

February 14, 2008

## Dear Faithful Companions,

Today is Valentine's Day....and what better way to celebrate than to send our fondest greetings to the greatest lovers in the USA—all of you! We are holding you close in prayer as always, and trusting you to live out the values of the Weekend and spread the Good News so we can change the world together.

Remember that we are missionaries and called by Jesus to renew the Church and change the world.



Just a few weeks ago we attended the World Council in Rome. What an exciting gathering of energetic couples and from all over the globe! All the proceedings took place in English, but there was simultaneous translation into French and Spanish for the European and Latin American Secretariats. In spite of the differences in language and culture, we are one family. This was made clear so often as we shared feelings and exchanged ideas. We are very excited by one

new development at the World Council --Canada and the United States are beginning dialogue with the view of creating a new North American Secretariat. Our two Secretariats are the only ones that represent individual countries, all the others are continental or are comprised of multiple countries. This challenge is exciting for all of us because we can all benefit from the relationship as we create new bonds across borders. The process will be a slow one, of course. We will report to the World Council next January on the progress of our dialog. At the local level, little will change, but we still need your loving support and prayers for this endeavor that will benefit our worldwide family.



While in Rome, we were able to see many of the holy places that have played a part in the history of our Catholic church. We had an excellent guide in Fr. Emile as he lived and studied there for a year before coming to the United States. The three of us prayed at the grave of St. Peter and at the grave of John Paul II. We prayed for all of you knowing that our movement depends on the quality of your love. At the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls, we requested a mass for the intentions of all of you. We also said special prayers for our mission at the grave of St. Paul—our missionary father and patron. We prayed that we might have the same passion he did in spreading the good news. With the help of our Italian hosts, we had an audience with Pope Benedict as well. Our International Coordinating Team was fortunate enough to shake his hand and get a new

quote to help publicize our Weekends. You will be getting the information shortly if it isn't in your hands already.

By far the best part of our journey was our pilgrimage to Assisi. The day after the World Council was adjourned, the three of us set out together by train to visit this holy place. The beauty of that small town perched on the mountain was incomparable, and spiritual atmosphere was palpable. Once again, Fr.Emile was our guide. Because it was there that he discerned on the call to come to the USA, we felt a special connection in this place. We were deeply moved by the experience of praying at the crypts of St.Francis and St.Clare and of kneeling before the legendary cross of San Damiano. For Tony and I, this was a particular joy.



We made our original Weekend in a Franciscan Retreat House in Indiana and a small version of that cross hung above our bed. Ever since that day, one like it has been hanging in a prominent place in our home.



Being in Assisi was like coming home and meeting old friends. We rejoiced in our ecclesial relationship and we gave thanks for all of you who journey with us because you are part of the joy that we experienced there. We walked with the spirits of saints in Assisi, but we walked taller because of your faith and trust in us. As I (Cathy) think about it now, I have that feeling of joy—a full measure overflowing. It is invigorating like the cool mountain air and inspiring like the lives of Sts. Francis and Clare and all the modern day saints with whom we journey. My feeling of joy is like getting a big hug from God. It is warm like the sunshine and rich like dark chocolate. It sounds like church bells calling me to prayer. I (Tony) feel energized like getting a fresh drink of cool water on a hot and humid day. It is like a hug from Cathy or one of our grandchildren. It would sound like the Gloria being played on Holy Thursday. If I met the feeling, it would be rubbing it's hands getting ready to plant the garden. I (Emile) feel revived like being at home with friends after a long time away. It's sitting under a coconut tree with a cool breeze blowing as you sip the soothing milk of the coconut. It is being in the company of wonderful friends visiting special places, taking time to reflect, unwind, taking in the spirit of those who journeyed this path so many years ago. It's the feeling I have when I'm with all of you at our community gatherings.

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Just a few days after our return, we (Tony & Cathy) had to travel to Wisconsin to be with Cathy's parents who were in the hospital. They are safely back in their nursing home again, but as any of you in this situation are aware, life is fragile at their age. Today is their 66th anniversary, and that is something worth celebrating, so we ask your prayers for Russ and Marie who chose to marry on this auspicious day so long ago.



Sometimes the journey in leadership is slow and uncertain, but other times it flows easily. It sparkles like diamonds and warms like a wood fire on a cold night. We thank each of you for looking forward to and accepting the challenges that God has given to you in the movement, and we pray you are blessed with joyful times also. Because we are all on a mission, your efforts and energy are a gift to the Father who gave us our beloved Weekend forty years ago. We look forward to seeing you at the convention in California in June when we will be gathering from the corners of the world to celebrate with our Worldwide Marriage Encounter family.

As St. Francis heard Jesus speak to him from the cross, "rebuild my church", let us always "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12.2)

As we are called to renew the church and change the world, we have that same faith as Sts. Francis and Clare. We have that faith, because we strive to 'love one another as He has loved us.'

With all our love,  
Your servants in Christ....

**Tony & Cathy and Fr. Emile**  
United States Secretariat Team