

You Are Cordially Invited

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"I give thanks to my God every time I think of you which is constantly, in every prayer I utter, rejoicing, as I plead on your behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the gospel from the very first day."

These words from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians seem to greatly express the feelings of my heart when I think of the Marriage Encounter Community. When I stop to reflect on the many gifts you have nurtured in me, I am moved to deeper prayers of gratitude. You have enabled me to fall in love with my priesthood and my people all over again. You have restored in me the energy and the enthusiasm with which I first began my priestly life.

What is most significant about my experience with Marriage Encounter is that it began with a very simple INVITATION. I was not just encouraged by a couple to go on a Weekend. Couples and priests around me at that time seemed "on fire" with the values of family, relationship, and the gospel. They exemplified with their very lives the desire and enthusiasm to live in unity and love. There were no masks. I knew they had good times and bad. But what so attracted me was their ability to work constantly to progress through the blocks in order to rally in their joy and become stronger in their commitment.

If it had not been for Worldwide Marriage Encounter I may not be a priest today. Those are words of truth, and they carry memories of pain and great joy. But what if the INVITATION had never come? As one who wears the mask of the perfectionist, it would have been quite easy to say no to the INVITATION. Or better still, to cover up the pain and struggles that were going on deep down inside.

From my perspective, the onetime INVITATION to consider going on a Weekend would not have been enough. It's just too easy for us to brush that INVITATION off. There needs to be that follow-up and follow through. You may catch someone on a day in which things aren't going as bad as before. But the gently loving INVITATION must be given, not only in what you say, but in how you live.

This may mean an evening in which you invite a couple or priest to your house for dinner. It may mean that you take the time to show them you care and that you know how much they deserve this Weekend experience. I went because I thought it would be a good sign of my interest in this "program", and the couples would feel supported by me. I never dreamed it would have such a profound effect on my life! It can happen to others...but it can't happen without YOU!

If I sound like I'm calling you to a radical change of life, I am! That's what you called me to, and in order to be faithful to our love relationship I have accepted the challenge to try and live that daily. We cannot change the world unless we are willing to be a part of it.

We cannot change hearts unless we are willing to embrace them. We cannot give life to others unless we have nurtured life in our own relationship.

St. Paul writes, "I am sure of this much: that he who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus" Therefore, we must bring the many gifts that we have before our God, raise them up in blessing, and then allow God to work the miracle! It will happen. And the "Impossible Dream" that we have, to see all people transformed into people of unconditional love and lasting commitment, will become a dream realized for this age and ages to come. Please take the time and accept the responsibility to extend the INVITATION to others to make our Weekend, to make our dream come true!

My love and fidelity are yours always.