

Dear eMatrimony,

We are currently Community Coordinators for the Lisle/Naperville/Woodridge Community, Section 7, Illinois. We are also on the Marriage Prep. Team for our parish, St. Joan of Arc in Lisle, IL. In the past we have been Prayer Coordinators and Inviting Coordinators for our Community. But we are just now starting a new ministry. One inspired at the recent convention.

We attended the National Marriage Encounter Convention in DeKalb, this past July. We were very moved by all of the presentations, but none had any greater effect on us than the one by our International Execs, Fr. Rich O'Brien and Lee and Jan Kremer. At the end of their presentation they talked about our need to be Open and Apostolic. The following is an excerpt from their presentation. The entire presentation can be read on eMatrimony.:

Lee and Jan Kremer:

"We also challenge you to get back to the basics of Open and Apostolic. We are asking you to do what we profess on our Weekends and get back to our parishes with our Couple Power. We believe that we, as a movement, have become too inward focused, and we need to look outward into our parishes and the world to see what we need to do to help ALL marriages and priests, whether they go on our Weekend or not!! Our mission in the Catholic Church is to provide a Catholic "experience" to renew marriage and the priesthood. It does not say that this can only be our Weekend. The Weekend is still our objective for all couples and priests because that is where the conversions happen. But, let's face it, we are not very successful at getting over 99 percent of the couples to go ON the Weekend. But we can get into our parishes and provide enrichment for ALL married couples and help ALL of our priests in their struggle to stem the tide of divorce.

We challenge you to help us! If you want to fill your Weekends we KNOW that you can do it by first getting the couples in your parishes to come to a 2 or 3 hour enrichment in your parish, offer baby sitting and then they will see that you do not have two heads, and the Marriage Encounter is not just a private club that you need to go on the Weekend to enter. We know you can do it because we do it in our parish and we have couples on every Weekend in Rockford Diocese....

We don't have to be a Presenting Team to make this happen. All it takes is the desire to make a difference and to present simple, relatable enrichments in our parish on the items that are important to all couples today. Things like Raising children in today's world, Praying as a Couple, Conflict Resolution, Time Management in the Home, Balancing Work and the Home Life, etc. In today's fast paced world there are so many excellent topics – like both husband and wife working, especially because that is one of the reasons we can't get couples on our Weekends. ...

We have programs already available to take to your parish and make it happen. All you need is to have a few couples to do it. It is easy and fun, and VERY successful.

The challenge for all of us is to follow in Jesus footsteps. He asked us to go out two by two into the world and spread the Good News. He didn't say it would be easy, and he told us that many would reject us. But, we challenge you to shut off the TV and the computer and get out there and make a difference. YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE!"

And so we heard a calling, and we believed! Now, it's important that you know that we heard this same call last year at the section convention in St. Louis. But the timing just didn't seem right last year. When we heard it again this summer we felt compelled to look at it again. We spoke to Ken and Sue Ekins, good friends of ours who also attended the convention, and they agreed to help us. We wrote up a proposal outlining the benefits to the parish and our ideas for the program. We envisioned quarterly meetings on Friday or Saturday evenings, run very much like a Community meeting. We would begin with a prayer, a couple (or professional) would give a presentation, followed by individual sharing between couples, followed by optional group sharing, followed by fellowship time. We decided to call our program STrengthening OuR Marriages, or STORM. The program would cost the parish very little. We requested money to purchase beverages, and some pads of paper and pens. Otherwise there would be no other expense, and no other assistance would be required. How could the parish turn us down?

And so they accepted our proposal. We had to move very quickly to get things off the ground in September. We advertised our first program in the bulletin and in the weekly envelope for the parish school. We told people that an RSVP would be helpful, but was not required.

We were all very pleased to have 12 couples attend, most of whom were new to us. We did not know many of them. Ken and Sue Ekins wrote a very beautiful prayer for us to begin with, remembering also those who had been widowed and those who have been through divorce. We shared with the group our reasons for wanting to put this program together. Especially the fact that it is very disheartening that marriage gets a very bad rap in our culture and in the media. We wanted to counteract those negative images with ones of positive, strong, and faith filled sacraments.

Phil and I (Cathy) gave the first presentation entitled "Marriage and the 10 Cow Spouse: or making your spouse feel special". We explained how to do a 10/10 and handed out pads of paper, pens and a list of feeling words, but told people that they could just share with each other for 20 minutes. We were pleased to see that most people took to the idea of 10/10 easily. When we gathered for the optional group sharing we reminded them that sharing was optional, but that we had decided to call our gatherings "Strengthening Our Marriages" because we all strengthen each other's marriages when we gather together. And when we share from our own wealth of experience we strengthen each other. We sat back and were amazed that all but one individual shared!! The fellowship was also very pleasant. Many couples were very happy with

the format and were pleased that the “church” was finally offering something for married couples.

In addition, we had two couples come up to us and offer to present at a future session. We had a binder with copies of outlines we have used and one couple is looking it over to select something that they think they could do. Another couple is with “Couples For Christ. We suggested that they might give a presentation on couple spirituality, or couple prayer.

We held our second session on Saturday, Nov. 1. Gerry and Karen Maguire from the St. Joan of Arc Marriage Prep Team presented “Daily Temperature Readings” a technique for improved communication for couples. Karen Maguire is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Imago Relationship Therapist. We were very excited with this second program.

Our third session is scheduled for Jan. 23, a couple from our Community will present that session, and the fourth for April 16. We are also planning some extra social activities, such as ballroom dancing classes, or a special mass followed by a “reception” party, complete with wedding cake, for the future.

We had a pulpit pal in the room, with brochures. But we did not “push” M.E. We think it will get enough press in our presentations and in our conversations. We think that many couples will become receptive to the idea with repeated exposure.

We can say, with all honesty, that there was little involved with putting this together. The hardest parts were deciding what to call it, and writing our presentation. The rest is just lining up the next speakers and promoting the event. We feel a great sense of satisfaction at being able to bring this sort of enrichment to other couples. Like the other couples for a long time we had thought “they” should bring something like this to our parish. And as Sue Ekins says, she finally thought, “who are they?”. WE are “they”. WE have the resources to do this. And WE can be God’s instrument to strengthen each other’s sacraments. It has been very fun and very rewarding to do so.

We encourage other couples to begin similar programs at their parishes.

Love,
Cathy and Phil Gorski