

Dearest WWME Family,

We just want to share our World Council experience in Osaka, Japan with all of you. Japan is a country slightly smaller than California with a population of over 127 million people. The primary religion is a combination of Shinto and Buddhist, with Catholics being less than 0.5%. Over 70% of Japan is mountainous and uninhabited, so the major cities are densely populated.

We left California on Thursday afternoon and arrived in Osaka at Kansai International Airport on Friday evening (after crossing the international date line). Our flight on Japan Air Lines was 11 hours. We were enthusiastically greeted by members of the Japanese Marriage Encounter community, waving "Welcome, M.E." signs. What a wonderful sight! Our luggage was loaded into the car and Yasushi & Kimiko Fujiwara, a Presenting Team couple, drove us to the Passionist Nuns Monastery at Takarazuka, a small city about 1-1/2 hours from the airport.

The Passionist sisters greeted us, asked us to remove our shoes, and gave us slippers to wear in the Monastery. Yasushi & Kimiko ushered us to our room, which they told us was the "room of honor", the best room. It was a traditional Japanese room with reed-mat floors and sliding doors fitted with thin rice-paper. The only furniture was a low table with floor pillows. Our bed was a pad on the floor with a small pillow filled with grains of rice. We felt both awed and curious, but profusely thanked our proud hosts!

The next morning, we discovered we were the only Secretariat Team honored with a Japanese room. All the rest had a traditional American-style retreat house room with a door, sink, desk/chair, and two twin beds (pushed together, of course!)

On Saturday while awaiting the arrival of the other Secretariat Teams, with the help of Fr. Ward, several of us took a train into Osaka and, arranged a bus tour. Fr. Ward is a Passionist priest from Chicago who has ministered in Japan for over 42 years. We visited Osaka Castle, Shitennoji temple (Buddhist), and Osaka Tower. Our tour was in Japanese, but we were able to get a sense of the city and the people.

The World Council meeting began on Sunday with a welcome to the new Pan Africa Secretariat Team, Daniel & Nadege Flore and Fr. Gerard Sullivan from the Republic of Mauritius (a tiny island off the coast of Madagascar). This meeting began the preparations for a Selection Process for the International Coordinating Team (ICT) which will take place in January, 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya, Africa. Lee & Jan Kremer and Fr. Rich O'Brien (U.S.A.) have facilitated the World Council for the last three years.

One of the major issues we, as a Council, tackled was a "re-wording" of the Non-Negotiable tenets of our movement. It was a full day's work trying to address the very diverse cultural and language differences of the seven Secretariats involved in the effort. As a group, we work well together, each making allowances for the reality of the other, and trying to understand the needs and perspective of the many countries who are members of our greater WWME family. When the document was finally complete, we all rejoiced, feeling proud of our efforts to truly be one in mind and spirit for the sake of our worldwide movement.

In the middle of our "work week", our Japanese community arranged a bus tour to Kyoto, the old capital of Japan. We visited several shrines and temples and enjoyed the few remaining cherry blossoms in the warm sunshine. The Japanese people are courteous and polite and anxious to please their "guests".

The World Council ended on the following Saturday with a beautiful celebration of the Eucharist with many of the Japanese Marriage Encounter community present. Fr. Ward celebrated the Mass in Japanese and we felt a true sense of oneness with our Catholic family. We were then treated to a "cook-out", using chop sticks and unique "trays" made just that morning from split bamboo! Fr. Chuck bravely ate squid, which was served along with chicken, beef, and salmon.

We were housed overnight on Saturday by a lovely and gracious family, Tomonori & Yuko Shida, who live in Kobe, about an hour from the Monastery. They experienced their M.E. Weekend 14 years ago. Tomonori was not Christian when he and Yuko went on the Weekend, but he converted from Shintoism to Catholicism afterward. They have two daughters, Takako, who is not yet married and Shikako who is married (1 1/2 years) to a charming young man, Takashi Yamanouchi. All spoke very limited English, but our non-verbals went a long way in helping us communicate! We tried to explain the "Boston Tea Party" to them, but we weren't sure how much they actually understood! Fr. Chuck was housed with the Canadian Secretariat Team who were staying with a friend in Kyoto.

We arrived back in LA on Sunday and then boarded our flight for Boston (another 6 hours!) finally arriving home, sweet, home in Upton about 1:30 a.m. on Monday. Fr. Chuck was able to remain in Japan for a few extra days, arriving back in Detroit on Tuesday.

Our role as the U.S. Secretariat Team is such a privilege! We are able to experience the awesome "worldwide" power of our beloved WWME movement! God is so present in all the people we meet who welcome us with open, loving arms! We carry each of you in our hearts, and pray we will always portray you to others as the prophets you are for our ministry and our Church.

We love you very much,
Bob & Joy and Fr. Chuck

PS. Attached is a copy of our World Council Family photo taken at a major shrine in Kyoto.

