

Affirming Military Couples

By Bob & Janel Lange

Our Weekend was in celebration of our tenth anniversary. Not long before that, we had moved to Charleston, S. C., after Bob completed Navy Officer Candidate School, launching us into life as a military family. We had been hearing about WWME for years, and when we heard a pulpit talk at Charleston Air Force Base Chapel, we recognized a small window of opportunity for us before the impending birth of our third child and Bob's upcoming time at sea. You could call it dumb luck, but we now know it was God's plan for us to be presented with the gift of Dialogue at that moment in our lives. It proved to be an invaluable tool to help us grow in our relationship during the many months of separation that we would experience in Bob's Navy career. As we moved from one duty station to another, the affirmation of many local WWME communities was a tremendous encouragement to us to continue striving to live our Sacrament according to God's Plan, even as we carried out Uncle Sam's plans. Many of these WWME couples were also military couples with whom we shared a double bond. What a rich way to experience a military career! We have wistfully wished that more military couples could experience the gift of WWME!

Bob retired from the Navy in 2000. After 9/11, we felt a special solidarity with the many thousands of military couples impacted by the War on Terrorism. This solidarity inspired Janel to write a book, the *Treasure of Staying Connected for Military Couples*, which is intended to help military couples bolster their relationships during deployments. While she was writing the book, WWME and the Archdiocese of the Military Services joined ranks to begin an initiative to reach out to military families. The first phase of this initiative focused on making the Weekend more available near military installations. Since 2004, several of these Weekends have been successfully presented. Due to the rapid preparations for deployments, finding the time for couples to experience the Weekend has been a challenge.

As we began to visit military bases promoting the book, we were asked if we could present a pre-deployment workshop that would focus on couple relationships. We started thinking about that, and then came an invitation from the wife of the Deputy Chief of Navy Chaplains (an encountered couple, by the way!), and we presented the workshop to a group of senior Navy chaplains' wives at the chaplains' annual symposium. The workshop was well received, and we were encouraged to take it to the military installations. As we began to contact Navy priests, we began to hear a plea from them: There is a critical shortage of priests in the military, and with so many being sent to minister to our troops on the front line, our chaplains are asking for help in supporting the families at home.

About the time that we began to hear this message from the chaplains, the WWME/AMS outreach initiative was entering a second phase: local "sponsorship" of active duty military couples through diocesan parishes. We began to gather suggestions for our Domestic Church, and particularly our WWME community, to support so many families struggling with the current wartime environment. Dave & Lucy Snyder have led this initiative since its inception, working closely with our beloved Bishop Jack Kaising. We could think of no better tribute to him than to have our nationwide WWME community to step up to support

our military families. Who is there who could affirm these military couples better than Marriage Encounter?!? Along with Dave & Lucy, we are available to assist you in this endeavor. We invite you to contact them: 813-684-6579, daveandlucy@tampabay.rr.com, or us: 423-246-1570, langeluvrz@earthlink.net. We want to share with you the following document which we believe might serve as a springboard for you to discern what could be done in your area. Similar information has been sent to the membership of the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers. Members of that organization in your area might be very happy to hear from you regarding this need. This could be a great way to promote the Weekend, as well!

Remember the dream!

Supporting Military Families

There are families scattered throughout our area with loved ones who are deployed service members. Their presence provides us with a great opportunity to support our troops and their families in a time of great stress in their lives. Assisting these families begins with knowing who they are, and staying alert to identify these families among church, school, and workplace communities. Here are some practical ideas for providing support. The list is not exhaustive: Please use you imagination!

Prayer

The power of prayer remains a rich source of comfort to those enduring deployment. Displays with prayer support slips in church vestibules can encourage parishioners to keep the military families in their prayer intentions. Individuals could sign up for a specific day of prayer on a prayer vigil scroll covering each day of the deployment.

Acknowledgement

Cards telling families that you appreciate their sacrifice and are praying for them can be a high spot in one of their days of waiting. Send a cheerful greeting letting them know they are not forgotten. Holidays and weekends are the toughest times for families during deployment. Special greetings and invitations during these times send a message of care and compassion.

Service

It is Murphy's Law that things tend to break as soon as the deployment is underway. A list of trusted service providers who won't overcharge can be a Godsend: Mechanics, plumbers, computer experts, yard workers, and respite child care providers could start the list. Even better, a list of willing volunteers from a church, civic, neighborhood or workplace community could provide tremendous comfort.

Assist families to maintain holiday traditions with help setting up the Christmas tree, outdoor lights, or simply retrieving boxes from the attic. Host a parish dinner to honor the family, including spouse, children, parents and siblings of the deployed service member. Arrange child care during church activities that may not already provide them, such as Bible study.

Offer assistance sending care packages to the deployed service member.