

Passing On The Dream, The "Stake" Weekend

Bill & Mary Anne Boylan
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Bill's Story:

We were driving home from a little place two miles from nowhere in the middle of Pennsylvania when we dreamed the dream' Our section board meets in this place because it is about equal driving distance for the 13 encounter areas. The two of us began to talk about how easy it had been to recruit a Weekend in celebration of our 25th Wedding Anniversary. We had saved our money and paid for 25 couples and the priest who married us to make that Weekend. It was our way of saying thank you for the gift of our own Weekend and the gift of 25 years of love. It was easy to recruit because we asked the couples to be our "guest" on the Weekend.

The more we talked the more enthused I got about asking encountered couples and priests to save for and pay for a Weekend for another couple. What better way to reach those who couldn't afford a Weekend; what better way to take a tangible stake in the lives of a couple or a priest than to offer them God's Weekend as a gift!

That was the beginning, the tiny seed of the Stake Weekend. The real flesh and blood for it was put together by five couples in our living room. These super couples developed the hundreds of nitty-gritty details needed to bring the concept to life. This even included a beautiful slide and music presentation that would be used to introduce the idea to small and large groups.

Our own personal journey with the Stake Weekend is filled with wonderful memories of the couples and priest we had staked to a Weekend. For example, I work with the U.S. Navy. My favorite stake story is the one in which we gave a Weekend to our Executive Officer, Commander Mike Mielnik, and his super wife, Joanne. If I had to put a label on Commander Mike, I'd call him the "conservative Catholic". He, like Pope John XXIII, still isn't sure those windows needed opening as far as they have been! An encounter Weekend was hardly something he would rush to. Yet, when I approached him and said, "Mike, Mary Ann and I have a gift for you. We would like you and Joanne to accept a fully paid Weekend away, at our expense. "He found it hard to say no. I told him that Mary Ann and I would be one of the presenting teams, so he couldn't "forget" to go. Needless to say, it was a tremendous feeling to watch this tough old "X.O." gradually open himself to his beautiful Joanne. At the end of the Weekend I even got a hug, but only after I promised to not tell anybody.

Mike & Joanne almost immediately took their gift and passed it on by staking a neighbor who couldn't afford to go on a Weekend. And thus it began to happen time and time again. Those couples who were staked invariably gave that stake to someone else. The dream we dreamed in that car ride from Central Pennsylvania has come true.

Mary Anne's Story:

As far as I'm concerned, the idea for the Stake Weekend began in the tub! It was several years ago and I had brought the *Worldwide Family Spirit* into the bathroom with me to read during a relaxing bath. I read a story entitled, "Impossible Dreams Come True." It was written by Ed & Joanne Conroy of Greensburg, PA. It told how they wanted to do something for their 25th anniversary; something that would remain with them the rest of their lives. Their "something" was to recruit and pay for 25 couples to make a Weekend. Wow! Our 25th was just over a year away. What a great idea for us to do also! "To whom much is given much is expected." That quotation kept running through my mind. We had been given so much on our Weekend; now we could share it with others. Bill liked the idea immediately and we were off and running! Friends helped us recruit and soon even our daughter caught the spirit. She, herself, paid for the priest who had witnessed our wedding vows 25 years before. Imagine the thrill of us presenting Sacrament and It's Graces to the priest who had witnessed our Sacrament's beginning! During the talk when we invite them to bring their friends to the Weekend and to make a starter list of 6 couples, Bill got out his original Weekend notebook and, in front of everyone, checked off the last name on his list. They were our friends, Jim & Pat, sitting right in the second row!

It was months later on that famous ride home that Bill began to dream of saving money, a little at a time, to pay for another couple's Weekend. He said in this way we could stake at least one couple every year. I remember being so tired from the meeting we had just attended that I silently wished he would dream some other day! But his head was really popping, and with little support from me, he began to hinge his dream together. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." And I did. I suggested we could buy our stake couple one Weekend presentation every month. Bill said, "Let's get busy; Mare. What if people mean well but forget?" I told him we would then send them a note saying, "Your stake is stuck at Risk and Confidence on Saturday night!" I told him, "Bill, no one would want to be stuck there for very long!" So we went home to arrange a series of living room sessions with our giving and talented couples to develop and put flesh on Bill's dream.

My favorite, most recent, stake memory Weekend is of dear friends, Fran & Cass, who have been encountered many years. They were carrying a heavy burden and being a real "Jewish Mother" (like Mary); I wanted to "make them all better" I asked if they would allow us to have a stake in their lives, by giving them 44 hours at the "side of the road". They accepted and by Sunday of that Weekend they were bright eyed, bushy tailed and ready to face the world again. That was last December. Now we're staking again - we're at Encounter With Self. You all know we can't let our stake couple stay there very long.

George & Rose Monaghan Continue the Story:

It was three years ago when Bill & Mary Anne Boylan asked us to be "Stake Weekend Secretary". We turned to one another asking, "What the hell is a STEAK Weekend?" And we wondered, "What will these two think up next? They must stay up all night dreaming up things to do!" When they explained that they weren't talking about a weekend steak barbecue, we asked them that biggie question in the encounter, "How

many nights will this take us out to a meeting?" They assured us it was an in home joy and we wouldn't have to leave our home. With that settled we agreed to take the job. "But only for one year!" Well, that was three years ago. We just recently gave the joy to Dick & Betty Conger.

Bill & Mary Anne's brainchild, "The Stake Weekend" is not only a successful tool for recruiting; it is the heartbeat of our movement in our area. As each month passes, we can feel the beat become more exciting as new couples receive their Stake Certificate to give to their un-encountered friends. These three years have infused us with enthusiasm for those new couples about to make a Weekend. We were constantly revitalized and in touch with each Weekend; before, during and after.

We are in awe of the couples who are dedicated to keeping up their Stakes. Couples like Bob & Anne King. For four years the Kings staked couples, even when Anne's father was seriously ill and their own children experienced health problems. They never let their Stake down. They remembered the dreams.

Our favorite story is of the Vala family. The first brother and his wife were staked by their friend. They in turn staked the second brother and wife, who staked the third, who staked the fourth. We were part of Joe & Luisa Vala's Weekend as team. What a beautiful experience it was to hear Joe speak of the dream and what the Weekend meant to them.

The Stake Weekend is a stake in loving one another. And without love there is nothing at all. The beat goes on. Feed My Sheep...Feed My Weekend!

Rich & Carol Mazzafro's Story:

It was one month before the Weekend when we would be team and only eight couples had been recruited. We started brainstorming one night with four other couples on how to save the Weekend from being cancelled. Thirty minutes later we had the answer. We would give away free Weekends! You see, we had accumulated Stake Weekend Certificates in Philadelphia and this seemed like a good time to give some away. We divided the area team list into sections, and each couple there took a section to call. We offered the teams a Stake Weekend for any couple they recruited. This was their big opportunity to give a special gift of love to their friends or family.

Almost immediately the couples began signing up. We felt overwhelmed with excitement as we watched our numbers grow from eight to twenty-one. We knew our Weekend was a go, and we felt loved and supported that our friends had stepped in and helped us recruit the Weekend.

During the Financial Presentation on Sunday the idea of the Stake Weekend was introduced to these couples who so appreciated the opportunity they had been given. Many of the couples chose to stake another couple! Each month they send in their checks, building presentation by presentation toward that day when they'll have a

Weekend to offer another couple. Others gave to them. Now they give to others. And so the dream continues.

Ed & Pat Lavender's Story:

Our most thrilling experience of presenting the gift of a Stake Weekend to a couple occurred in March, 1988. For three years we had tried to recruit this couple. Ray Theilacker was a work associate who had been employed to video tape the Philadelphia Area Convention in 1987. Prior to that taping we offered the gift of a fully paid Weekend to him and his wife, Sally. However, they were not ready to accept. With the filming of a second convention came a second offer and a second rejection. They were in the process of adopting two Korean children and couldn't afford the time. "Can we pick the good candidates", we thought, feeling discouraged. Then, this past February, Ray approached us with the proposition that they were now ready to make the Weekend. We watched with hope and apprehension as Ray taped the convention this year, one week before their scheduled Weekend. Now we knew Ray was primed for the Weekend, but what about Sally, who thought "Man of La Mancha" was corny?

The following weekend the Theilackers experienced the Weekend. Here we are in June and their feet still are not solidly back on the ground. On the Monday after their Weekend, Ray said he noticed that the world was a different place. "Why", he said "even the dog that has always stayed far away from me actually came up and licked my hand!" What a difference a Weekend makes.

Our three year dream for them has now become their dream as they dialogue daily and recommit to follow God's Plan for them. Now they, too, have plugged into this precious recruiting tool as they faithfully mail in their Stake contribution. Thank God we have one more way to change the world.

Pat & Kathy Kurtas' Story:

Larry & Louise (we have changed their names) were part of our parish family. We had known them for five years and had served with them as adult advisors to our parish youth group. Whenever we saw them and their family they looked so happy. We watched as their family grew from two children to four children. We wanted to share the Marriage Encounter Weekend with them. We decided to make them part of our new recruiting tool which was just getting started.

St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians was the inspiration behind this tool. The idea was to ask encountered lovers to write a letter to each couple whom our area lovers wanted to see make a Weekend They would briefly describe their own hesitancy at going on a Weekend, their thoughts as their Weekend progressed and, mainly, what their Weekend did for their marriage. Each couple on our list would receive five letters from encountered couples within one week, plus an encounter brochure with the date of the next Weekend and the couple to call to register.

The first group of letters was sent and Larry approached us in Church and asked if we had anything to do with it. He said they were impressed with the sincerity and honesty

of the letters and especially the fact that they were hand written. He added that he and Louise might try the Weekend soon.

The next time we saw the two of them together we asked if they were ready to make the Weekend. Louise said they were and they wanted to go when we were team. We encouraged them to sign up for the next Weekend and said that though we weren't team on it, we would love to care for their children. "All four of them? For a whole weekend?" They were startled but pleased.

A week later Louise called and said that money was tight and they couldn't go. We told them to just send in their form and not worry about the money. But Larry strongly believed they shouldn't make a Weekend unless they could pay for all of it. He was working two jobs; she was working part time, but they couldn't handle the whole amount. Pat finally convinced Louise not to worry about the money. She then had to convince Larry and many of us prayed that their Weekend would indeed happen.

The Tuesday before the Weekend one of the teams became ill and we were called and asked to fill in. We hadn't heard any more about watching Larry & Louise's children so we called and asked if they were still making the Weekend. Louise was very enthusiastic on the phone. Yes, they were going and both sets of their parents were going to take turns baby-sitting. We said nothing about being one of the presenting teams. They were surprised and pleased when they saw us. They had wanted us to be there with them and God saw to it that it happened.

Funds were available in our area's Stake Weekend Account for couples who couldn't afford the Weekend. It was decided that Larry and Louise would be presented with one of the Certificates.

The Certificate was tucked under their bedroom door during the Financial Presentation and we could tell by the look on their faces when they returned that they were overwhelmed. They decided then to stake a couple.

They told us that their eight year old daughter noticed a change in them immediately. And, after coming to our house with other encountered couples and their families, their children kept asking them when they could be with "those funny, crazy people" again!

Father Ken McAteer's Story:

The Stake Weekend is something beautiful. The need we all have to love "as I have loved you" is fulfilled by participating in the Stake Weekend.

A monthly contribution of \$10 or \$15 will be both a penance and a reminder that this Stake Weekend must be extended to all the world. If we expect to make a difference, to change the world, then we must bring more couples and priests face to face with God's Plan for their lives.

For the past several years I have been faithful in my own support of the Stake Weekend. At the present time I am serving as a pastor in a minority area. The value of the Stake Weekend is so evident to me in dealing with my people.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of my Weekend, the Marriage Encounter community of the Greater Philadelphia Area offered to stake ten couples from my parish to a Weekend. As of now, four couples have said yes! It thrills me to know that couples special to me will have the opportunity to live the dream. The Stake Weekend makes recruiting so much easier.

I have been touched time and time again by the consistent generosity of encountered couples and priests. Their loving responses have given me hope and challenged me to be more self sacrificing and generous toward the people whom I serve.

Take a stake in another couple or priest. Invest in someone else and **PASS ON THE DREAM!**