican to celebrate our Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders. Being at the audience with Pope Francis, with over 4000 WWME people from around the world, was an awesome experience and it is one we will cherish in our hearts forever.

Teams from Africa, Asia and Europe were also present for the event. The overall program was organized by WWME Italy as a pilgrimage during the Jubilee Year of Mercy.



# Our history at a glance

“God created man and woman to give meaning, life and love to the universe. He created marriage “to His image and likeness”, and God is not a circle. He is the spiraling foundation of Life and Love.

The quest for happiness in marriage demands that you expand your vision and perspective beyond your marital relationships. You are challenged by today’s society to stop being a selfish and isolated married couple. And you are called by the Creator to depart from your conjugal and family love, and go towards the universal love.

You, as a married couple, have been born to become a loving spiral of love!”

Gabriel Calvo



## **Our roots: Encuentro Conyugal**

1952

It all began when a young priest in Spain, Fr. Gabriel Calvo, developed a series of conferences for married couples. For about 10 years the Marriage Teams of Pope Pious XII traveled throughout Spain presenting sessions for married couples. Each presentation during the conference ended with a question that would help the couple look deeper at their own relationship through intimate and trusting conversation.

1962

Fr. Calvo presented the conferences as a weekend retreat to 28 couples in Barcelona and this experience rapidly

spread throughout Spain as the Encuentro Conyugal.

1966

Encuentro Conyugal was introduced to the Americas at the Conference of the International Confederation of Christian Family Movements (ICCFM) in Caracas, Venezuela. The movement began spreading to other Latin American countries and to Spanish speaking couples in the United States.

1967

Fr. Calvo’s notes were translated into English, and the weekend was brought to the United States for both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking groups.



*Fr. Gallagher was 85 when he passed away on Sunday, July 21, 2013 in New Jersey, USA, after a short illness.*

**Our movement:  
Worldwide Marriage Encounter**

1968

Fr. Chuck Gallagher, S.J., a youth retreat master, attended a weekend in New Jersey, USA, and his dream to change the world began taking shape.

1969

A National Executive Board for 'Marriage Encounter Weekends' was formed in the United States, maintaining ties with Christian Family Movements (CFM).

1969

The second meeting of the National Executive Board was held in conjunction with the CFM, and guidelines were developed to coordinate the expansion of the movement in the United States and Canada.

Fr. Gallagher - drawing from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius - proposed the first outline for Marriage Encounter weekends. His vision was for a Roman Catholic movement with an emphasis on sharing feelings, daily dialogue and continued community support.

1969

The original movement of Fr. Calvo became known as National Marriage Encounter and Fr. Gallagher's group, originally called Catholic Marriage Encounter was renamed Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

Although Worldwide Marriage Encounter was developed as a Roman Catholic experience, couples of other religions have been welcomed since 1969.

Expansion began into Canada, Australia and other countries in the 1970s, and this evangelization continues today.

**Our legacy: 50 years later**

Fr. Chuck Gallagher's vision, drive and determination have enabled millions of couples, priests and religious to experience this special marriage enrichment weekend.

Today, Worldwide Marriage Encounter is in 94 countries under the leadership of six Roman Catholic secretariats: Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, Pacific and Pan Africa. More than 1.7 million couples and 27,000 priests and religious have experienced this enriching and transformative weekend experience.

Expansion continues into more countries including China, Haiti, Russia, Cuba and the United Arab Emirates.

Guidelines have been established to enable other Christian denominations to become a part of this movement, with the focus on the renewal of marriages for the renewal of their own church. There are currently eight other faith expressions affiliated with Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

# Fr. Chuck shares some stories

**The following are excerpts from an interview with Fr. Chuck Gallagher, originally printed in the Summer, 1988 issue of Matrimony magazine. The interview was conducted by Larry and Mary Sue Eck:**

## **Teams dialogue too**

Most people in the encounter don't know that the early teams didn't dialogue on the weekends. They only started dialoguing because they were too noisy in the kitchen fixing meals!

It happened this way: In the very first year of the encounter, 1969, we ran weekends in a Jewish

bungalow colony. I had been stationed in Monroe, New York and the owners were friends of mine. It was a huge hall. They used it as a night club during the summer. It was a barn-like structure and we took out the stage and the tables and chairs and it became our presentation room. Then there were cottages off by the side of the hall.

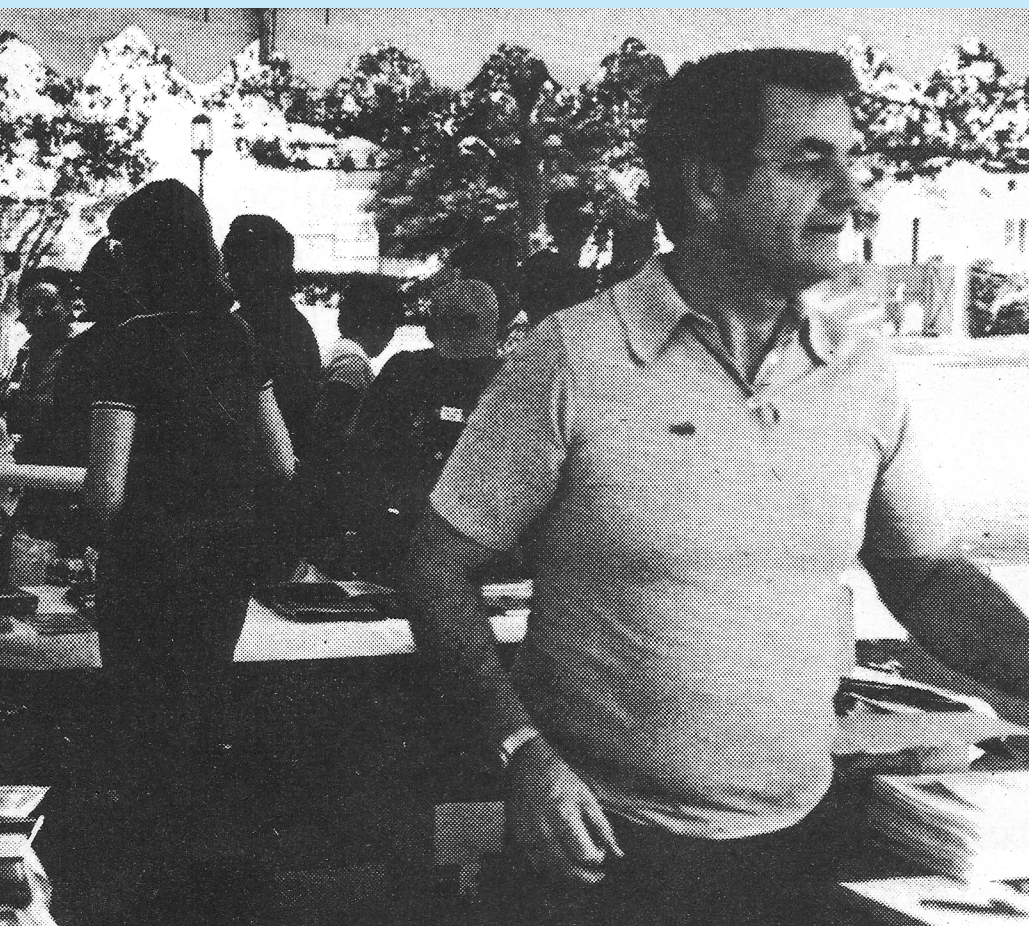
All the dialogues were done in the big room except for the open ended Saturday night when the couples went back to their cottages. The trouble was that the big hall was not heated. So we rented big blowers; big

kerosene blowers like you see at the side lines of football games. They made so much noise however, that we turned them off during the presentations. Normally this made the room freezing cold. We all wore overcoats, and when the writing time came, everyone would head for the blowers and huddle around them. Once I almost froze the couples to death. I thought I was turning on a heating vent and instead it was a ventilator.

For food, we got franks and beans for Saturday lunch, lasagna for Saturday supper, cereal, toast and danish for breakfasts and shrimp salad for Sunday lunch. It was the same every weekend.

One weekend the teams were in the kitchen as usual preparing lunch while the couples wrote and dialogued. They were making so much noise they were disturbing the couples. The kitchen was just off the big hall.

So I went to the kitchen and told them they all deserved to make the weekend and to go dialogue themselves. My actual motivation was to keep the noise down. But it worked out beautifully, they thought it was wonderful. So I would go into the kitchen and heat up these big pots of franks and beans and then serve it when the dialogue was over.



## **That's not a feeling!**

Our first team training was so good that we scheduled another. It was March or April of 1970 I believe. We thought it would be joyful but it wasn't. Once again we had invited the "old" along with the new teams. The old teams went into the pits. They discovered they had not been dialoguing and they felt hypocritical. The sharing was heavy water.

It started to pick up after the God's Plan talk. One of the wives said she had discovered that "love is a kick in the ass" That became an expression the couples used for a long time. Bob Campbell, on Sunday after the Sacramento talk said, "This weekend we've discovered that our little church is in ruins, but now were going to build a cathedral!"

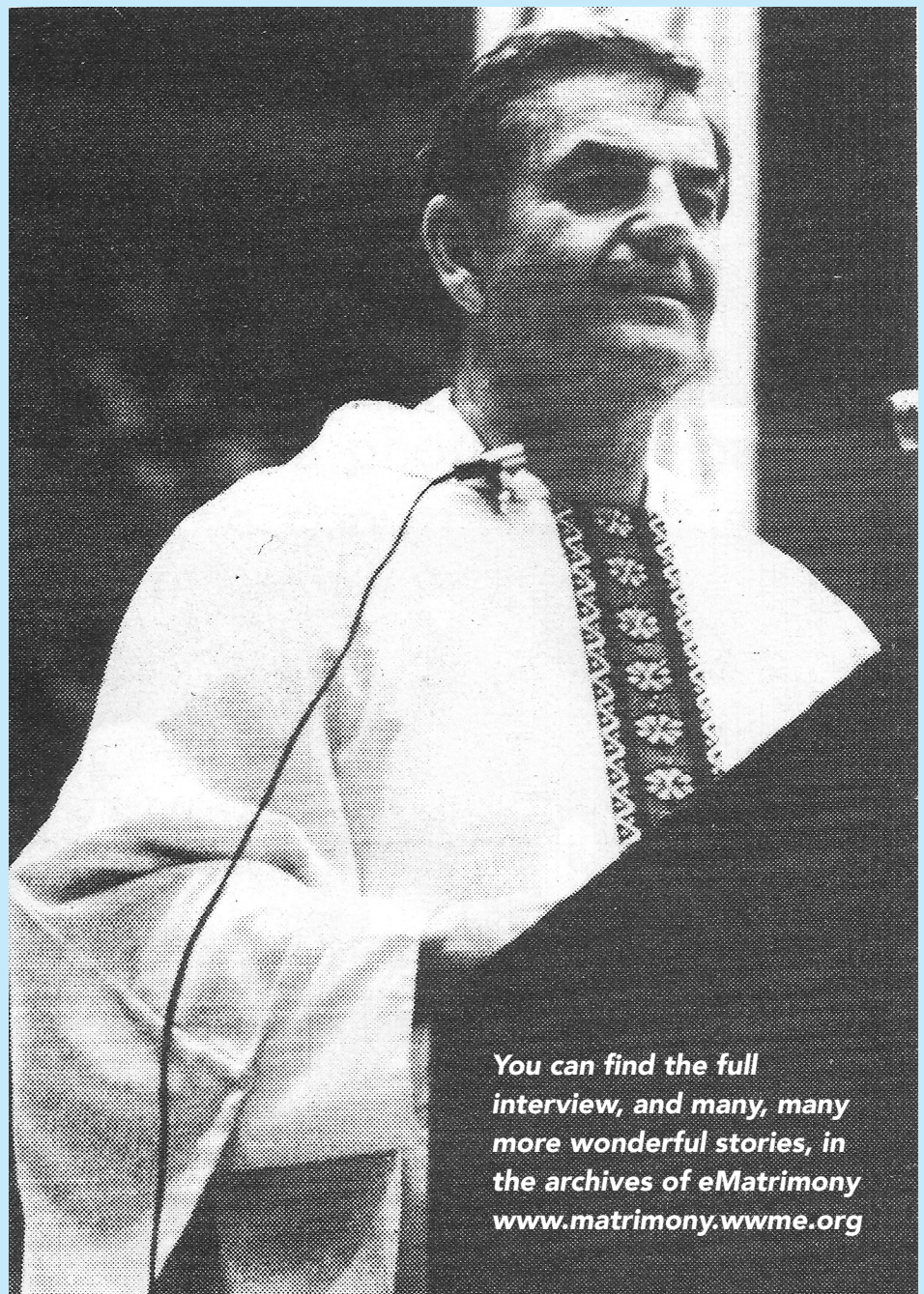
But a team couple thought it was all a set up, start to finish. And they stood up and said so. "We feel you are all hypocrites talking about ruined churches and cathedrals, etc."

And the whole house of cards just tumbled around us. I couldn't say a word because we all believed that feelings weren't right or wrong. And they had said they had to share their feelings with us. So I just thanked them, and we couldn't wait to get out of there.

I was driving home and all of a sudden it just struck me. "That's not a feeling, that's

a judgment!!!" I had been frustrated before because I knew instinctively that what they had said wasn't right. First of all, it wasn't true, but even if it had been, it wasn't fair to share it that way. Now I knew why it wasn't right! So I got on the phone and called everybody who had been on that weekend and explained the whole thing. Thus we discovered the little rule saying,

***"Anytime you can put "that" in the sentence, and it makes sense, it's not a feeling, it's a judgment."***



***You can find the full interview, and many, many more wonderful stories, in the archives of eMatrimony [www.matrimony.wwme.org](http://www.matrimony.wwme.org)***

# *International Ecclesial Teams*

---

## **1979**

Dick & Barbara McBride (USA) and Fr. Guido Heyrbaut (Belgium)  
Al & Winnie Belliveau (Canada) and Fr. Guido Heyrbaut (Belgium)

## **1983**

Al & Winnie Belliveau (Canada) and Fr. Guido Heybraunt (Belgium)

## **1986**

Al & Winnie Belliveau (Canada) and Fr. Bob Uzzilio (USA)  
Frank & Barbara Jelinek (USA) and Fr. Richard Champigny (USA)

## **1988**

Fernando & Tere Kohrs ( Mexico) and Fr. Bob Uzzilio(USA)

## **1989**

Liam & Sue Davison (Australia) and Fr. John Rate (Australia)

## **1991**

Liam & Sue Davison (Australia) and Fr. Mike McVerry (Fiji)

## **1993**

Liam & Sue Davison (Australia) and Fr. Bill Challenor (Australia)

## **1995**

Bill & Mary Anne Boylan(USA) and Fr. Charlie Coulter (Ireland)

## **1998**

Alberto & Mariny de la Mora (Mexico) and Fr. Jonas Guerrero (Mexico)

## **2001**

Lee & Jan Kremer (USA) and Fr. Rich O'Brien (USA)

## **2005**

David & Bronny Lea (New Zealand) and Fr. John Rate (Australia)

## **2009**

Tony & Cathy Witczak (USA) and Fr. Emile Frische (New Zealand)

## **2014**

Daniel & Shelley Ee (Singapore) and Fr. Nathaniel Gomez (Philippines)

# *First International Council: Dublin '82*



*AL & WINNIE BELLIVEAU, FR. GUIDO HEYRBAUT  
WORLDWIDE EXECUTIVE TEAM*



*Al & Barbara Regnier, Fr. Des Colleran  
United States.*



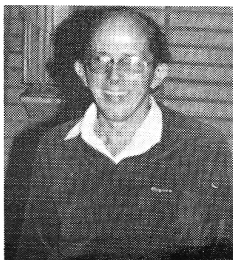
*Carlow & Maria Luisa Sandovel, Fr. Hernandez  
Latin America.*



*John & Molly Belanger, Fr. Gerry Morris  
Canada.*



*Paul & Francine Hespel, Fr. Dermot O'Neill  
Europe.*



*Fr. Bernard Thorne  
South Africa.*



*Tony & Lorraine Grace  
Fr. Dan Neylon.  
Pacific*

*Succeeded by Norm & Eileen Clausen,*



*Paul & Jeanne Roby,  
Fr. Don McInnis M.M.  
Asia.*

*Succeeded by Tony & Greta Trisnadi.*



# Sharing the encounter

Although Worldwide Marriage Encounter began as a Roman Catholic experience, even in the early years of the movement, Worldwide Marriage Encounter embraced other faith expressions with initial financial support and guidance.

Our Catholic movement proclaims the value of marriage and holy orders in the church and in the world. Through participation on weekends, many couples of other faiths recognize the potential the weekend offers for church renewal within their own denominations.

The first outreach to other denominations began in 1971 when the weekend was introduced in the Jewish faith community and the Episcopal faith community. The ecumenical expansion of the movement continued in the 70s. A letter dated May 9, 1975 from Brad and Jan Rigdon and Fr. Ed Schramm, U.S. Secretariat Team, announced the appointment of an Interfaith Committee that would begin the monumental task of ecumenical expansion.

The Catholic team of Dick and Barbara McBride and Fr. Paddy Colleran led the

charge into ecumenism and in August of 1976 they reached out to several denominations. The first meeting of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Interfaith Board took place in October

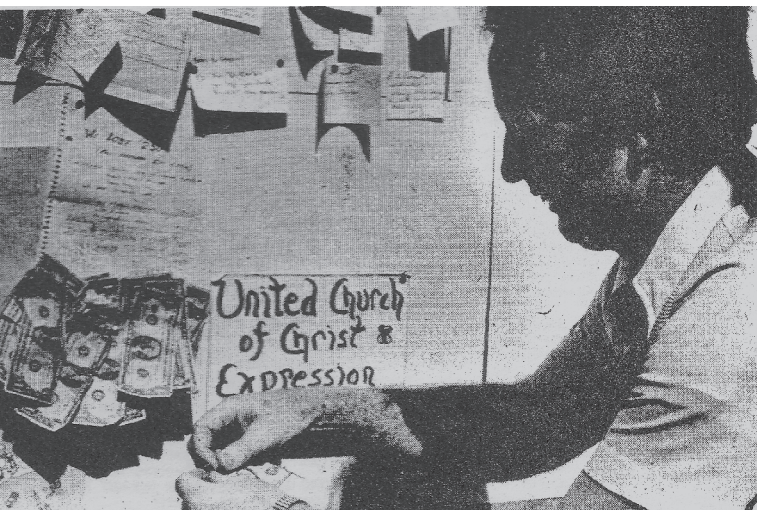
*"In the beginning we had almost no couples who weren't Catholic. It was my conviction that the Encounter was something for the whole church, not just for Catholics. We very definitely wanted to share with our brothers and sisters of other faiths. . . We wanted to immerse them in their own faith experience. And that's why we helped the other religions begin." – Fr. Chuck Gallagher*

1976 with representatives from the Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Methodist, Jewish, Church of Christ, United Protestant and Presbyterian faith expressions.

In April of 1978, formal guidelines and a licensing agreement were established. Through these, Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Inc. licenses other faith expressions and denominations to use the outline of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic movement and other faith expressions continue to work together on an Interfaith Board, which meets twice a year in the United States. Over the decades, new faith expressions have been added, and some denominations ceased to continue the affiliation.

*Left: From the International WWME Convention, 1978*





Interfaith Board,  
2016

- Episcopal (and Anglican) - Began in 1971, expanded throughout United States, into Canada, England, Australia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Uganda, Puerto Rico and Ecuador. From 1971-1990 approximately 33,000 experienced an Episcopal Weekend.
- United Church of Christ – Began in 1974 in Canada in English, and in French in 1975. In 1975 weekends began in the US, and are still happening in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Illinois/Missouri, Kansas, Ohio, and California.
- Seventh-Day Adventist – 1975, expanded into US, followed by Puerto Rico, Guam, Philippines, Singapore and Canada.
- Lutheran – 1975, grew throughout the US and into Canada, Sweden, Australia, Norway, Brazil, Finland and Denmark. In the first 10 years, over 56,000 couples attend Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekends.
- Presbyterian – 1976, from US to Canada, Northern Ireland, Peru, Kenya.
- United Methodist – 1976, the first
- Baptist – 1978, beginning in the US and reaching into Canada and Europe. Note: There are many diverse denominations and conventions who have Baptist in their names. There are also thousands of independent Baptists who are not a part of any larger group. One charter includes all varieties of Baptists.
- Reformed – 1981 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, then branched out into other parts of the United States, into Canada, and Africa.
- Mennonite and Brethren – 1982, first in the United States and Canada, then began presenting Spanish weekends in Belize, Mexico, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Costa Rica.
- Orthodox – 1989, the Orthodox Marriage Encounter (aka Pan-Orthodox) includes the Greek, Russian, Serbian, Antiochian and OCA (Orthodox Church of America) churches.
- Wesleyan – 2003, continue presenting weekends twice a year with the help of United Methodist and Mennonite/Brethren presenters.

United Methodist Weekends were held concurrently in New York, Kansas and Colorado, and in 1999 in Puerto Rico.

Currently Marriage Encounter weekends are being conducted by the following Christian denominations: Baptist, Episcopal (Anglican), Lutheran, Mennonite/Brethren, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist, United Methodist and Wesleyan.

# Generous, committed, and gifted

The Marriage Encounter journey of Ed and Harriet Garzero is as old, and as filled with love, as our movement.

Ed and Harriet were asked 50 years ago if they would be interested in attending a Marriage Encounter weekend at a retreat house in Elberon, NJ. The weekend was sponsored by the Christian Family Life movement. They were also asked to see if they could bring a priest with them for the weekend.

Living in Port Washington, New York they approached their parish priest, Fr. Gerard Murphy. Fr. Murphy agreed, however, just before the weekend he had a heart attack. The Garzeros knew of a young priest from an adjacent town, so they called him. He agreed to rearrange his schedule and join them on the weekend.

## **His name was Fr. Chuck Gallagher.**

Ed and Harriet and Fr. Chuck went on the weekend, and it was a life changing experience for all of them. Harriet said they received a call from Fr. Chuck on the Monday after the weekend, saying that he was so overwhelmed with the experience when he was driving

home on Sunday night, he pulled off the road and celebrated Mass by himself in his car. He was touched by the Holy Spirit.

Harriet and Ed realized after the weekend that their eyes were opened "to us as a couple, as a family and then as part of a larger family, the church".

Fr. Chuck asked them if they would help him spread the message of Marriage Encounter. They agreed, noting that they realized then that "there was real work involved with time spent in living the day to day of our marriage vows."

They also saw that their marriage bore the marks of the church, "one, holy, catholic and apostolic."

At Christmas time that same year, the Garzeros were in Rome and took the opportunity to speak to church officials about Marriage Encounter. "Since our children were with us, we knew



we weren't going to be the ones to bring Marriage Encounter to Rome but we knew that others would. . . . and, they did."

Ed and Harriet Garzero had been married 60 years when Ed passed away early in 2017.

Harriet says, "Marriage Encounter, if taken seriously, is a life changer and a gift that keeps giving."

She says three words sum up her thoughts about their experience with Marriage Encounter: "generous, committed and gifted."

# Sharing gifts with Haiti

The origin of the expansion to Haiti began with the adoption of a seven year-old Haitian girl by a Belgian couple in the early 80's.

In 2011, Marcel and Colette Maquet traveled to Haiti with their daughter so she could meet her biological parents. It was during this visit that Marcel and Colette made connections with Salesian missionaries and other Haitian priests who, in turn, visited them in Belgium in 2012.

Marcel and Colette were serving on the WWME National Council of Belgium (French) at the time, and talked to their

to Belgium to participate in a weekend. They returned to Haiti full of hope that the Haitian people could receive the gift of Worldwide Marriage Encounter in their country.

Supported by the WWME World Council, the European Secretariat and Belgian community, two Belgian couples and one priest visited in Haiti in 2014, presenting two weekends in the northern region (Cap Haïtien).

In July 2014, the North American ecclesial team (Karen and Scott Seaborn and Fr. Tom Ogg) asked the Canadian Council to work

They traveled from Europe to the Caribbean; they enrolled in university to learn to speak French; they shared financial resources; they reached way beyond their comfort zone; and with hearts overflowing with the love of God, they reached out to one of the least developed countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Over a period of three weeks in 2014, teams from Belgium, Canada and Trinidad shared the Worldwide Marriage Encounter message of love with 91 couples!

## **Vivre et Aimer**

With financial assistance from Belgium and the North American Secretariat, outreach to Haiti continued when the Belgium Francophone National team, Isa and Alain Deville, and Fr. Ralph Schmeder, asked the North American Secretariat (NAS) for support to bring Worldwide Marriage Encounter to Haiti. The goal was to forge a collaborative effort between WWME Europe and WWME North America. Lovers were to come from French speaking Belgium (Liège); French speaking Canada (Québec) and the Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago (English speaking), which is part of Region 3-Canada.



*Front: Bernadette and Joseph Detiffe, standing: Marcel and Colette Maquet, Fr. Ralph Schmeder, Richard Doyon, Sylvie Lanteigne, Fr. Jean-Luc Laflamme, Lynn and Malcom Joab*

Haitian visitors about the WWME movement. Within the next year, two Haitian priests traveled

with Belgium to continue the outreach to Haiti. This is the rest of the story (so far) . . .

Malcom and Lynn Joab, from Trinidad and Tobago, explain their thoughts and feelings as they considered this monumental task:

"We were flabbergasted! We weren't sure what to make of it, or for that matter how to approach it. Our thoughts centered on the extreme poverty, which we knew existed in Haiti - the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. How could we relate to them? We certainly had no frame of reference. We knew we were likely to be there in the middle of presidential elections, which in Haiti is usually marked by violence and bloodshed. These elections had been ongoing for over 18 months and were very divisive. With that in mind, our thoughts

Open and Apostolic, this now meant, "putting out into the deep."

We tasked ourselves to be functional in French within one year. So we re-enrolled in the University of the West Indies - Centre for Language Learning, as French students. Lynn at Level 1, Malcom at Level 2."

Bernadette and Joseph Detiffe; Fr. Ralph Shmeder  
Region 2-Can: Richard Doyon and Sylvie Lanteigne, Fr. Jean-Luc Laflamme  
Region 3-Can: Lynn and Deacon Malcom Joab, support team.  
The 1st Rookie weekend took place at Gressier. The centre used was part of a large boarding school run by Catholic priests



instinctively shifted to our personal health and safety - would we make it back safely to our children!?

Furthermore, neither of us spoke much French. Once the dust had settled, we knew we had to be

The weekends were split between Gressier (near the capital) in the south and Jacquezyll in the north. The team consisted of:

Belgium: Marcel and Colette Maquet, who presented two weekends in 2014 (Cap Haïtien)

belonging to order of St. Francis de Sales (Salesians). Twenty six couples were educated. Next Belgian and Canadian teams journeyed for 12 hours to Jacquezyll. This weekend was a follow-up to a rookie weekend, presented two years earlier by the loving team from Belgium. A total of 41 couples joined the this follow-up.

Although the teams from Canada and Trinidad had returned home by now, the Belgium lovers remained behind for another week to present a third Haitian weekend, this time in Gressier with 28 couples. They were assisted by seven couples from the first weekend! What a sharing

of joy! A total of 28 couples attended this weekend.

In addition to linguistic and cultural barriers, some of the challenges the WWME teams faced included overwhelming

“Autre présence qui nous a grandement aidés : celle de Dieu avec nous et de son Esprit qui nous a inspirés et nous a encouragés à ne pas trop nous laisser guider par notre rationalité occidentale.

What seriousness during the long dialogue, what a joy at the festive moment when we all tasted together with the “champagne” in Haiti, what fervor and intensity of prayer at the time of the Eucharist! ”



As a follow-up, WWME Belgium invited four couples and two priests to Belgium for another Rookie Weekend and Deeper Training Weekend. Also, Regions 2 and 3 in Canada reached out to Richard and Karen Ann St. Cyr, a Haitian-American couple who agreed to assist couples in writing talks when they return so they will be able to conduct weekends in the Haitian Creole language.

Due to geographic proximity to the Caribbean region, and a large French-speaking population, it is anticipated that Haiti will become an outreach

heat, black dust, exhaust fumes, lack of washroom facilities, sewage smells, power outages, mosquitoes, disorderly travel conditions within Haiti, and a volatile political climate with crowds and demonstrations in the streets and the United Nations patrolling.

In spite of the challenges, Colette and Marcel, Joseph and Bernadette, and Fr. Ralph shared their joy in these words:

Nous avons été touchés par la religiosité toute naturelle et joyeuse des Haïtiens. Nous les avons laissé chanter leurs rythmes à plusieurs reprises, ce qui a mis une ambiance toute particulière dans tout le week-end, et plus particulièrement dans l’eucharistie.

And yet, as often at weekends, after the good Friday and holy Saturday came the resurrection Sunday.

Encounter under Region 3-Canada.

*On January 12, 2010 southern Haiti experienced a magnitude 7.0 earthquake, causing major loss of life and damage to infrastructure. The country, already a very poor country, continues to struggle with recovery from the devastation.*

# Asian Secretariat

The history of the Asian Secretariat begins in 1973 and shows widespread growth throughout the decades, through the grace of God and the unwavering love and commitment of couples and priests from near and far. At time of print, there are 12 member nations in the Asian Secretariat: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and UAE.



*Asian Conference,  
Nantong, China,  
Sep 2017*

## **India:**

- 1973 – The first WWME weekend in Asia was held in Bangalore, India; 12 couples received the gift of the weekend. Soon, WWME spread to Bombay, and this is where the first training for team in Asia also took place.
- 1974 - Couples and priests from Bombay brought the movement to Delhi and Goa and in 1977 the weekend began enriching marriages and vocations in many more cities throughout India.

## **Japan:**

- In the mid 1970s, American teams from Philadelphia and Pennsylvania brought the weekend to Japan and the community grew quickly. New teams were sent back to the United States for team training.
- September 1975 - The first English-speaking weekend with a full team from Japan, a treasured milestone, took place near Tokyo.
- October 1975 - From Tokyo, the weekend spread to Okinawa.

- January 1977 – The first all Japanese language weekend was presented.

## **Indonesia**

- July 1975 - The first weekend in Indonesia was held in English by couples who had received the gift of a weekend in the United States.
- May 1976 – WWME was introduced for the first time in Indonesian language in Samadi Shalom, Sindanglaya.

## **Korea and Guam**

- February 1976 – WWME spread to Korea with a weekend in English for US Military.
- March 1976 – Couples and Priests in Guam were able to experience this transformative weekend.
- March 1977 – The first Korean National Ecclesial Team was selected in March.

## **Sri Lanka and Philippines**

- November 1976 - India reached out to Sri Lanka, presenting a Weekend and a Team Training in the same year.
- 1976 - A couple from Los Angeles,



40th anniversary  
celebrations,  
Korea

California, brought weekends to Manila in the Philippines, with two couples from Hawaii as part of the presenting team.

The first Asian Conference Meeting took place in January of 1979. Don and June Chu from Hawaii with Fr. Guido Heyrbaut from Belgium led this organizational meeting in Seoul, Korea. The second one took place in Antipolo, Philippines, in October of 1979. Paul and Jean Roby and Fr. Peter DeSouza from India were the first Asian Coordinating Team. Pol and Nina Repotente and Fr. Don MacInnis were asked to represent Asia at the first International Council that same year.

**Singapore, Malaysia, Bangladesh,  
UAE and Taiwan**

- 1979 - Weekends began in Singapore, initiated by a CICM priest, Fr Jean-Piere Benit and a Good Shepherd nun, Sr. Columba. The first weekend was conducted by a couple each from Australia and India and Fr Benit.
- 1980 - The weekend was brought to Malaysia with help from couples and priests from Singapore as well as a couple from Australia.

- 1994 - Bangladesh received weekends in English. The first Bengali weekend in Bangladesh was given in 1997, with significant aid from Japan and Korea.
- 1999 - India began reaching out to expatriates living in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Since then, weekends have been held every year in Dubai and the community has outreached to neighboring cities.
- WWME began in Taiwan in the late 70's but weekends subsided for some time. In 2013 Taiwan was re-admitted as a full member of the Asian Secretariat after it sought Singapore's help to align themselves with the WWME outline.

**China**

- 2000 - The first WWME weekend was held in Shanghai with help from WWME Singapore.
- 2005 - The movement spread to Ningbo diocese and the first Deeper weekend was held there a year later.
- Since then, the movement has expanded rapidly to numerous cities across the country.
- 2008 - China was formally accepted as a full member of the Asian Secretariat



# *United in love with God's people*

Fr. Michael Arro was ordained on July 3, 1955 (Société des Missions étrangères de Paris, Paris Foreign Mission Society). He has been a presenting priest with Worldwide Marriage Encounter in Singapore for over 37 years. He continues to present weekends each year. This is his story.

Sometime in 1979, a number of parishioners came to see me, one after the other, to tell me

about their experience on a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend. I knew nothing about Marriage Encounter.

As a priest, I am used to people coming to see me because they need a baptism certificate, are requesting a Mass, because they want some counselling or because they want to grumble about something happening in church.

**These couples were coming to tell me how happy they were! That is rather unusual, so I became curious about this Marriage Encounter.**



They invited me to go to on a weekend, but I found it very difficult to leave the parish at that time. Then I heard that other priests were attending this Marriage Encounter weekend and found it very beneficial for themselves and for the couples.

**As a priest, I too, was challenged to be united in love with God's people.**

I was meeting with more and more couples who had difficulty in their marriages, couples who were on the point of breaking up, couples who were asking for counselling. I had very little to say to them.

At the same time, I was experiencing some distance between the parishioners and myself. I thought that maybe if I would go on the weekend, it would help me grow closer to my parishioners.

So, finally, I went on a weekend. What came clear to me because of the weekend is that I needed to be nearer to the hearts of the people; I needed to experience friendship with them and to be part and parcel of the life of so many married couples united in love.



***I realized that instead of being simply the priest in charge of people, I should be the priest in love with people;*** a priest who helps people to share, to grow in their love for each other, to grow in their love in community, and to come forward instead of being pushed by the priest in charge. This was my greatest benefit from the weekend.

And that is what I have been trying to do since the time I attended my first Marriage Encounter weekend. For the past number of years, I have been presenting about two weekends a year, including Deeper weekends. I dialogue regularly with couples, and spend time with couples with whom I can be fully myself.

**Marriage Encounter has brought a new dimension to my life. I feel loved by people for who I am, not just respected as a priest. And it has helped me to find my life as a priest more meaningful and more life giving.**

# Persistence with eyes set on mission

*Aquinas and Rose Fernando of Sri Lanka share with us, in their own words, this story of persistence, dedication, and eyes set on a Mission.*

Wilfred and Helen Rajakaruna are models of missionaries for us. They visited us many times over the period of 10 years, from 1986 till 1996, to invite us to experience a WWME Weekend.

“There is nothing wrong with our marriage, so why do we need to attend? It is not for us!”

They persisted in inviting us,

gently and persuasively. Finally after 10 years we succumbed to their invitations, wondering whether it would be worth a try since they had not given up. We admired their courage, effort and commitment.

We participated in the weekend; we joined the community and took baby steps in finding our way as part of the group. Then, one day we were discerned to be the National Ecclesial Team for Sri Lanka (serving 2006 to 2010).

We have gone on to participate in Asian Conferences, and have

presented 71 weekends to 980 couples, priests and religious. We have also presented 11 Deeper Weekends. Wilfred and Helen have presented 110 weekends to 1614 couples 11 priests and three religious sisters. They presented six Deeper Weekends.

The important lesson we learnt from Wilfred and Helen is that **God calls people to Mission through us, His instruments. We are His servants, His hands and feet, to convey His love through our humble acts of service.**

September, 2016 at the Asian Conference hosted by Sri Lanka  
Seated facing the group: Wilfred & Helen Rajakaruna, Rose & Aquinas Fernando





**'Frozen' in time for World Marriage Day**

By Ning Qian

Public Notice: Please do not be alarmed. Just happily married couples having fun. So read the signs held by volunteers at Ngee Ann yesterday afternoon.

At 4pm, about 50 married couples and families participated in a "freeze flash mob" event lasting five minutes.

The event - "Love In The City" - was organized by Worldwide Marriage Encounter (Singapore) to celebrate World Marriage Day, which is on Feb 14.

It aimed to show the world that happy marriages are still possible today. Onlookers walking past Ngee Ann City paused for a moment to look at the couples, who froze in place that were supposed to be love.

One family formed shape with their arms, while there, a man went on one knee to present rose to his wife of 40 years.

Participants held signs that they had been "happily married for however many years."

This is the first event has been



# Sharing the gift in India

**In 1973 Dick and Pat Alexandro gave up their jobs, packed up their three children, and moved to India so they could spread the love of Worldwide Marriage Encounter.**

little boys would be all right with the transition. Pat felt fears about being away from both their families and their country. But, she said, one of the most powerful lessons from their

his family, the Redemptorist community and parishioners in Bangalore and Bombay, who embraced them with affection and acceptance.



*Dick & Pat, 3rd and 4th from left, India, 1970s*



*Dick & Pat, Fr. Peter, Fr. Boy, Shelley & Daniel at India's 40th Anniversary, 2013*

“Our miracle began with our own Marriage Encounter Weekend, which brought us into the fundamental relationship that gives life, a relationship with God in Jesus. We adapted to a new way of life, one that included daily prayer and dialogue and learned to listen and to hear God’s call to love. We knew we wanted to share the gift of Marriage Encounter in India.”

Dick had concerns about leaving his job teaching underprivileged children, and whether their three

Marriage Encounter weekend was that love is a decision.

“On our weekend, we heard that taking an action that is generous and can contribute to growth in our relationship is an act of the will, and we need not be enslaved by our emotions. We knew that, although we were scared, we could do this, especially since we would be holding the hands of Jesus.”

Arriving in India, the family was welcomed by Fr. Peter DeSousa,

The Marriage Encounter community in the United States financially supported the mission providing for monthly expenses, while Fr. Peter’s family donated whenever there was additional need. Fr. Peter found the family a home, and helped set up meetings with couples who would be invited to make the Marriage Encounter weekend.

**Dick and Pat said, “One of the best gifts we received was the humility necessary to accept the generosity and love of**

**others. We, who proposed to give, became the receivers."**

The missionaries from New York said they fell in love with the Indian culture, particularly the greeting Namaste (which means, I bow before the God I see in you) and the practice of removing shoes before entering the temple.

"We learned the importance of approaching others with no barrier, but with humility and respect, and openness knowing that when you meet the other, you're meeting the spirit of God and standing on Holy Ground," they said.

Pat and Dick were pleased that their children, Richard, Ted and David adapted so well to life in India (their daughter Tricia was born just a few months after they

returned to the US, followed by another daughter, Amy, two years later).

They stayed in India for nine months, until they were told by Indian authorities to leave or they would be arrested. Throughout those nine months, with Fr. Peter De Souza, they presented weekends and trained couples and priests.

Upon their return home, Dick was able to go back to his job, and the family moved back into their home (freshly painted by their local WWME community). They were home in time to celebrate Christmas with their families and Marriage Encounter community.

Throughout the past 40 years, and the challenges of life's trials, Dick and Pat remain grateful for

their friends and the Marriage Encounter community.

"Our best couple friends are couples we met through Marriage Encounter over 40 years ago."

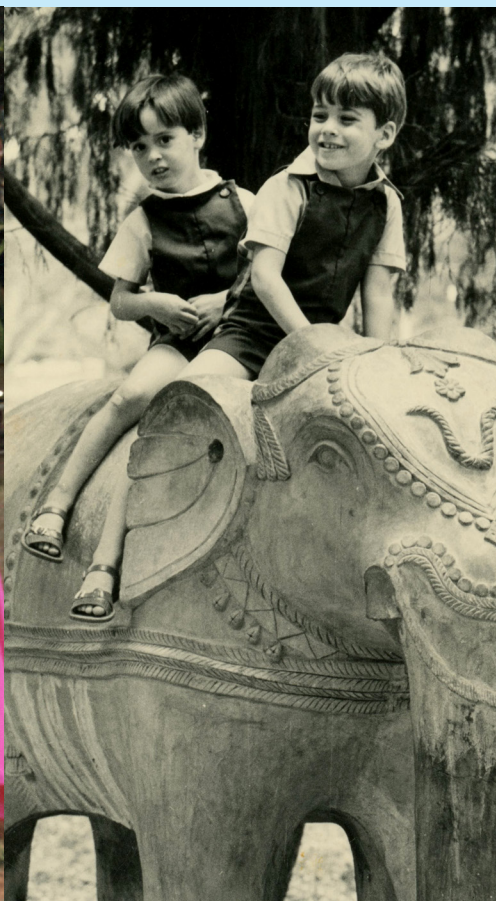
They were able to reconnect with many of their friends during a trip to India in October, 2013 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Marriage Encounter in the country.

"A trip like this makes me wonder where the time has gone," said Dick. "I am in awe of how a seed that was planted 40 years ago in India by a visionary priest, Fr. Peter, and a young, fairly naive couple from the United States, by the grace of God has been able to bear so much fruit."

Pat added, "Marriage Encounter introduced us to a new way of living, a new identity as the people whose call and purpose are to love God and one another. Our small offering, by virtue of God's love, has multiplied and the kingdom of God is here."

Dick and Pat share some advice for all:

"Love one another as God has loved you. Dialogue. Pray. Be open to the goodness of your partner and yourself and recognize the presence of God with you, calling you to be a beacon of light and hope for all to see. Decide to love, be gentle, be open and embrace the grace of God, in whom we can do all things."



# Stop in the name of LOVE!

World Marriage Day is an annual observance sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter on the second Sunday of February. Around the world WWME communities find unique and exciting ways to celebrate marriage.

The first Freeze Flashmob held in 2011 to commemorate World Marriage Day was mooted

than 250 persons with parents, grandparents and children all participating. Collaboration with Archdiocesan Commission and Family Life Society added even more to the numbers.

In 2016, the Singapore community added a new component to the Freeze Flash Mob: celebrating the Longest Married Couple. This idea came

from the successful Longest Married Couple Campaign that was started in the United States a few years earlier.

***It is our dream that more people come to appreciate that there is much hope and positivity in Marriage as a life-giving institution which builds communities of love in our society.***



by the WWME Singapore Outreach Team as a means to generate greater visibility for the movement.

From a mere 25 couples, the numbers soon grew to more



Flashmob 2018 and 2016 (left)

# European Secretariat

The history of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter movement in Europe dates back to 1972.

## England

- 1972 - American couples and priests presented the first weekends in England, Wales and Ireland. The good news spread quickly to Scotland thanks to the enthusiasm of the pioneers.
- 1999 - The English community, with its rich identity and many connections throughout the world, began to present weekends in Gibraltar.



One of the first European Councils

## Belgium

- 1972 - Flemish priest, Fr. Guido Heyrbaut, experienced his first ME weekend in the United States, and on the weekend of Pentecost that same

year, he gave the first ME Weekend in Belgium.

- 1972 - The French speaking community of Belgium received the gift of the weekend.

Belgium, at the cross roads of different cultures, evolved very quickly into two autonomous sister communities: Dutch speaking and French speaking. English and German speaking communities developed over the years.

From Belgium the weekend spread

- 1973 - France
  - 1975 - Indonesia
  - 1976 - Netherlands
  - 1978 - Italy
  - 1979 - Germany and Austria

## France - 1973

After the Weekend was introduced in the northern part of France in 1973, it spread to the east, west and south, and even to the French speaking part of Switzerland.

Throughout the years, the French community has been faced with a society moving further from Christianity. The leaders needed to ensure WWME could move forward, respecting the culture, but sustaining the WWME identity and vocation.

Since 1998, Marriage Encounter in France has been identified as *Vivre et Aimer* (to Live and to Love). (The title *Vivre et Aimer* is also used in the French region of Canada).



## Spain

- 1975 - Worldwide Marriage Encounter, the weekend, developed by Fr. Chuck Gallagher, was introduced in Spain. It was presented in English for the American families of the military base of Rota.
- 1976 - The first Weekend was held in Barcelona in Spanish, and the weekend spread quickly.



*Picnic in  
Valladolid, 1982*

Teams from Spain have also presented Spanish weekends in Switzerland and provided support to this small sister community.

The European Secretariat was formed in 1976. At the first meeting of the International Council in 1979, Europe was represented by Ini and Andre DeHont and Fr. Jean-Pierre Mailliez from Belgium.

In 1982, after some Portuguese couples participated in a ME weekend in Madrid, their enthusiasm created the opportunity for a Spanish team to give the first weekend in Portugal.

The roots of our worldwide movement are strong and deep in Spain, and continue to flourish and nurture a world in need.

## Italy

- 1978 - The first experimental weekends were given in Rome in 1976, and the weekend developed in other regions of Italy in 1978.
- 1980 - A complete Italian team began to present. From northern Italy WWME spread to Sicily, Calabria and Sardinia.
- The Marriage Encounter movement is now active in 13 regions in Italy.

## Slavic States

- 1976 - Couples from Kansas, USA, brought the weekend to Croatia. At that time, Weekends were already being presented in Italy.
- 2003 - **To bring the weekend to Slovenia and Serbia, teams were forced to make secret voyages with the presentations and booklets hidden in their car.** Despite severe political troubles, these courageous pioneers successfully launched Catholic weekends in Northern Serbia (Vojvodina). With the support of the local priests, the local community was able to begin presenting weekends on their own.
- 2004 - At the request of the military bishop and supported by the Ministry of Defense, weekends for members of the Croatian army began.

## Germany

- 1979 - The first Weekend was given in Germany and not long after, the weekend was secretly introduced to the former German Democratic Republic (better known as East Germany)
- 2007 - The Northern Region was formed as the 6th German region.
- 2009 - German speaking Switzerland

joined the German community as the 7th region. Switzerland hopes to become an independent community again one day.

In Germany, the Marriage Encounter community regularly takes part in Catholic, Protestant and ecumenical Church congresses.

#### **Ireland and outreaches – 1980s**

In Northern Ireland the political tensions and very present dangers in the 1980s made it difficult to build community. Priority was given to supporting the larger Church community and growth of the ME movement was stalled.

As a result, Marriage Encounter disappeared in the South for 10 years until couples from the North, along with a Priest from the South, helped restart weekends in the early 1990's. Praise God; the two Communities were then united! There were outreaches from Ireland in the 1980s to Kenya and in the 1990s to

Denmark and Cameroon. Although the Weekend did not take off in Denmark, WWME thrives today in both African countries.

Ireland continues to give ongoing support to the small community in Scotland by providing team priests and team couples for weekends and also by providing regular communication from the European Councils.

#### **Russia**

- 2011 - Wolfgang and Johanna Mandl from Austria come into contact with a Spanish priest and an Italian priest, both working in St. Petersburg, who helped them take the weekend there.
- 2012 - The first two weekends were given in St. Petersburg, Russia, by the Mandls, with Fr. Norbert Stigler from Austria, and Fr. Hermann Pint, from Belgium, respectively. The weekends first presented in German, and were then translated simultaneously into Russian.

*Fr. Calvo with  
Josico & Susana  
Mata, Ecclesial  
Team couple*



## More and more expansion

- 1976 - The Netherlands received the Catholic weekend from Belgium, and in 1977 a Protestant Marriage Encounter community began giving weekends. A weekend for youth (age 18-30) was developed and also a weekend for singles.
- 1983 - Austrian couples and a priest brought the weekend secretly over the border to Hungary.
- 1988 - The Dutch couple Maria and Ruud van Ooijen with Fr. Kees Maas SVD brought the weekend to Surinam, to answer the wish of Mgr. Zichem, bishop in Surinam. Also weekends for youth and for singles are presented there. In 2006 the Surinam community was approved as associated member of the European Council. The National teams of the Netherlands and Surinam together make up the Supra National Team.
- 1982 - Spanish couples arrived to present the first weekend in Portugal. The 80s were years of rapid expansion



*Extended Board,  
1986*

for the Portuguese ME community, which also supported the presentation of weekends in Portuguese language in Canada and USA.

- In 1983, some couples and priests secretly came together for the first M.E. weekend in Hungary in two apartments with less than ideal conditions. The Austrian Community provided the team. By 1986, a Hungarian team led the first weekend in their own language. Hungary now brings the weekend to Hungarian communities in Ukraine, Rumania, Serbia, and Slovakia.
- 1990s - The Portuguese community expanded to the Azores Islands and to the Portuguese nationals living in Paris. In 2001, the community also opened their arms to welcome Portuguese nationals living in Luxembourg.
- 2012 - Austria began reaching out to St. Petersburg in Russia. In May 2017 a weekend was presented in St. Petersburg for the first time totally in the Russian language. In October 2017 this team with Father José Vegas presented the weekend in Krasnojarsk, Siberia

*Left: Elsa and  
Jaime, Spain,  
2016*



# Fr Guido Heyrbaut: the Marriage Encounter 'Pirate'



***"Live fully as a human being,  
love one another as Christ has  
loved and know that I love you  
all."***

That was the message Fr. Guido Heyrbaut always shared with others. Fr. Guido, the pioneering Priest who began presenting Marriage Encounter weekends in Europe (Belgium) in 1972, died in December 2016 leaving behind a legacy of love, and hundreds of couples whose lives he had touched.

Fr. Guido Heyrbaut was sent to the United States in the early 1970s by Cardinal Joseph Suenens to learn more about a new religious trend focused on families. He discovered the

Marriage Encounter weekend and returned home with a dream and a mission: to launch Marriage Encounter in Belgium. He was 34 years old and had been a priest for nine years, but Fr. Guido was multilingual, able to present Marriage Encounter weekends in French, Dutch, English and Italian, and he was determined.

The first weekend, which Fr. Guido called a "pirate weekend", consisted of only Fr. Guido and three couples from his parish. Suzanne and Jacques Kempeners, Nic and Robert Lambin, Myriam and Paul Moyson lived this extraordinary journey, the first European

venture into the Marriage Encounter way of life.

The couples, not knowing what to expect, left their children at home (except for little Frederic who was only one week old). Throughout the weekend, the couples discovered that they had been living in separate worlds, focused on their jobs, children, houses, and duties. They shared their feelings with each other and got in touch with their original dream as a couple. They left the weekend believing that this ME experience was worth spreading and they made the decision to love. . . and to invest themselves in this dream.





A few months later, Fr. Chuck Gallagher sent an American team made up of a priest and two couples to Belgium to present a weekend to 15 couples.

***This is the first time a weekend was given outside of the United States with a full team.***

Things started moving very quickly in Europe, with Fr. Guido and those who believed in, and devoted themselves to, this ministry spreading the love far and wide. Weekends overflowed with couples, team trainings were being held and the mission was on fire.

When Fr. Guido died in 2016, WWME World Council Leaders, Daniel and Shelley Ee traveled to

Belgium to attend the memorial mass, which Fr. Guido himself had pre-arranged.

With about 200 of Fr. Guido's friends and fellow missionaries attending, the World Leaders were given an opportunity to speak to the congregation, and they delivered the following messages:

- Our mission is to carry on the dream of Fr. Guido and bring WWME to many more couples and priests,
- We must continue to innovate in the ways that we promote the weekend to couples and priests,
- We must continue to love our priests.

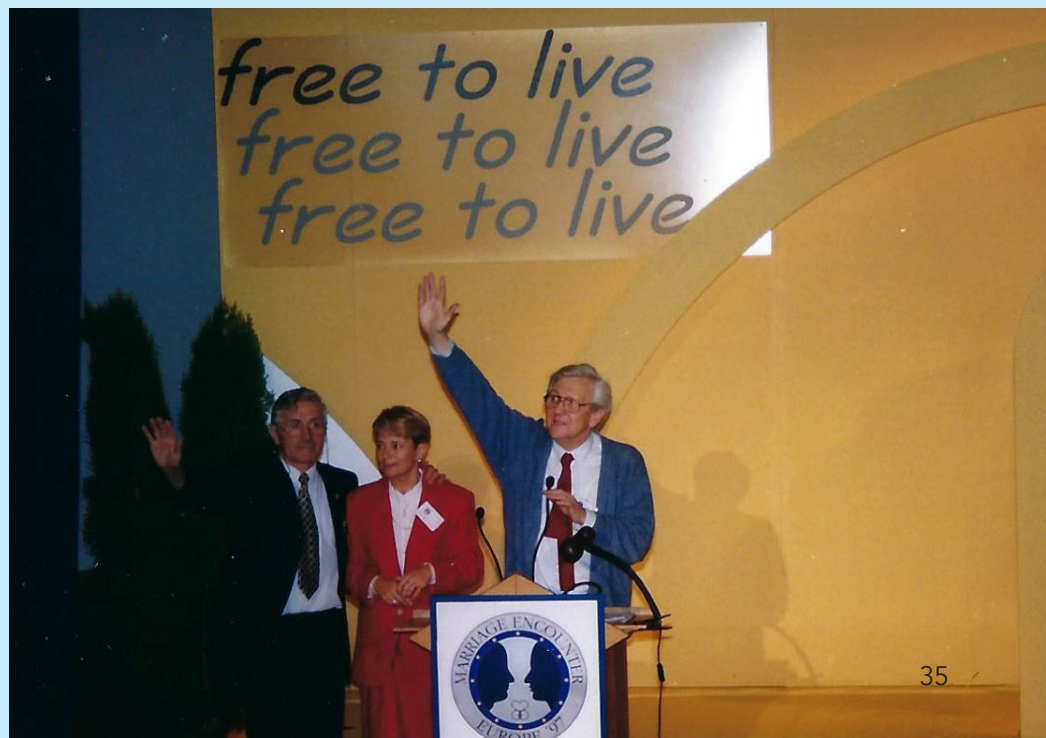
*"We spoke with many who had worked closely with Fr. Guido. They told us of his great enthusiasm for ensuring that couples be mentored on their marriage journey, how he*

*kept high ideals and would be saddened when there were no priests available to present the weekend."* – Daniel and Shelley Ee

Although in the years prior to his death, Fr. Guido was no longer able to present weekends, he kept in touch with many team couples and priests, and he dialogued daily with a dear friend, Fr. Hugo.

As recently as three weeks before he died Fr. Guido gathered Marriage Encounter priests together for a reflection "What Christmas means to me as a priest?"

Following the memorial mass, there was a dialogue reflection, which gave each person the opportunity to process his/her sadness and identify the impact of Fr. Guido's legacy, his life of loving service to each person. His dream, and his memory, lives on.



# Bloom where you are planted



So, they decided to stay in Barcelona and introduce Marriage Encounter in Spain. Their immediate goal was to provide some weekends in English, and then to provide foundation to couples so they could present a weekend in Spanish.

After a couple of unsuccessful tries, the Kral's were able to host an English weekend in Spain in 1975 with assistance from teams from the United States. In February 1976 the dream to hold a Spanish-speaking weekend in Spain came true at the residence of Tibidabo.

In June, 1973, Fred and Cappy Kral left their jobs, sold their car, rented their house, packed up their three children (the youngest was four years old) and bought tickets to travel by ship from New York to Le Havre, France.

They were on their way to spread Marriage Encounter to Kenya.

But, as they waited in France, the weeks passed and their travel Visa for Kenya did not arrive. They made the decision to go to Spain where the cost of living was lower and in February 1974 they arrived in Barcelona.

Although the missionary couple continued to seek ways to travel to Kenya, the time was never right. At one time they even had the support from the Bishop of Nairobi, who was interested in Marriage Encounter.

Although they had no money for tickets from Barcelona to Kenya, Marriage Encounter couples from the United States were willing to financially support their travel. But then, disappointment fell again when Fr. Rosenbond was sent back to the United States by his Order, leaving Fred and Cappy with no team priest.

Fred and Cappy Kral never did make it to Kenya, but in Barcelona they planted seeds of a worldwide movement, and those seeds have grown and matured for nearly 50 years, changing the world one sacrament at a time.

# The "Married Weekend" in Hungary

Worldwide Marriage Encounter arrived in Hungary under a cloak of secrecy.

In November 1983, two Hungarian couples participated at a German weekend in Magdeburg, held by Fr. Reinhold Ettl and Hanna and Wolfgang Mandl. Consider this conversation, in the planning stages of holding the first weekend in Hungary:

Austrian couple: "Where can we hold an encounter?"

Response: "There are two couples living in two apartments one just one floor above the other. There, it is possible."

Austrian couple: "That is not going to work. Are there enough German speaking couples to start with?"

Response: "No, there aren't, but we can translate."

Austrian couple: "That is impossible, ME does not work if translated."

But, it did work.

On April 9-11, 1984, the first Weekend was presented in Hungary with seven participating couples. The weekend was held in two apartments, with

Leaflets for the encounter were printed in Vienna and hidden in a cellar, in the hope that they would not be found in any search.

In order to avoid suspicion, these



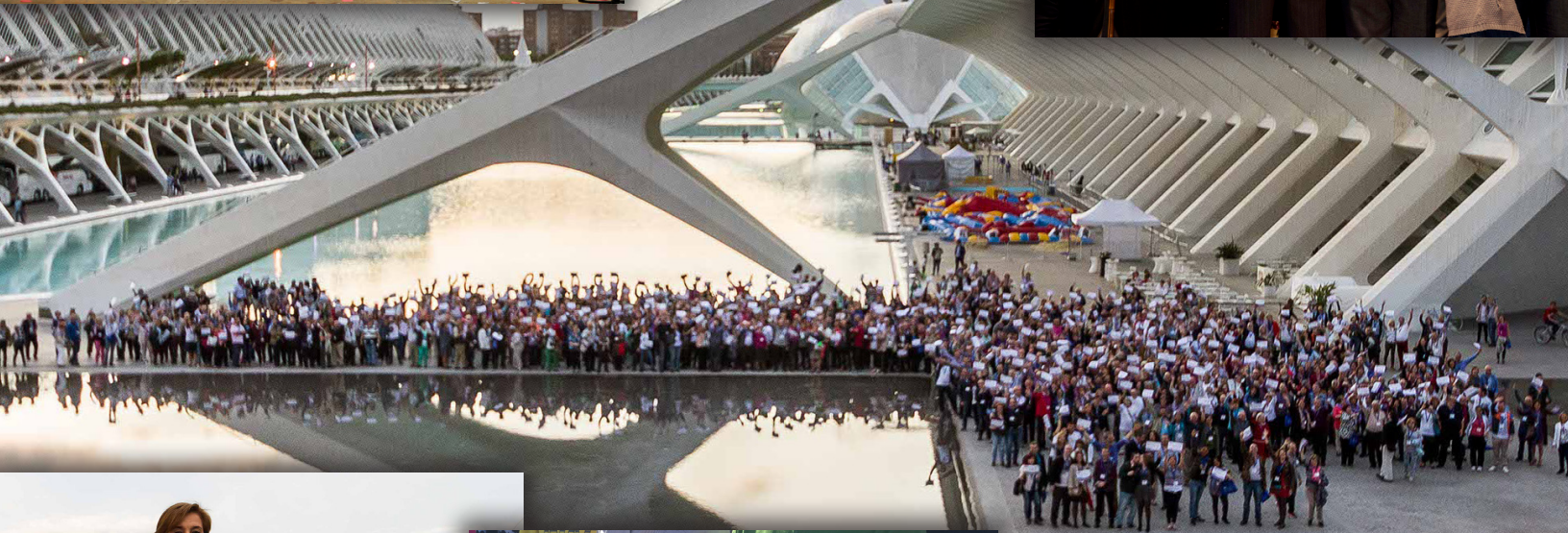
20th Anniversary in Hungary, 2004

translation. The couples discussed their letters in the bathroom, in the pantry, or in the hall – wherever they could find a little space.

At that time, the Hungarian State Security Authority and the State Office of Church Affairs were bugging phone lines, and anything that came from the west was especially suspicious.

leaflets invited the couples for a "Married Weekend", instead of a "Marriage Encounter Weekend".

Ever since then, the weekend in Hungary has been called "Married Weekend".





# Latin American Secretariat

Worldwide Marriage Encounter took root in Latin America in 1974.

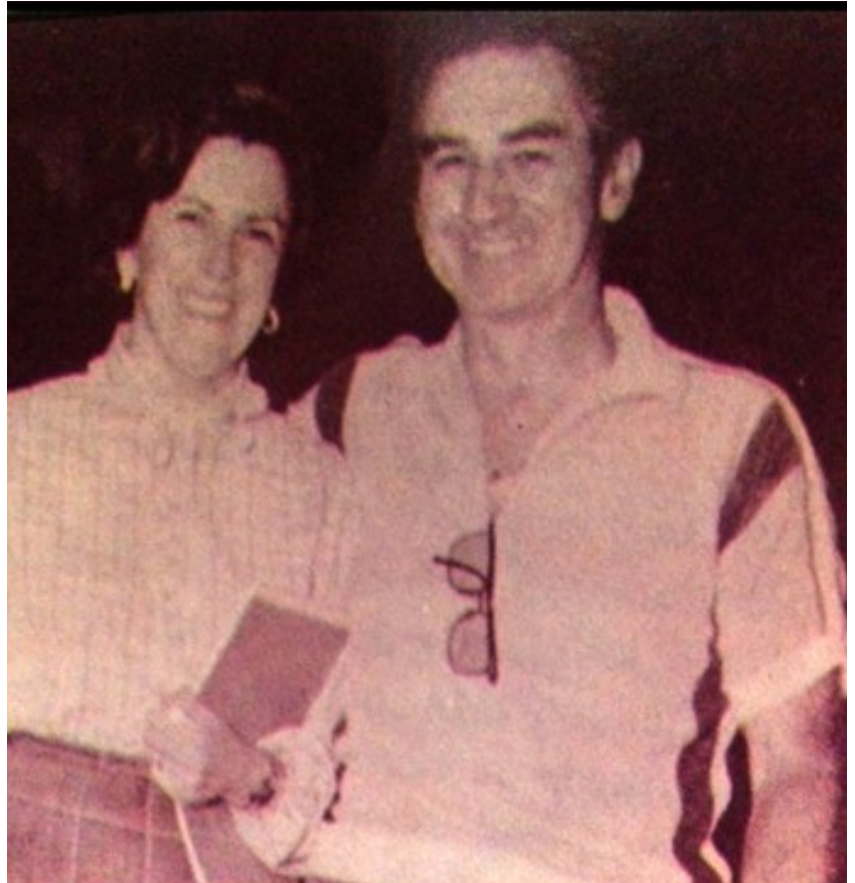
Dick and Barbara McBride, and Fr. Chuck Gallagher asked Fr. Angelo Henry Camacho, OP to coordinate the movement in Latin America with Ángel y Conchita Aja, the national leaders of Encuentro Conjugal in Mexico at the time.

Ángel y Conchita Aja attended a weekend in San Antino, Texas, and then worked with the church to develop WWME in Mexico. The first WWME Weekend in Mexico was presented in July of that year by a priest and two couples from San Antonio, and then another weekend was held in November with a couple from Houston, Texas presenting.

In September, 1974, a weekend was presented in Spanish in Puerto Rico, thanks to the sacrifices of a couple and a priest from Brooklyn, New York. In November of the same year, the first Weekend in English was presented in Puerto Rico, again assisted by teams from the United States.

The first weekend presented by an all-Mexican team was held in June 1975. Worldwide Marriage Encounter spread quickly throughout the region, thanks to dedicated outreach efforts of the people of Puerto Rico and Mexico (and with assistance from the United States).

Nineteen seventy four (1974) was a big year for WWME in Latin America. Expansion into Brazil came about after Fr.



Conchita & Angel Aja

Jack Kennington, who had lived a weekend in the United States, was transferred to Brazil. His challenge, however, was to find a way to have weekends presented in the local language, Portuguese. It only took one year.

In 1975 a couple from Mexico, a Spanish-speaking couple from the United States, and a Brazilian couple presented a weekend in Brazil in the Portuguese language.

In 1973 Anita Goossens, a committed missionary brought the WWME weekend to Chile from her homeland in Belgium. She was supported in her efforts by Fr. Esteban Gumicio Vives.

Fr. Jack  
Kennington



The first official meeting of the Latin American Secretariat was held in Mexico City at the Aja home in 1978.

WWME spread quickly to other countries in Latin America.

- 1976 – Colombia, Guatemala
- 1977 - Argentina and Dominican Republic
- 1979 - El Salvador
- 1980 – Uruguay
- 1982 - Venezuela

Expansion continued to Bolivia in 1977, aided by two brother priests from St. Louis, Missouri. Chile began holding weekends in 1976, with the support of Brothers from Belgium in Europe. And, also in 1976, Peru was added to the WWME family, when Fr. Manny Ballard from San Antonio, Texas, presented a weekend along with couples from Mexico and the United States.

Fr. Jose Luis  
Almendros, Halef  
& Leda Schmidt

Gonzalo & Maria  
Victoria Martinez,  
Fr. Lamberto  
Picado

The collaborative efforts continued and WWME was rolled out across the lands throughout South America.

- Guatemala reached out to Honduras and Nicaragua in 1976 and to Costa Rica in 1981.
- Colombia shared the weekend

with Panama in 1978 and Ecuador in 1979. Argentina and Brazil helped start the movement in Paraguay in 1982.

### The Team of 9

The first meeting that the Latin American representatives attended was held in Hawaii in January 1979, followed by a meeting in Vancouver, Canada, in July 1979 and another in Brussels in October of that same year.

In 1980, Carlos y María Luisa Sandoval and Msgr. Efrain Hernandez from Guatemala were chosen as the Latin American coordinators. The various sectors began to branch into regional zones, and by 1984 had formed a Latin American Council with Ecclesial Teams representing each zone.

In 1984, Halef y Leda Schmidt from Costa Rica and Fray Jose Luis Almendros from Guatemala attended the World Council meeting on behalf of the Latin American



Council. Along with the Schmidts, who represented the Northern Zone, the Latin American Council (affectionately called the Team of 9), included Diego y Claudia Naranjo and Fray Abel Giordano from

Beto And Mariny de La Mora were elected International Ecclesial Team for WWME.

The current Latin American leadership of

## The Worldwide Marriage Encounter family knows no boundaries, and opens its arms to all God's people, regardless of borders

Colombia for the Central Zone, Roberto y Susana Pittini with Msgr. Hermes Garin from Uruguay for the Southern zone. The three leadership teams shared responsibilities for the Council equally.

José Antonio and María Elena Huezo from El Salvador and Fr. Arturo Zambrano from Nicaragua have been preceded by: 1999, Rafael and Cuca Melgoza and Fray Luis Gallo from México.

By 1995, at a meeting in Santiago, Chile, teams decided that a new structure was needed to enable representations from all countries, but with one overall Ecclesial Team selected as leaders. Gonzalo y María Victoria Martínez of Ecuador and Fray

2002, Coco and Mamuca Ramírez and Fray Pedro S. Gennaro from Paraguay.

2005, Hernando and July Mendoza and Mgr Miguel Diaz from Colombia.

2008, Carlos and Mary Pena and Fr. Carlos Fillol from Argentina.



*Members of the Rio community, May, 2017*

Lamberto Picardo of Panama became the first Ecclesial Leadership Team for the Latin American Secretariat.

In 1998, the presbyter Jonas Guerrero,

2013, Pepe and Carmencita Ahumada and Fr. Jorge Rivera from Chile. Fr. Janusz Rozalski replace Fr. Jorge.

## Expansion into Cuba

In Latin America most of the countries share cultural roots, including Cuba. The countries also share religious roots which has allowed for the expansion of Worldwide Marriage Encounter in all countries.

However, Cuba is a different environment not because of its religious difference, but because of its lack of religion culture. This situation

prompted leaders to look for new ways to approach the traditional expansion of the movement and adapt it to the conditions required by the country.

Cuba is above all a country that has gone through, and continues to experience, very difficult times, and that demands a lot of creativity, dedication, donation and generosity from those who are working to bring WWME to the country.

In the early years of the Encounter, weekends were presented in secret in Cuba, but the community was unable to sustain a full-scale movement.



Primeros pasos de EMM

Cienfuegos 1979

Grupo de Matrimonios - Padre Vega

Compartieron: Sacerdote y Matrimonio de Matanzas



The initiative efforts of Msgr. Emilio Aranguren, a Cuban priest from Cienfuegos, inspired by a Bolivian priest, Fr. Fernando Rojas to once again initiate contact with WWME in the early 2000s.

In September 2004, the Latin American Council decided to make an exploratory visit to determine the conditions which would be faced to bring the movement to Cienfuegos and establish its expansion in Cuba. This was supported by a Colombian team couple Álvaro and María Teresa Durán and through financial support from the United States.



***In February 2005 the first two weekends were held in Cienfuegos - the first one with 11 couples and the second with 10 couples and a priest.***

The first weekend was led by team from Colombia: Msgr. Miguel Antonio Díaz, Hernando and July Mendoza, Álvaro and María Teresa Durán. Fr. Fernando Mendoza joined in the second weekend.

In September 2007, when he visited the island, the new bishop of Cienfuegos, Msgr. Domingo Oropesa was asked to support the continued expansion.

Msgr. Aranguren, who had been transferred to the city of Holguín, was asked to join with Monsignor Álvaro Beyra from Bayamo and bring the encounter to eastern Cuba.

***This expansion activity was strongly supported by the church. The bishops, with great efforts, have paid for the couples transportation, housing and other expenses.*** Without this support, sharing the weekend experience would have been unmanageable.

Despite the existing difficulties around internal and external mobilization in Cuba, missionary couples managed to present 22 weekends from February 2005 to June 2014: 14 in Cienfuegos and eight in the Ecclesiastical Province of the East. This

province includes the cities of Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey, Holguín, Bayamo and Guantanamo.

**The renewal continues**

In 2014, Jairo and Luz Estella Londoño from Columbia assumed the mission of coordinating the expansion in the region. During the past three years, they have made a biannual visit, staying one month each time, to aid in the formation of couples and priests to develop future leadership.

To date 34 weekends have been presented with an attendance of 355 couples, 16 priests and four religious. There are eight support communities in Cuba, throughout six cities. So far, two priests and five couples have been formed as weekend presenters. To make this possible six deeper weekends have been held. In October 2017 an ecclesial team attended Cadre training, so they will be able to provide team training in Cuba in the future.



# Sharing the discipleship in Cuba

Worldwide Marriage Encounter leadership teams and encountered couples were treated to a unique experience when International Ecclesial Team couple, Daniel and Shelley Ee traveled from Singapore to join them in Cuba for a workshop on the National Journey of the Family in May 2017.

Presented at the Sanctuary of Saint Joseph in Paradise in the diocese of Cienfuegos, the workshop deepened the meaning of being disciples of Christ in marriage, in the family, in the ecclesial community, and in the world.

Monsignor Domingo Oropesa Lorente, Bishop of Cienfuegos, presided over the closing Eucharistic celebration and encouraged the 60 couples in attendance to continue to live the testimony of the love of Christ in the church and in the society, as they follow in the steps of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Monsignor Domingo spoke about the need to continue providing Marriage Encounter weekends for married couples, to strengthen the encountered communities, and to share experiences with married couples, families and communities throughout Cuba.

During their visit, Daniel and Shelley met with the leadership teams from the dioceses of Holguin, Bayamo-Manzanillo and Cienfuegos where they shared lived experiences and learned more about the joys and struggles of the Marriage Encounter community in Cuba.

WWME has been present in Cuba for more than a decade, thanks to the support of priests and married couples from Colombia, who willingly share in the loving spirit of the affirmation "Love one another, as I have loved you".



# A trace of sanctity in WWME

## A servant of God

Fr. Esteban Gumucio, priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, was born on September 3, 1914, in Santiago de Chile. He died at the age of 86. In 1974 he lived his first Weekend and from that moment he gave the next 27 years of his life supporting Marriage Encounter. . . according to him **"in more than 300 WWME Weekends"**.

In the 10 years following Fr. Esteban's death, important events took place. Undoubtedly the most important has been the growing reputation for holiness manifested day after day by the catholic people. Numerous faithful, from different places, have given testimony of this after meeting him in person. Other people, moved by Father's numerous writings, have also come to the conclusion that this priest was really a saint.

According to Fr. Esteban Gumucio, a WWME Weekend "is about revalidating in married people the meaning of the sacrament and, in the priest, the sense of his ordination as Holy Order."

This concept allowed Fr. Esteban to enter very lucidly in his own religious and priestly vocation, an opportunity that he always

considered as a grace of God in his life.

In May 2010, the bishop of Santiago introduced the cause of beatification and canonization of Fr. Esteban, thus initiating an investigation into the life of holiness of this Servant of God. In January 2011, the solemn closure of this process was carried out; documentation was sent to Rome, to the congregation for the causes of the saints.

## The call for a new and challenging road

In one of his books Fr. Gumucio tells us about the first invitation.

"The call to participate actively in WWME came to my life through the most common channels: in the pastoral trajectory of a priest. I went to the first Weekend out of obedience to my hierarchical superior. I took it with availability, although not without fear that it would surely bring me other new responsibilities, added to those of a huge parish with new



populations in difficult times, 1974."

The connection with WWME was instantaneous as Father describes it in his book, "I think that just after a month of my first experience, I was already participating in four or five talks during the next weekend. Everything was replaced with enthusiasm to help other couples and priests experience something that had been a strong light in our lives.

"I also remember that I was very careful that I would not snatch the leadership from those laity whom I admired for the transparency of their sharing.

"My first participation as a team

priest was also an overwhelming experience of God walking in the fragile steps of us, the team. We were full of emotion and happiness to see that the Lord changed their lives to those couples, whom in a few moments we learned to love deeply."

## **The Impact of participating in WWME**

One of the first impacts on Father Gumucio was in relation to his dialogue with the Lord.

"In my personal life great changes began. The first and strongest was in the quality of my personal prayer. In the dialogue, I faced my masks. Immediately I felt compelled to consider dialogue in my daily prayer.



"Participating in Marriage Encounter has personally meant a greater knowledge of myself and, more than that, a rich process in which I could accept my own person. The vision of the Sacrament of Marriage and Holy Orders has enriched me

"It has allowed me to understand the daily life of the laity couples, to capture the vital depth that home means to them. Usually, as priests we approach them separately, man and woman, or in another context - school, apostolate, worship - and this is

## **"How did he manage to impact the lives of so many in such a delicate way, so fine and at the same time so powerful?"**

I had to order myself. I started to get up half an hour before the community meeting, to give the Lord my love letter at the best time of the day. I discovered with joy that reading the Sacred Scripture was the letter that God returned to me."

Fr. Esteban tells of another impact that had to do with his personality, his vocation and inter-sacramentality.

and made me contemplate with joy its unity. It has helped me to establish good and deep friendships with couples.

"Through that friendship with both spouses, my heart has been enriched with greater emotional balance. Particularly I believe, it has allowed me to understand the unique feelings of women.

not the part of life that has such a profound impact on their lives." Speaking about Fr. Esteban Gumucio, Rosario Gumucio said, he was an artist of many souls, but an artist guided by the Lord. The Latin American Secretariat of World Wide Marriage Encounter thanks Father Esteban for his service and support, and we await with his people for the resolution of the Congregation for the cause of the Saints.





# North American Secretariat



Canadian District leaders with US and Canadian leaders, Houston, 2008

For more than 30 years, the United States and Canada were the only two single countries with a seat on the World Council. Costs were rising and the individual countries were finding it more and more challenging to travel to World Council meetings, or to consider hosting the council.

*"Motion to form a North American Secretariat which includes the present Canadian and U.S. Secretariats."*

In January 2008, the World Council recommended that the Canadian and USA Secretariats consider creating a new combined North American Secretariat. The conversation began at many levels over the next year.

- Early 2008 - The Canadian Secretariat Ecclesial Team, John and Wynne

Simmer (Fr. Lawrence DeMong was unable to attend), joined the United States Secretariat Team, Tony and Cathy Witzak and Fr. Emile Frische, at the USA Secretariat Support Coordinators meeting in Pennsylvania to begin dialogue on a potential union, and to begin to build relationship.

- May 2008 - The United States Secretariat Team attended the Canadian board meeting in Montreal, Québec.
- July 2008 - Some Canadian couples and priests traveled to Ontario, California for the International WWME Convention, where more relationships were formed and bonds strengthened.
- July 2008 - The Canadian district leaders were warmly welcomed as guests at the U.S. Secretariat board meeting. At this meeting, on a hot and humid Texas weekend, couples and priests made new friends, shared their stories and grew in oneness. Many said afterward that they felt an immediate sense of family and togetherness.
- October 2008 - the U.S. and Canadian leadership teams each proposed to their respective boards that the two countries merge into one unified North American Secretariat. The motions passed with overwhelming support at board meetings in both countries.

To ease the transition, the structure of each country was maintained, and a new North American Secretariat Ecclesial Team (NASET) was selected. Together the NASET, the Canadian Ecclesial Team (selected in November 2009), the U.S. Secretariat Team (selected in February 2010) formed a new Leadership Council.

Four Secretariat Support Coordinators (ecclesial teams) support the Leadership Council. The SSC lead the development of opportunities and policy for the Team, Community, Weekend and Structure pillars for the North American Secretariat. The Leadership Council recognized that Interdependence is required at all levels of the secretariat.

In 2011, the U.S. and Canada, together as one secretariat, approved and implemented a common weekend outline. Not only has this helped to solidify the bonds between the countries, it has eased the way for team couples and priests to travel across the border to present weekends and share enrichments.

Work continues to build relationships between the two countries during annual plenary meetings, bi-annual conventions and other opportunities such as team training (deeper/profundos, Leading Through Relationship). The U.S. Board again affirmed Canada as part of their family when they invited them to share in Family Funds (which were previously restricted to U. S. sections).



*Fr. Lawrence DeMong, John & Wynne Simmer*

Leadership teams since the inception of the North American Secretariat, to date, are as follows:

2009 – 2012:

NASET: Jose & Marilyn Garcia  
 CET: Eric & Lupita Goodwin and Fr. John Persaud;  
 USET Scott & Karen Seaborn and Fr. Tom Griffith

2012-2015:

NASET: Scott & Karen Seaborn and Fr. Tom Ogg;  
 CET: Jamie & Connie McNeill and Fr. John Juhl;  
 USET: Ron & Judy Pekny, Fr. Rocky Grimard

2015 – 2018:

NASET: Gene & Maggie Tokraks and Bishop William Skylstad;  
 CET: Ernesto & Ana Lilian Ayala and Fr. Michael Basque;  
 USET: Joe & Sue Talarico, Fr. Tom Ogg

## Special projects

Left: Scott & Karen Seaborn, USET with Marshall & Winnie Kuykendall, Longest Married Couple, US, 2010

### Longest Married Couple

The Longest Married Couple project was created by Dick and Diane Baumbach in 2010 to highlight the value of marriage and to prove that marriage really can go the distance. In addition to recognizing the longest married couple in the United States, the US Regions also recognize the longest married couple in each state on an annual basis. Canada followed suit in 2011. This highly successful and widely recognized project has introduced Worldwide Marriage Encounter to new audiences throughout North America.



Left: Alice & Arthur John, Longest Married Couple, Canada, 2012

The first U.S. recipients of this honor were Marshall and Winnie Kuykendall, of Lordsburg, New Mexico, married 82 years.

In 2012 Canada recognized Arthur and Alice John, of Ross River, Yukon married 77 years as the first Canadian Longest Married Couple.

and Holy Orders, and his dream was to change the world. Mark and Joyce Kulyk and Fr. Tom Ogg led the charge to develop this important project.

The Legacy Fund that honors Fr. Chuck's mission will support WWME leadership

**The dream of these pioneers was not simply to improve the relationship of couples and priests but to make a lasting contribution to the Church.**

### Fr. Chuck Gallagher, SJ Legacy Fund

The Worldwide Marriage Encounter Fr. Chuck Gallagher, S.J. Legacy Fund is an endowment created to honor the founding father of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, and to ensure that his work continues. Fr. Chuck's mission was to strengthen the Sacraments of Marriage

formation and training, enhance the ministry and outreach of the movement, and provide a vehicle for giving to WWME.

The Legacy Fund is rooted in the following principles

- the growth of the WWME movement.
- providing opportunities that were

once only dreams.

- being good stewards as the family of Worldwide Marriage Encounter.
- continuing the ministry for future generations.
- sharing the treasure that God has given us.

### **Incorporation**

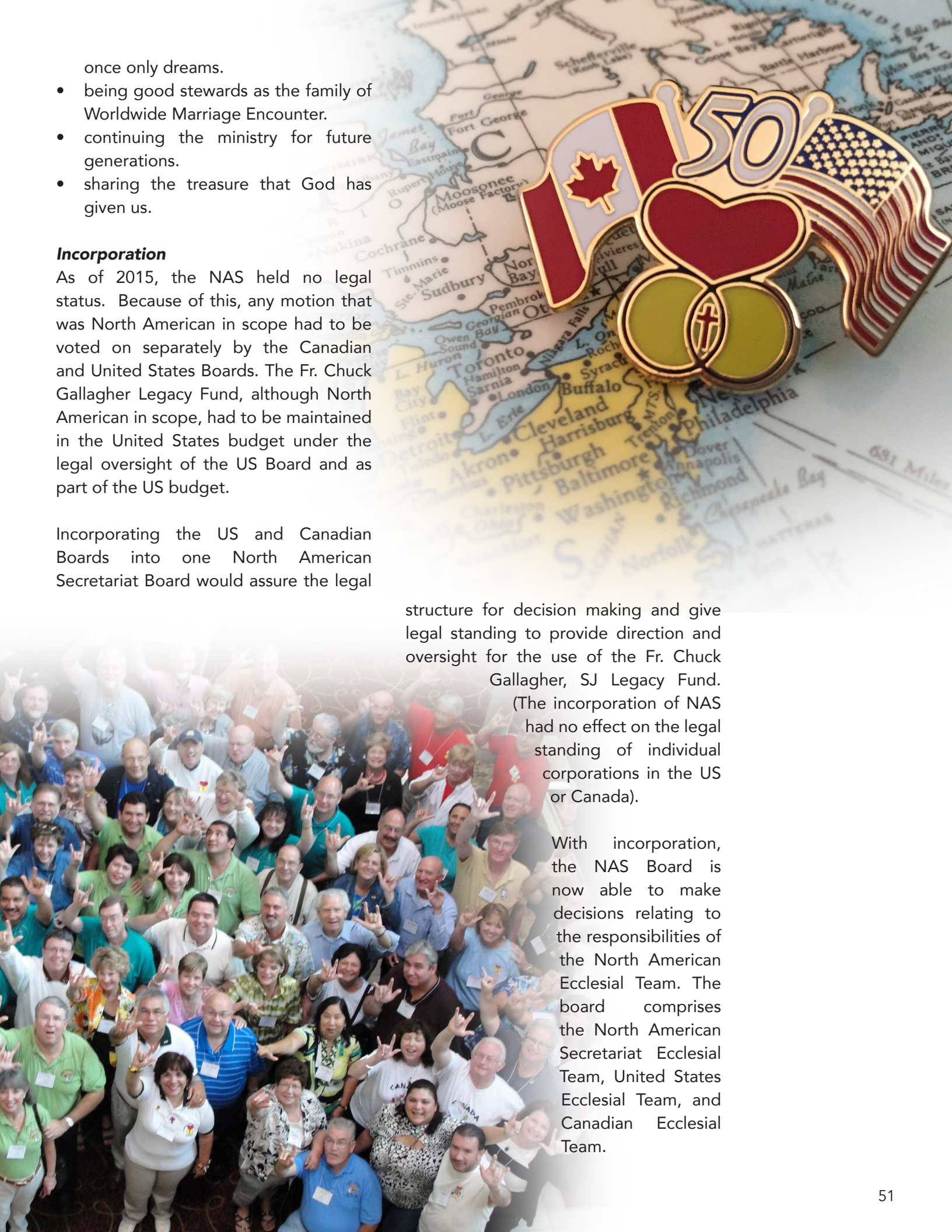
As of 2015, the NAS held no legal status. Because of this, any motion that was North American in scope had to be voted on separately by the Canadian and United States Boards. The Fr. Chuck Gallagher Legacy Fund, although North American in scope, had to be maintained in the United States budget under the legal oversight of the US Board and as part of the US budget.

Incorporating the US and Canadian Boards into one North American Secretariat Board would assure the legal

structure for decision making and give legal standing to provide direction and oversight for the use of the Fr. Chuck Gallagher, SJ Legacy Fund.

(The incorporation of NAS had no effect on the legal standing of individual corporations in the US or Canada).

With incorporation, the NAS Board is now able to make decisions relating to the responsibilities of the North American Ecclesial Team. The board comprises the North American Secretariat Ecclesial Team, United States Ecclesial Team, and Canadian Ecclesial Team.



# Building the NAS

The two secretariats, Canada and the United States, have always reached farther than the borders of the nations themselves. Each Secretariat embraced outreach countries (much of the English speaking Caribbean for Canada, and areas including Guam, Saipan for the US), and it is in the US that the very history of Chuck Gallagher's Worldwide Marriage Encounter movement first took root.



*Jose & Marilyn Garcia*

In 2007, when the two Secretariats began discussing the option of joining together as one North American Secretariat (NAS), many concerns and questions had to be addressed. Would the large US group dominate the smaller Canadian group? How would the transition be accomplished? How would the finances be handled? Were there legal considerations for the corporations? Would the French regions in Canada lose their cultural identity?

Through the efforts of the passionate and dedicated Secretariat leaders at that time, John and Wynne Simmer and Fr. Lawrence DeMong of Canada, and Tony and Cathy Witczak and Fr. Emile Frische of the US, meetings were held, questions

were answered, and finally in 2009, one united Secretariat was presented for approval to the World Council.

The combination of the Secretariats has been a major success and a model for countries working together for the greater good of the movement. The entire NAS now follows a common outline and mentality for presenting weekends, meaning that team couples and priests can present the same weekend, crossing borders and cultures, and bringing dedication and love to any region throughout the Secretariat. Team training has been streamlined and is presented to couples and priests across borders and timezones, annual NAS plenary meetings

bring leaders from all regions together and conventions have further solidified the bonds.

## **Serving in leadership is a blessing**

In 2010, leaders representing regions throughout North America selected, together, the first North American Secretariat Ecclesial couple: Jose and Marilyn Garcia. Soon after Scott and Karen Seaborn and Fr. Tom Griffith were selected as the US Ecclesial Team, and Eric and Lupita Goodwin and Fr. John Persaud said yes to the call to serve as the Canadian Ecclesial Team. The first NAS Pillar ecclesial teams were selected and the North American Secretariat began the work of building a cohesive, spirit-centered love-filled movement

rooted in the strength of relationship.

The original NAS Pillar leaders were: Jerry and Fran Ashe and Fr. Dick Morse as Structure Pillar, Jesus and Lilia Ibarra and Fr. Francois Pellissier as Community Pillar, Tom and Mary Frances Burke and Fr. Dennis Hughes as Team Pillar, and Dick and Diane Baumbach and Fr. Dick Morse as Weekend Pillar. Allen and Monika Fields and Fr. Joe Voor joined the team as Structure Pillar replacing the Ashes and Fr. Dick. Before their terms ended, the Canadian Leadership would be passed on to James and Connie McNeill and Fr. John Juhl, Ofm Cap.

It was around this time, when the NAS was being formed, that Tony and Cathy Witczak and Fr. Emile Frische from the US were selected by the Holy Spirit as International Ecclesial Team, and leadership teams from all six secretariats joined together for the World Council meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

NAS leaders Jose and Marilyn Garcia have fond memories of that gathering:

"We stayed at the home of Nini and Wanto Syafudin, and made life-long friends with Max and Jane Budiarto. During the meeting we celebrated Fr.



*Tony & Cathy Witczak and Fr. Emile Frische*

Emile's birthday, and had the opportunity to taste durian, a fruit that Fr. Emile loves and one which was provided in abundance by the Indonesian community. Durian is an exotic tropical fruit with a pungent odor, which permeated throughout the celebration that night. Fr. Emile was very happy!

We stopped in Singapore before returning home, and at the Marriage Encounter House, which is provided by the Bishop for WWME activities, we had the opportunity to meet with outreach couples working to bring weekends to China. Peter and Teresa Teo told us about some of the challenges they faced in their efforts to spread the movement into China. We were awed by their dedication and commitment to both our Church and to our beloved WWME."

World Council meetings rotate throughout the Secretariats. During their term as North American leaders, Jose and Marilyn were blessed to attend meetings in Rome, where

they had the opportunity to see the beautiful Christmas lights and the life-size nativity at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. This trip stands out as one of the many highlights of their leadership. The leaders had the opportunity

to meet Ferdinando Cardinal Antonelli (President of the Family Life Council of the Vatican), as his invited guests in front row seats at St. Peter's Vespers Service led by Pope Benedict, and were honored with an audience with the Holy Father.

While all Marriage Encounter activities are spirit led and focused on serving our Lord's mission here on earth, Jose and Marilyn said this meeting in Rome was exceptionally spiritual and showed them, along with the other World Council meetings, the true blessings of our worldwide movement and the blessings of leadership. "What an honor and a blessing to have had the opportunity to represent North America at these important International meetings of WWME leaders! Attending the meetings helped us to understand the breadth of the global reach of WWME, and understand both the blessings and the challenges of WWME across the world."





# *There are no borders in God's kingdom*

**Although the roots of Worldwide Marriage Encounter reach back to 1968 in the United States and 1973 in Canada, the North American Secretariat is relatively young as an organization. However, Canadians, Americans, and those from other countries that make up the North American Secretariat (including Trinidad and Tobago, Guam, Bardados, Jamaica, Saipan, and many more) have been sharing resources, teams and love across borders for many years.**

## ***We are all family***

Mike and Jeanne Emry were on the United States Board when the North American Secretariat was formed bringing together the Canadian and the United States Secretariats in 2009. It was a new beginning for both countries with hopes and dreams of working together more fully as one family. This included the dream of sharing presenting teams across the border using a common outline.

Mike and Jeanne share their story of cross-border collaboration:



*Doug & Candice Chappell, Fr. Henry Alva, Jeanne & Mike Emry*

In early October 2015, an email was sent out in search of a couple that could present the 2nd and 3rd sets in Canada. We responded with our availability, feeling eager to help live out that dream.

We felt blessed to be able to present with a beautiful couple from British Columbia, Doug and Candice Chappell, as well as Fr. Henry Alva OFM from Toronto. We Skyped a few times with Doug and Candice before the Weekend to get to know them

and were warmly welcomed when we arrived.

We presented to 20 wonderful couples from the Calgary area for what was an amazing and powerful WWME Weekend! It was seamless. We stayed with a very welcoming and wonderful couple from the Calgary community after the Weekend before returning home on Tuesday.

We were all family and it was as if we knew each other for years.

## Deeper magic in the Caribbean

When Paul and Stephanie Francois were asked to present a Deeper Weekend for couples and priests in the Caribbean in February of 2017, they jumped at the opportunity. Here is their story:

In true ME fashion we said 'yes' before we even knew exactly where Dominica was and what might be involved. We had to refresh our geography skills just

fervor for our beloved ministry to a part of the world that had not had a Deeper Weekend since 2010. We reached out to our dear friend Fr. Larry Brault from Massachusetts and he was immediately in as the Cadre priest.

One of the first things we learned working with the Region 3-Can Leaders, Deacon Malcom and Lynn Joab, is how cohesively the different encounters in the Caribbean work together using Skype and

Getting them all there and set up in community housing was going to be a labor of love.

Just getting the workbooks to Dominica was a feat itself as it took over a month for the books to arrive after being shipped from the US! We Skyped with each of the couples and priests in the weeks leading to the Deeper and the excitement was palpable. This was going to be special!



Paul & Stephanie Francois

so we wouldn't book our flights to the wrong island! However, we couldn't wait to bring our excitement, hope, renewal, and

WhatsApp. Couples and priests would be coming from many different islands to the tiny island of Dominica for the Deeper.

It took 17 hours to fly from California to Dominica with layovers along the way. When we landed, we were greeted by Keith and Annie Benjamin who drove us to our host couple's home on the other side of the island. Our host couple, Deacon Alvin and Francisca Knight, greeted us and fed us a wonderful reception meal – even though it was well past their bedtime. We remember thinking as we went to bed that night, where else in the world could we possibly feel as relaxed and welcomed in a stranger's home than in the company of another encountered couple?

At the breathtakingly beautiful Holy Redeemer Retreat Center we saw this incredible community in action – setting up the conference room, checking couples and priests in for the Deeper, preparing meals, and setting up guest rooms. The community couples in charge stayed overnight seeing to the attendees' every need. We personally saw them up late at night emptying trash and doing chores and then they were the first ones up in the morning preparing our meals – there was no retreat center staff to do this, only the loving couples from Dominica.

The 13 couples and four priests attending the Deeper traveled from Dominica, Trinidad & Tobago, Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, Suriname, Guyana, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The dream was to create a renewal of the entire Caribbean by setting these couples and priests on fire to respond to the call once again in a new and invigorated way.

We spent three glorious days together learning and growing through the Deeper. On the day we left, we bid Alvin and Francisca a fond farewell not knowing when or if our paths would physically cross again, but being quite assured that we now had a surrogate family in another part of the world.

Over the years of our involvement in ME we have been blessed to experience the love and generosity of our worldwide family, but nothing prepared us

for the outpouring of that love from the community in Dominica. From the moment we stepped off the plane in the late evening hours we were welcomed with open and loving arms. There was no distance between us; rather it was like meeting old friends and having time to catch up. It was instant family and instant love.

## Being open to a God-incidence

Patty and Shawn Noonan's yes to a last minute call for team, taught them that Marriage Encounter is all about sharing love, and that borders really don't matter.

This is their story.

In February 2013 we were sitting in the living room at Jamie and Connie McNeill's home, just finishing workshopping our revised 2nd set talks. Jamie and Connie – who were the Canadian Ecclesial Leaders at the time - received a phone call from Peter and Sheila Oprysko from Region 20 US, asking if they knew any 2nd set couple from the Maritimes in Canada, who could travel to Lewiston, Maine, in just a few weeks time to present a

Weekend. They looked over at us and smiled.

We were in the right place, at the right time, with the right talks just completed. They asked - and we said yes immediately. We call it a God-incidence. We were present for the call and ready to serve.

Although our District (Region 1-Can) had been a part of the North American Secretariat for a few years,



John & Toni Torrio, Shawn & Patty Noonan, Diane & Gary Potvin, Fr. Emile Frische

at that point we still had not personally experienced any interaction with the United States teams, so we were excited to meet our American counterparts.

It's a nine-hour drive from Prince Edward Island to Lewiston, Maine. It's always risky, heading out on a road trip through Atlantic Canada and the North Eastern US in the winter, but God was on our side.

When we arrived at the hotel in Lewiston, we were welcomed by the very enthusiastic Gary and Diane Potvin, from the local area. The rest of the presenting team included John and Toni Torrio, from The Hamptons, NY and Fr. Emile Frische from New York City: a cracker-jack team for sure.

We had a fantastic experience sharing and presenting with the others as well as meeting all

the couples experiencing the Weekend. Fr. Emile brought wine for Sunday's mass that he had brought back from Cana in Italy, called Cana Wedding Wine. We saved the (empty) bottle as a souvenir from our experience.

During our Weekend, there was also a Tattooing Trade Show going on in the same facility. At times it was challenging to listen to the talks with the hard

rock music coming up through the floors. We aroused some curiosity too, and many of the trade show tattoo artists asked what we were all up to and what WWME was all about. Some even offered to do couple tattoos stating they could ink our WWME logo onto our bodies. No one took the offer, as far as we knew.

## The ripple effects are immeasurable

Ken and Janine Kessler from Montana, US, say that the ripple effects of the creation of the NAS – and the increased collaboration between the USA, Canada, Caribbean, and Saipan – are already immeasurable even though the Secretariat has been in existence for less than 10 years.

In 2015, Ken and Janine attended the North American Secretariat Meeting and were seated next to Quebec, Canada couple Richard Doyon and Sylvie Lanteigne. Ken and Janine talk about the amazing ways that God can take one incident and use it to further His kingdom:

Because French is their native language, Richard and Sylvie shared with us how they had



been asked to travel to Haiti to present weekends in French in the coming year. When we left that meeting Richard and Sylvie were randomly given our names as a couple for whom they should pray over the coming year. Little did we know that our paths would cross again in November 2017.

As a new Cadre couple in 2016, we developed a very close relationship with John and Pat Hosang from Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada) who workshopped our talks. In November of 2017 we presented a Deeper weekend to a group of new Team Couples and Priests from Canada (both French and English-speaking Regions),



*Deeper Weekend, November 2017*

the United States (including Alaska), and Saipan, as well as one couple from the Anglican/Episcopal expression of WWME, and - to our joyful surprise - Richard and Sylvie from Quebec! Although they had been Team and Region Leaders, Richard and Sylvie were attending another Deeper weekend in preparation for becoming Cadre Couple for French speaking Team in Canada.

At the end of the weekend in November 2017, this group of 29 couples and four priests were no longer strangers. We were one big happy family who had come together from distances of more than 8,000 miles with a common mission – to take the Love of God and the message of WWME back to the people in each little corner of our big world.

There are many more stories of cross-border sharing, for example:

- Tony and Cathy Witczak (Philadelphia), and Dave and Christine Baldiga (Upton, MA) presented a LTR weekend experience in Vancouver, BC, in the spring of 2013.
- Bishop Bill Skylstad drove from Spokane, WA. to present a weekend in Kelowna, BC. This weekend was the first after many years of WWME absence in the Okanagan area.
- Fr. Joe Voor traveled from Louisville Kentucky to present a weekend in Vancouver, BC - shortly after he celebrated his 90th birthday!
- Eric and Lupita Goodwin, from British Columbia, have been presenting North American Secretariat Leading Through Relationship (LTR) weekends in the US since 2015.
- Fr. Michael Basque, from St. Catherine's, Ontario, regularly presents weekends in Buffalo and Rochester, NY, and Pittsburgh, PA.
- Stan and Miriam Amaladas from Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada) drove 150 miles to fill in the need for a presenting team in Grand Forks, North Dakota (a wonderful example of how God does NOT see borders).

We know there are countless stories like this – where one couple or priest gets introduced to another couple or priest and there is a domino effect which leads to yet another wonderful WWME story. The ripple effect of the creation of the NAS will continue enriching the lives of couples and priests for generations to come.

# Pacific Secretariat

With roots dating back to 1974, the Pacific Secretariat has brought together countries, languages and cultures through the blessings of one universal dream, to enrich sacraments and the church.

The first WWME weekend in the Pacific was presented in Sydney, Australia, in February 1974 by Fr. Joe McCann and two couples from the United States. The message of love quickly spread to the Australian cities of Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

That same year, the first Team Training was held, followed in December by the first weekend with an all-Australian team. The weekend spread to the capital city of Canberra, and then to the Island state of Tasmania in 1977.

- 1978 - Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekends were offered in Fiji and New Zealand
- 1980 - The first Weekend in the Fijian language was held.
- 1981 - The weekend spread to New

Guinea as an outreach from New Zealand.

The Pacific region has been recognized as a Secretariat with regular participation on the International Council since 1979. The first representatives were Ken and Julia Gee with Fr. Joe McCann from Australia. They were succeeded by Lorraine and Tony Grace and Fr. Dan Neylon OFM, the first official Pacific Coordinators, in 1980.

The Pacific Council met as a group for the first time in Sydney, Australia, from January 29 to February 1 in 1982, with representation by New Zealand, Fiji, and Australia.

- 1990 - New Zealand took the weekend to the Cook Islands.
- 1990 - The love spread to Tonga as an outreach from Fiji, and in 1996 the first weekend in the Tongan language was presented.
- 1995 - Outreach continued to the Solomon Islands.

*Some of the couples that attended weekends in the 1980s.*



In 1996, when teams from Tonga first attended the Pacific Council meeting they were representing the areas of Fiji, Samoa, Solomons and Tonga, collectively called Oceania to include the wider representation of countries across their geography. The Pacific Council now consists of the three founding countries, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia.

The Dream of “Love One Another as I have loved you” through the apostolate of Worldwide Marriage Encounter was first gifted to the Fiji Islands by Australian couples and priests. It was through the persistence of two visionary Marist priests in Fiji, Fr. Michael Bransfield SM and Fr. Michael McVerry SM. They had each experienced a weekend in the US, and demonstrated humble patience as they waited for the dream to be passed to the Pacific before it was to continue, finally, to the shores of Fiji.

While in the US, Father Michael McVerry dreamt of bringing this dream to the couples in Taveuni (the third largest island of Fiji) where he was serving. He prayed and US couples donated money for this dream. However, before he could realise his dream for Fiji he was appointed to the missions in the Solomon Islands where he continued his own commitment to daily dialogue in front of the red lamp of the Eucharist. Everyday, he prayed that one day he could share this gold he had in his pocket with couples and priests of the Pacific, and especially Fiji.

While he was in the Solomons, his brother priest, Fr. Bransfield was witnessing the first weekend held in Fiji. It was in Suva (capital city of Fiji) on the main island of Viti Levu, led by Australian team couples and priests who had personally financed their own airfares and travel expenses. Subsequent weekends were held in the main cities of the main island.

With much struggle and challenges, the dream was passed on to the Northern division of the islands and finally to Taveuni in 1980. Fr. McVerry was transferred back to Fiji by then to run the Marist Project of the Marist Training

Centre with Rural Adult Education for Married couples on Taveuni. The soil was ready for the Dream to be planted on the fertile land of Taveuni. It flourished, and grew into a big community with weekends held one after the other.



*Team and community couples of the Northern area of Fiji.*

Fr. McVerry, and three couples of Taveuni who were called to team decided to translate the outline into the vernacular for the rural couples. From the island of Taveuni, Fiji Marriage Encounter was lovingly structured and organised into the great movement it is now for the church in Fiji and the Pacific.

Today Marriage Encounter is active in the majority of the parishes in Fiji and is continuously being shared throughout Fiji. The Northern unit has brought the dream back to the main island of Viti Levu with renewed life and proper structure with the national leadership from Taveuni, scheduling weekends, and team formations.

Personal impact stories from Fiji:

- A man carried his paralysed wife to the weekend venue by walking the tracks through the mountains and crossing a

big river with their beddings and clothes. They attended their follow up process following the same route.

- Couples wrote their dialogue by kerosene lamps, and reading glasses were passed between neighbours as they shared their commitment to daily dialogue.
- An old couple had to swim across a big river to reach their sharing group once a week. They then swam back home after the sharing night.

*Fr. Michael McVerry SM with Talemo & Lusia Tukidia (RIP) who were instrumental in building up the Fiji Community when leadership was passed on to the North of Fiji.*



- Teams were stranded by floods after weekends and had to be away from their families for days.
- One time a team priest was required to ride on the back of a truck loaded with coconuts and logs to get to the weekend on Friday night.
- One team couple had to walk for miles in the hot sun because the bus broke down half way – but they got to the weekend venue.
- The team priest challenged four of the couples finishing a weekend to go out and recruit couples for the next weekend. They recruited 72 couples for the next weekend! Some couples travelled from far away villages, so no

one was going to be turned away. It was the biggest weekend Fiji ever held.

- Before Marriage Encounter, men and women did not sit together in church. However, once ME couples started sitting as couples it inspired other couples and their families to sit together in church.
- Team couples traveling to take the weekend to another island, had to be rescued by another boat as they drifted with engine problems (at one point,

they thought they would never see their children again).

- Fijian couples do not hold hands in public. However after their original weekend, an old couple decided to hold hands while shopping in

town to show their couple power. They were laughed at and people stared at them thinking that they were mad. But they kept holding hands as they boarded the bus back to the village!

The Marriage Encounter community in Fiji looks forward to the future, while paying tribute to all those loving and committed couples and priests who have passed on to eternal rest. Their passion and dedication to carrying the dream in Fiji and the Pacific has enriched the Church not only in Fiji and the Pacific but Worldwide.



The Pacific Secretariat is made up of both first world and third world countries. New Zealand and Australia with very similar lifestyles to most other western countries make up the first world part of the secretariat: the Pacific island nations including Fiji, Tonga and the Solomon Islands make up the third world nations. All have contributed over the years to the growth and expansion of the movement in the Pacific region.

## Demonstrating generosity, commitment, spirituality and humanness

The Marriage Encounter movement in the Pacific has survived many ups and downs in the past 40 years. From the enthusiasm of receiving the gift from the USA, Australia immediately outreached to spread the gift to Fiji and New Zealand.

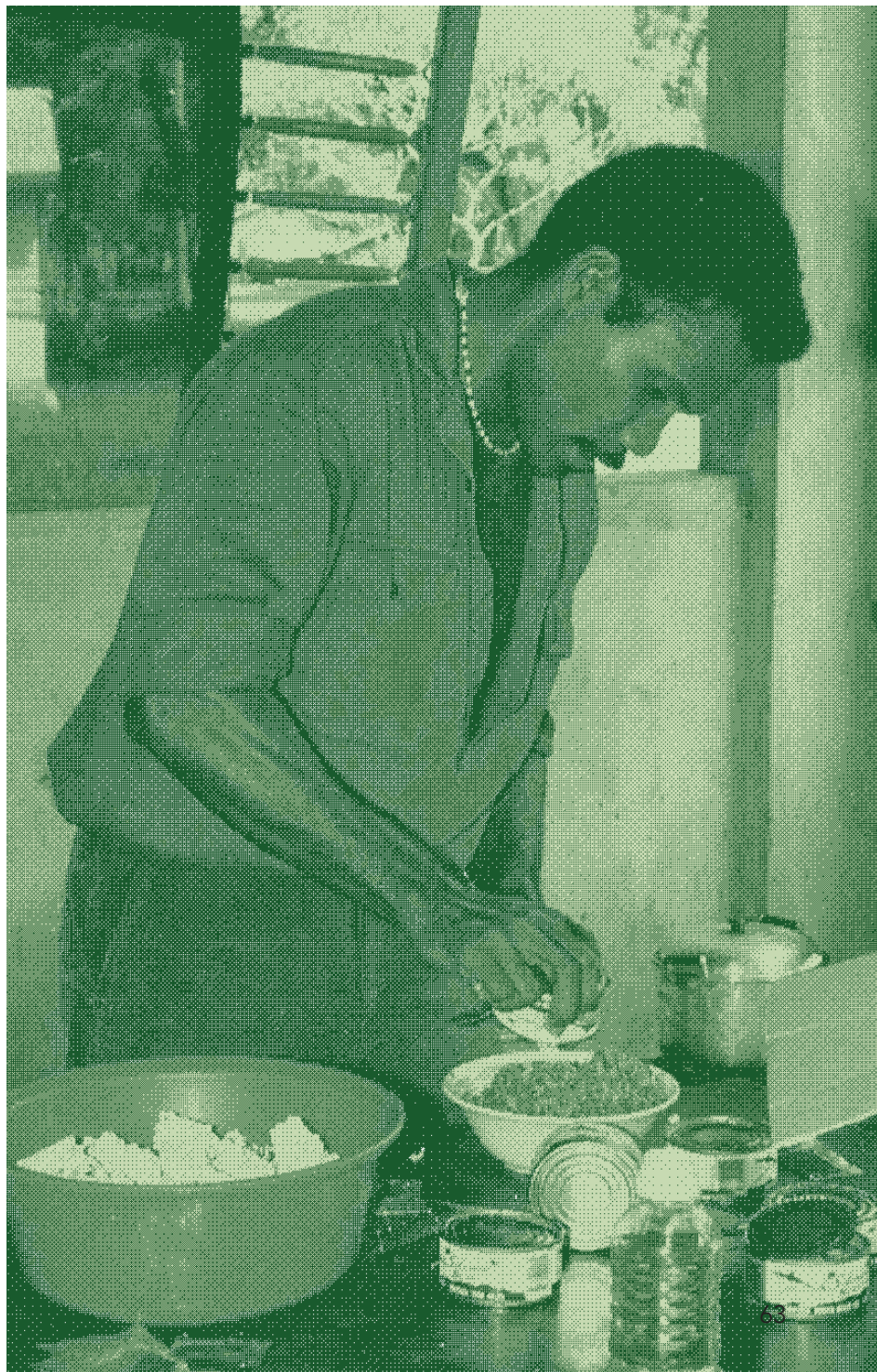
The movement grew and flourished in all these areas and dedicated enthusiastic couples and Priests worked together to spread the gift to other Pacific Island nations over a long period of time. These nations include the Cook Islands, Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

Sadly, for a myriad of reasons (including finance, lack of resources and lack of leadership teams) weekends are no longer being presented in these nations. However Marriage Encounter continues to be active in both New Zealand and Australia, and to an even greater extent, is thriving in the Fijian Islands. All three of

these nations continue to work towards expansion within their own countries.

Although some areas are no longer active, a record of the missionary outreach work over the years is pivotal to understanding just how much Marriage Encounter has changed and continues to change the world.

One of the greatest of these missionary outreaches began in 1994 when the



then Pacific Secretariat Council gave the blessing to a dedicated Fijian team to begin the outreach process to the Solomon Islands, a small group of remote islands to the east of Papua New Guinea with a population of around 200,000 people. The majority of people were living self sufficient lifestyles in the rural wilderness and spoke many languages with the least of these being English. They took on the mammoth task of traveling to the townships of Honiara and Auki (which could mean a journey of 10 days) and

which eventually became self-sustaining and securely planting the riches of a Marriage Encounter lifestyle amongst the people of the Solomon Islands.

All of this was made possible by the generosity of many people throughout the world. The initial 10 week programme had a (balanced) budget of 105,041.19 Solomon Dollars. This was made up of a donation from Missio, (a German Government missionary funding agency) of 30,000DM (approx. 60,000 Solomon Dollars) and donations from New Zealand, Australia, Europe and United States, and an immeasurable amount of time and energy from the Fijian team.

Marriage Encounter became well established under the leadership of a team priest, Bishop Gerry Loft SM, a New Zealander stationed as the Bishop of the Diocese of Auki.

Bishop Gerry dedicated the last few years of his life (although he was not to know it at the time) to establishing and nurturing Marriage Encounter in the Solomon Islands. He, along with the then Archbishop of Malaita, Bishop Adrian Smith, and a team priest, worked with their people, passing on the gift that the Pacific Secretariat had passed to them, thus continuing the dream started by Fr. Chuck and his missionaries all those years before.

Eventually Bishop Gerry retired back into parish life in New Zealand although within just a few weeks, he died unexpectedly. The loss of Bishop Gerry is one of the factors contributing to the sadness of Marriage Encounter not currently having a presence in the Solomons.

Following are a few excerpts written by Bishop Gerry to David and Bronny Lea and Father Paul Kerridge from New



*Lucia and Telaemo of the Solomon Outreach team. Bedrooms were floor space separated by hanging sheets.*

joining many townfolk spreading the encounter. Wow, what a task and what a challenge! But it happened.

In September of 1995, the outreach team from Fiji held five weekends over a three-week period (two were held midweek). Two bishops, 135 couples, eight priests, 24 sisters and four brothers attended the weekends. These weekends were followed by numerous follow-up bridging weekends over another five week period. Then, the outreach team headed home, leaving a small dedicated local community

Zealand (the Pacific Secretariat team at the time of the outreach) describing not only the incredibly difficult circumstances, but also some of the beautiful moments experienced during his time giving weekends in the Solomons.

"I have used up all my personal savings, Nearly S. I. \$15,750.00 but when I see all the local people giving their farthings too, and it is harder for them, then I cannot complain. It is a privilege. The continual joy of seeing relationships turned into gold, and the joy and freedom of the wives especially makes it all worthwhile. I was revelling in the happiness and liberation of the couples and had to thank God, that in my twilight years he has put so much colour and grandeur into the sunset for me.

Communication is difficult as the postal service here is rudimentary at best. To get any information to the villages we have to allow at least a minimum of one month for the northern part of the island and often two or even three months for the southern end where there are no roads at all.

The cultural situation here is that women are ritually defiling and unclean; sex is seen purely as for the men to enjoy and demand whenever they like. Behind the smiling exterior there is a world of hurt and frustration and despite years of preaching, the custom attitude remains deeply rooted in the people. So you can just imagine the joy and liberation that Marriage Encounter brings into their lives and into their families. It is pure gold, the pearl of great price without a doubt.

Last weekend I went over to Honiara to present a weekend. It went very well but at the end I was absolutely wrecked when I got home to the Archbishops house to prepare for my trip home the following



*The Classroom,  
Solomon Island  
outreach*

day. I lay down for just a few minutes to rest and woke up late the next morning to learn that the house had been broken into, doors smashed, burglars chased all around the place by yelling locals, excited post-mortem discussions - and I had slept through the lot!

One husband (whose wife after 10 children remains a toothsome morsel) shared that after learning that sex was a holy and wholesome thing he now regarded it as prayer and he and his wife were going to do a lot more praying than before! That sharing earned him a bask over the ear and reduced the rest of us to hysterics. If you bear in mind that the mention of sex, let alone discussing it in public is totally taboo and would normally earn you a heavy customary fine, you can start to get some idea of how liberated that couple are. So funny and all as it was it is an indicator of just how far reaching the changes effected can be."

And one final comment from Bishop Gerry talking about the practical preparations needed for the medical kit:

"All in all a dramatic start to the weekend which actually went off very well and had all the couples flying high in a clear blue sky, but one small note of practical import. Most of us got tummy trouble from some 'over age' fish they cooked. Continual procession to and fro across the school playing field. Add one extra

plastic of toilet paper and two packets of Imodium to the weekend kit!"

And finally, some comments from the outreach team.

"We left Fiji on the 29th of August after 18 months of preparation. Saying goodbye to our children was the hardest part of our leaving, knowing we will not be seeing them for another 10 weeks.

We were detained by customs as we entered Honiara; we had two large suitcases, one full of 150 ME tee shirts, so we were in big trouble! Like a gift from God, at that moment Archbishop Adrian Smith arrived to greet us, he immediately took over negotiations and in no time, all our problems were solved! Bless Him!

Fr Mike, Talemo and Lusia had a house in the parish and us two couples were taken further behind the parish to the bush where we inherited two leaf houses, (traditional houses) that had been specially built for us. It was about 1am and all we could think about was the mosquitoes. We were so tired we soon settled into our beds to wake in the morning to men setting up our own water tanks and showers, cold of course, and we were grateful as it was so hot!

*Soloman Islands outreach participants. Fr. Mike McVerry is 3rd from left, front row*

The closing mass was celebrated by Fr. Mike and Archbishop Adrian who shared to all that had gathered that for him, this was the first time he had shared to the church those magic words 'I Love You.' Everyone was in tears!"

David and Bronny Lea and Fr Emil Ciecierrega, Pacific Ecclesial Team, sum up the missionary work in the area with the following words:

"These people are our inspiration. They have been and still are the true missionaries of our movement. They willingly accept the barriers of finance (lack of), atrocious weather, broken down infrastructure (or no infrastructure at all), mosquitos, crocodiles and 'dodgy' fish. They devote their lives (not their spare time or retirement) to spreading our dream. They humble us with their generosity, their commitment, their spirituality and their humanness. They are their brother's keeper and they have been and remain the wind beneath our wings.

Marriage Encounter has been well and truly planted and the seed continues to grow. Our mission to change the world never dies and the lifestyle of many people has been changed for ever. We truly are a missionary people!"



# The gift of dialogue

**Fr. Mike McVerry is a Marist priest, a member of the Society of Mary, a religious congregation in the Catholic Church. In his own words, this is his testimony to the gift of dialogue.**

The gift of writing has been such that I've been able to listen to the person closest to me and to listen to myself. And that's through the writing. When we talk, there's no commitment. When we write, we listen to ourselves and it's a wonderful gift. Even though we are not always sharing. I dialogue with a couple once a week, listen and get in touch with the feelings.

We do the Deeper Dialogue here. It's a wonderful first step for the discernment of the five steps towards discussing what can be the three loving decisions. So that we can be more like St Ignatius wanted.

I've written every day since 1975, apart from the few days in hospital and when the plane was late. I think I've written in

so many different places. It's been a wonderful gift – this daily dialogue for priests. I'm talking about the performance in good times and in bad.

At one stage I was in a situation where there were no ME couples for five years. I dialogued by myself.

And there was a time we were going on a retreat. We were going on a local flight. We'd just arrived and I went over to the

international side and I saw these bags with the ME sticker and they went on the bus. I got off at every stop to see where the bags were. And finally they got off – at one of the hotels.

I was watching. I saw a young couple in fact they were on their honeymoon. He was paying the driver. So I asked her "how's your dialogue?"

She replied, "it's awful, just going down and down".

She thought I had asked her 'how's your dollar?'

"No, no" I said, "I'm talking about the stickers, the ME stickers."

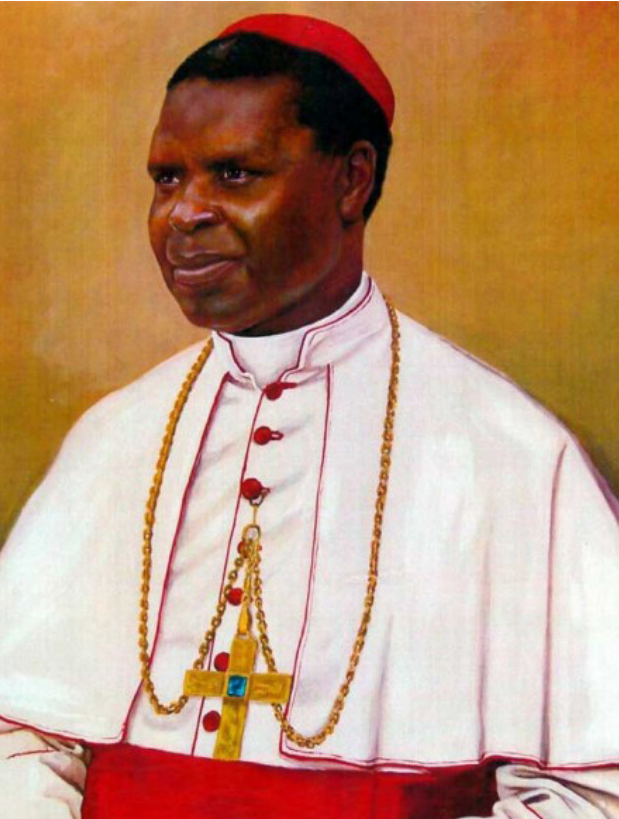
"Isn't it nice," she replied. " These are his parents bags. They lent them to us for this trip."

I wrote that night that I was so angry, it felt like I was in the desert, saw the oasis, went to it, and there was nothing there!

So you see the gift of dialogue is the best gift for me. "



# Pan African Secretariat



Cardinal Maurice Michael Ortunga

For nearly 40 years, Worldwide Marriage Encounter has been spreading the message of renewal across Africa.

In 1976, the late Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga of Nairobi experienced the weekend in the USA. He believed the experience would be beneficial for Kenyan families, so by June 1978 the first weekend was organized in Nairobi, Kenya, and presented by a

team from Ireland. As a result of Cardinal Otunga's visionary actions, thousands of couples have attended weekends in Kenya and still, the highest number of encountered couples and priests on the continent are found there.

Kenya, in the true Marriage Encounter fashion of missionary growth, expanded to Zambia, Tanzania, Cameroon and Uganda.

In 1977, some couples and priests from South Africa, while visiting the USA, experienced the WWME weekend and requested that it be brought to their people. In March, 1978, the first weekend was

presented in Natal by a team from the USA. South Africa expanded to Mauritius and Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland.

In 1981, Fr. Gerard Sullivan from Mauritius visited South Africa where he met up with friends who shared with him that they were completely transformed from within as the result of attending a weekend. Fr. Sullivan was eager to accept their invitation to experience a WWME weekend, and he became the first presenting priest from Mauritius in 1983. Mauritius is expanding to Rodrigues.

Although Zimbabwe was vibrant from the very beginning, in 1980 maintaining the community proved to be difficult and Zimbabwe had to depend on neighboring countries (Zambia, South Africa) to lend them a team priest for their weekends.

In 1979, Fr. Ward Van Hager Burg (CICM) moved to Zambia from South Africa. The bishop of Ndola Diocese wanted



weekends in his diocese and so he approached Fr. Ward. The first Weekend took place in September 1981 in Ndola, presented by a team from South Africa. Since then, the movement has developed and in some regions the talks are presented in the local languages. Zambia expanded to Malawi and Namibia.

The first couples to experience WWME in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) crossed the River Congo in 1980 to attend the weekend in Brazzaville (Congo). In 1983, a team from Belgium presented the first weekend in DRC. Weekends flourished until the 1990s, when the missionary priests that were presenting the weekends all left the country. The community continued for a few years, but without a weekend and no contact with the African leadership, activity dwindled. It was a blessing when Fr. Mario Barbero was posted to Kinshasa, for he revived the weekends.

In 1995 WWME reached Cameroon. A Holy Rosary missionary sister was looking for formation to help marriages around Bamenda. She stumbled on WWME in the USA, and, with the collaboration of a Spanish priest working in the region, team from England and Ireland, and financial support from Spain, Cameroon soon was hosting weekends. Cameroon has expanded to Togo.

Uganda received the gift of WWME in 2000 from Kenya. As a country divided by great distances, Uganda faces geographic struggles. However, in April 2010, the community as a whole was able to send a leadership team to the Pan-African Secretariat meeting for the first time.



*Enrichment day,  
Kenya*

Emmanuel and Marie-Louise Tchiko from Togo, were blessed with an opportunity to experience the weekend when they were in Switzerland studying. At the end of their stay abroad, they returned home determined to bring WWME their country. They made contact with the community in Cameroon, and in 2003, weekends began in Togo. Today the Togo movement is almost autonomous and is generously supported by church authorities.

The first official Secretariat meeting of the Pan-African Secretariat was held in January of 1983. At the initial meetings of the International Council, Fr. Bernard Thorne represented Africa. Francis and Francesca Mureithi joined him in 1983. Eldedius and Margaret Mpolohoso and Fr. Ward Van Haegenborgh were the second leadership team.

Due to financial constraints, the Pan-African Secretariat is only able to meet every 18 months. WWME weekends are being presented in South Africa, Kenya, Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Cameroon, Uganda, Togo and Namibia. Most recently, in 2014, teams from Cameroon brought the weekend to Nigeria.

# Mauritius



From South Africa to the Indian Ocean, the WWME family is strong together.

For more than 30 years, the people of Mauritius have been spreading the message of God's love as a gift, a path in unity, and a beautiful life experience.

It was during a trip to South Africa in 1984 that Father Gérard Sullivan first discovered Worldwide Marriage Encounter. With the endorsement of Bishop Jean Margéot, Fr. Sullivan began the process of bringing the weekend to Mauritius.

Patrick and Marie-France Lamusse, Alain and Geneviève Robert, Regis and Jeannette Lam Po Tang traveled from South Africa and Australia to present the first weekend. Before long, local teams were presenting weekends, and the movement grew on the Island nation in the Indian Ocean.

The early leadership team consisted of Patrick and Marie-Christine Audibert and Father Gérard Sullivan. Throughout the years, many couples and Priests have shared their gifts, their love and their faith in Jesus Christ to lead the movement.

In the late 1990s, Fr. Guido Heyrbaut accompanied Edouard and Marie Jeanne Legros, from Belgium, to bring new life to the WWME movement in Mauritius. The local community was enlightened and guided by their presence and by their words of wisdom. The movement flourished and still bears the traces of their testimony and their presence.

At the time of the Mauritius 30th anniversary celebration in 2014, the current leadership team of Paul

and Odile Lim Fat and Fr. Eddy Coosnapen were honoured for their friendship, dedication and loyalty to the movement.

Although weekends in Mauritius are held in French, the community reached out to Rodrigues Island in 1999, where weekends are held in Creole, the native language. Today, Rodrigues Island consists of 100 couples and is a vibrant and fully engaged community within the Apostolic Vicariate.

Since Fr. Sullivan's trip to South Africa, more than 2,000 couples in Mauritius have experienced true inner transformation by making the decision to love each other every day, enabling their marriage to grow and accepting their call to testify and share the love of God in this world.



Mauritian NET: Fr. Eddy Coosnapen, Paul & Odile Lim Fat in Rodrigues Island



# Rodrigues Island

On a small island in the Indian Ocean, Marriage Encounter is one of the well-known movements of the Catholic church. Couples and priests on Rodrigues Island - a territory of Mauritius, which is a country of Africa - have been influencing marriages through Worldwide Marriage Encounter since

couples continue their journey, so Anias and Jane Ravanne appealed to their parish priest for help. He accepted, and through perseverance, the couples were able to journey together and soon-after to form team.

The movement has had a

Most of couples who have had the opportunity to experience the weekend are actively involved in the different capacities within the church. The Bishop of the Vicariate Apostolic of Rodrigues even appealed to several of these couples to assist with the preparation of a guide to help Christians better reflect



January 1999 when the first weekend was held with teams from Mauritius.

Following the first weekends, team were unable to offer follow up support to help participating

direct impact on the Christian community of the island. To date, 12 original weekends have been shared, and two Deeper weekends have been presented, providing guidance and opportunity to 146 couples in all.

on his pastoral letter: "The Beauty of Marriage".

Marriage Encounter has been a true catalyst, motivating couples in groups to come together with remarkable solidarity. WWME

weekends are a community effort. Couples from each of the four parishes of the island volunteer their time and resources to provide free meals, to cook and serve food, to clean up and provide support in many other ways.

Anias and Jane said the gift of their Marriage Encounter community helped them through a difficult time when they were caring for Jane's ill mother, and the added responsibilities were putting a strain on their relationship. Despite the many

In 2002, Fr. Eddy Coosnapen visited Rodrigues on a mission and brought new enthusiasm to the Rodriguan community. Couples began to work with marriage preparation, and in 2005 Anias and Jane were called to train as team and to journey with couples in a neighbouring parish. Even through the challenges of travel at night, they persevered.

*"God calls us on these missions. The distance has not prevented us from making ourselves available to help others.*

*other people, especially those who support the same values as ourselves.*

*We put all our trust in God because He is the only One who helps us to move forward in this mission. Thanks to Marriage Encounter, we have had - and still use - the tools of dialogue which allow us to maintain our garden of love daily.*

*We have every reason to say that ME has really changed our life as a couple and the lives of the Rodriguan couples as a whole.*



challenges, they made the effort to attend all of their monthly sharing group sessions and said that taking the time to dialogue and share in the group allowed them to grow closer to each other and begin sharing more intimately with each other again.

*Taking the road by motorcycle, especially at night is not an easy task. We have faced storms, and have been soaked through to the bones on a winter evening.*

*But we are driven by the desire to put ourselves at the service of*

*We are happy to have made the choice to fully engage in our marriage and realized that marriage is a path to happiness."*



# Lighting the way

***“You must keep going! You must keep lighting the way for others.”***

That was the message former International Ecclesial Couple Tony and Cathy Witzczak received from Pope Francis to share with Marriage Encounter communities.

In 2015, Tony and Cathy – who previously served as International Ecclesial Team with Fr. Emile Frische - were invited by Pope Francis to attend the Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and

Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World. The synod took place in Rome in October 2015.

Tony and Cathy share their experiences:

“Our responsibility as auditors was mainly to listen, but we were also to have a voice in the process. We spent many of the days in general audiences listening to short presentations on the topics in the working documents. These testimonies were prepared in advance by

clergy and laity alike; over 300 in all. Pope Francis was present for all the general sessions, carefully listening to each speaker.

Being at the Synod was humbling. In addition to the Pope, there were 275 Synod Fathers, dozens of other priests and religious and some very remarkable people serving as auditors and experts.

References to church documents were frequent; we had to remind ourselves that we were called for our lived experience, particularly

*Tony & Cathy Witzczak meeting with Pope Francis*



our many years involvement with Worldwide Marriage Encounter, and not as expert theologians. When our opportunity to speak at the general audience came, we shared part of our story and we offered a plea for quality programs for engaged and married couples.

We also underlined the importance of encouraging couples to work together in the parish so their sacrament might be visible, and we ended by suggesting that seminaries form priests - not only to manage the parish - but to love the people and walk beside them in faith. It was a relief to hear positive feedback on our presentation later because it was intimidating to speak before such an august assembly!

In small discussion groups, we were invited to offer our thoughts, particularly regarding marriage and family. Our ideas were gratefully accepted and we felt validated by our bishops and archbishops. Our WWME

experience was most helpful as we were able to contribute to the sense of community in our small group, and also to the understanding of our sacrament of Marriage and its connection to the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Looking back, we remember being warmly included by the Synod Fathers. We were delighted to hear many of them praising WWME in their testimonies. The first auditors who spoke said WWME prepared them for their role with Family Life at the national level in Mexico.

Four of the auditor couples and several others told us the weekend changed their lives. Some of the bishops in attendance were presenting team priests: Archbishop Peter Chong from Fiji, Bishop Zolile Mpambani from South Africa, Bishop Francis Alleyne from Guyana and Bishop Rodrigo Aguilar Martínez from Mexico. Others mentioned WWME as having a positive effect on

families in their dioceses. Some bishops affirmed what it had done for their priesthood.

***All this and more confirmed that WWME has changed the world and is seen as a beacon of hope around the globe!***

We had the joy of speaking with Pope Francis often. On the last day, we asked for a message for our WWME communities. He eagerly responded in Spanish: "¡Hay que seguir! Hay que seguir iluminando el camino para los otros." This was accentuated with upward motion of both hands. ***"You must keep going! You must keep lighting the way for others."*** We knew immediately it was just what our WWME family needed to hear!"

*The official photo of our small group, "Anglicus B"*



# Worldwide

Catholic weekends are being given in the following countries:

## North America (15)

- Barbados
- Canada
- Dominica
- Guam
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Jamaica
- Micronesia
- Northern Marianas
- St. Vincent & Grenadines
- Saipan
- Suriname
- Trinidad & Tobago
- United States
- Virgin Islands

## Latin America (20)

- Argentina
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Chile
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Puerto Rico
- Dominican Rep.
- Uruguay
- Venezuela

## Europe (21)

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- England & Wales
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Luxemburg
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- Scotland
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Spain
- Switzerland
- Ukraine





**Asia (13)**

- Bangladesh
- China
- UAE/Dubai
- India
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Korea
- Malaysia
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Sri Lanka
- Taiwan
- Timor-Leste

**Pan Africa (16)**

- Cameroon
- DR Congo
- Kenya
- Lesotho
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Mauritius
- Namibia
- Nigeria
- Rodrigues
- South Africa
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Uganda
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

**Pacific (3)**

- Australia
- Fiji
- New Zealand

Weekends are conducted in six other countries by various Christian denominations; Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Jamaica and Belize

# Our Father's call

by Fr. Chuck Gallagher

Your being in love is My way to attract you to love. I say to you, You are wonderful! You are good! I want you to enjoy together the fullness of life, for which I sent My Son.

I know you have the potential to love totally all your life long. Are you willing to give yourselves completely to each other, to

have as rich a life as I want you to have?

I'm not talking about your just being nice, but about your being part of each other. So important to Me is your love that I have even given you My special power to personify your love. Your children will be the two of you in one flesh!

Oh, how much I ambition for your love! Your closeness, your oneness is the human experience nearest to how I live and love. I desire for you to spend yourselves on each other without reserve the way My Son spent Himself on you.

I pledge to you, as you grow together through your years of loving, that the abundant joy that He came to reveal will be yours.

**Nothing is more important to Me than your loving each other.**

So valuable and so precious is that special love that My Son has made you one of the sacraments of His Church.

You in your unique union, in your everyday life together, are a sacred sign of His caring, healing, and life-giving presence. Wherever you are, whatever you say in tenderness to each other, and whatever you do in loving union brings Jesus in His Body, the Church, alive to all whom you touch.

I call you to love each other in His name.

