

WWME - U.S. SECRETARIAT

STATE OF THE MOVEMENT

February, 2005

Bob & Joy Hernandez and Fr. Chuck Kosanke

JOY

We have been graced and privileged to lead our WWME Movement in the United States for eighteen months. Our role has taken us to many interesting and exciting places in America from New York to California, and introduced us to unique cultures in Australia, Japan, and Africa. What a blessing it is to be chosen to serve as the United States Secretariat Ecclesial Team, representing couples and priests who give so generously to this ministry dedicated to renewing our Catholic Church and changing the world!

The U.S. Secretariat has accomplished much to be proud of in 2004. We selected faith-filled and knowledgeable English, Spanish and Korean couples and priests as Cadre Presenting Teams to present Deeper Weekends for all our new Presenting Teams from 2005 thru 2007. They will prepare and mentor those who choose WWME as their primary apostolate and are the future of our Movement in the United States.

After two years of pilot in the U.S., the WWMEE is recognized as a meaningful alternative experience for those who may be unable to attend a Weekend. This non-residential format will broaden our base of influence, particularly in urban communities. The MEE can help meet the desire of pastors to provide support to their married couples and also offers the advantage of a mid-week experience which will allow our priests to participate more readily.

BOB

The National Priest Experience formulated by the Team Pillar and hosted by Section 11 in San Diego in April, attracted over 75 Presenting Team priests. This provided an opportunity for relationship and sharing with other priests, as well as a Sweep Experience directed specifically toward the priest's sharing on the Weekend.

The Weekend Pillar coordinated an organized reach out effort designed to provide support to married couples who serve in the military. The WWME Archdiocesan Military Services Outreach (AMSO) is directed to the 380 Catholic chaplains serving the military archdiocese.

There are 1.5 million Catholics in the Military Archdiocese and 60% of them are married couples. This effort has the full support of Archbishop Edwin O'Brien, as well as Bishop Jack Kaising, who is a former Cadre Team priest, a Presenting Team priest and our new Episcopal Moderator for WWME.

Over 1,300 Presenting Team couples and 195 Presenting Team priests attended the 2003-2004 Sweep Experience, which is required for those choosing to continue their ministry as a WWME Presenting Team. The Sweep Experience inspired a resurgence of energy and rededication to renewing presentations to offer a Weekend that will bring conversion of heart to those who experience it.

The Leading Through Relationship experience for all new leadership in the U.S. was revised and presented for the first time in 2004. The post-weekend evaluations completed by couples & priests who attended the LTR have been overwhelmingly positive. The new LTR weekend provides excellent training and support for our new leadership teams.

Two extraordinary "firsts" also happened in 2004. WWME was invited to the White House to meet with the Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy and was also invited to attend the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops committee on Marriage & Family in Washington, D.C. We believe these are positive signs that our movement is gaining visibility and is clearly recognized as a powerful instrument of change in the Church and in the world.

The ability of WWME to use the technology of the internet to pursue our mission continues to expand. Our "eMatrimony" electronic magazine is updated several times each month and is published in both English and Spanish. A new electronic website was also developed and implemented during 2004. It is called the Encounter Resource Library (ERL) and it provides access to many types of inviting and enrichment resources that can be used to support both encountered and pre-encountered couples and priests who aspire to renew the Church and change the world.

During this year, our LINK Group, the technical couples that support the WWME websites, redesigned and re-launched the Encounter Leadership Files (ELF) website that is used by Section and Local Area leaders. This website includes all of our WWME leadership documents, organized by Pillar.

CHUCK

World Marriage Day and World Priest Day continue to be celebrated by Catholic communities throughout the United States due to the work of the Weekend Pillar and the passion of many encountered couples & priests who continue to bring attention to these sacraments of our Church.

CHUCK CONTINUES

With the sustained focus on inviting by all U.S. Sections in 2004, due primarily to the Inviting Challenge initiated by the U.S. Weekend Pillar, our labors succeeded in renewing the sacraments of over 600 **more** couples and 22 **more** priests than in 2003!

This increase reverses a three year decline in Inviting totals and it is the first **5% increase** in couples in over 10 years! We are convinced this upward trend will continue as we work shoulder-to-shoulder to announce the Good News of God's desire for His people, which is intimate and responsible relationship.

The U.S. Secretariat Board tackled a difficult issue in October as efforts were made to balance the 2005 National budget. In a bold and responsible vote, the Board chose to eliminate one of four planned annual Board meetings in Houston to help reduce costs and achieve a balanced budget. At the same time, the Board voted to increase national dues by one dollar for the first time since 2001 and added an annual License Fee for all 19 U.S. Sections and 10 Interfaith Expressions. We applaud the spirit of interdependence and the responsible stewardship of resources entrusted to WWME.

The Stewardship Fund has been, and continues to be, a valuable resource to assist in reach out efforts throughout the world. During 2004, substantial grants were provided to Latin America for a historic reach out to Cuba and to Oceania to support WWME in the Solomon Islands.

The mentality of responsible stewardship is important for us as a world Secretariat to set an example of interdependence at all levels of our movement. Many Local Areas and Sections were extremely generous in 2004, providing support to the U.S. Family Fund as well as financial and spiritual fellowship to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, and other countries in Africa.

Our first Year-End Donation Program received \$5,725 to provide assistance for WWME, both at the national level and in many Local Areas and Sections.

Holy scripture reminds us about the role that responsible stewardship plays in God's plan. The Jewish people were taught to "tithe", the Hebrew word for "tenth". This meant that a devout Jew was to return one-tenth of his financial blessings to God, the source of all blessings. Jesus admonished his disciples about "building more barns" rather than helping those in need. He praised the widow's mite and challenged the rich young man. We are grateful to those Sections that have generously reached out to other Sections and to the world. We encourage all Local Areas and Sections to donate 10% (tithe) of their year-end bank balance for outreach.

WWME embraces the Christian faith and therefore, the biblical teaching of stewardship. A "steward" is defined as "a person entrusted with the responsible care of the resources of another." As leaders, each of us is a steward entrusted with the "resources" belonging ultimately to God — our lives, our vocation, our family, our gifts & talents, our material wealth, and our ministry in WWME.

CHUCK CONTINUES

In St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he says, "*Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*" We are called to constant reevaluation of our openness to generosity so we may pursue our mission and change the world.

Overall, it's been a productive and momentous year for our movement! We thank each of you who share in our leadership with your support and prayers.

JOY

Now we stand on the brink of a new year. What will 2005 bring to WWME, to our Church, and to the world? We must develop "S M A R T" goals that will continue our upward momentum in WWME.

It's vital that we, as a movement, continue to embrace interdependence at all levels. Interdependence means that we rely on one another's strengths and work together to overcome our weaknesses. We mutually agree to support and be **influenced** by each other for the sake of all.

We have many challenges ahead of us and challenge requires a spirit and action of interdependence. Interdependence is more than just mutual cooperation. It requires collaboration. Cooperation is working together **agreeably**. Collaboration is working together **aggressively**. It takes commitment, passion, and a sense of shared mission.

In St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he advises the Christian community with these words: "*Therefore, encourage one another and **build one another up**, as indeed you do. We ask you to respect those who are laboring among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, and to show esteem for them with special love on account of their work. **Be at peace among yourselves.***"

As a collaborative movement, we must be at peace among ourselves, respecting and showing esteem for one another at all levels and in differing cultures. When we work together interdependently, we can accomplish great things. If we work separately, we leave a lot of dreams and victories unfulfilled.

The challenges in inviting will continue in 2005. We must not allow ourselves to become complacent. As leaders, we exhibit hope and enthusiasm in all that we do and all that we say.

In John Maxwell's book *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player*, he says, "People can succeed at almost anything for which they have enthusiasm. Successful people understand that **attitude is a choice**—and that includes enthusiasm. People who wait for external forces to help them spark their enthusiasm are at other people's mercy all the time.

JOY CONTINUES

However, positive people are positive because they choose to be. If we want to be positive, upbeat, and passionate, we need to take responsibility for being that way.”

We want WWME to be an enthusiastic, collaborative, courageous force in our Church. We want to work together **aggressively** to achieve our mission. Aggressive is a word that some are uncomfortable with, particularly in ministry. Aggressive means “excessively forceful”. As prophets and leaders, we strive to model our behavior on Jesus, and Jesus was not “excessively forceful”. Yet St. John shows us another side of Jesus we can emulate.

“It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. There in the Temple, he found men selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables.

So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins, and he ordered the men who sold the pigeons, “Take them out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that the scripture says “My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire.”

Perhaps it is time for us to act “excessively forceful” in our movement. **Our Father’s house has become a marketplace!** Do we have the courage to overturn the tables? Are we bold enough to risk rejection and ridicule by handing out inviting brochures on street corners and at flea markets? Are we brave enough to knock on doors in our neighborhoods? Do we have the audacity to “rock the boat” of polite propriety? We need **zealots** in WWME! A zealot is someone who is filled with ardor for a cause, someone with enthusiasm, courage, zeal, passion, spirit & heart!

This is our time to fulfill our mission to renew God’s house! Does our devotion to this mission burn in us like a fire? It must!

The Holy Father reminds us that “our faith, our responsibility, and our courage are all necessary if Christ’s gift is to manifest itself to the world in all its splendor.”

BOB

At the conclusion of the World Council in Kenya, the local Marriage Encounter community took all of us to visit a national game park at Lake Nakuru. As part of our lengthy bus ride, we had the opportunity to stop at several roadside shops that were selling Kenyan arts & crafts called curios. At each one, the vendors had the same basic merchandise — carved animals in wood & stone, Maasai blankets, painted bowls, carved masks and woven baskets. Rarely did any of these vendors wait in their makeshift storefronts for the customers to come to them.

BOB CONTINUES

The ones who sold the most merchandise were the ones who were the most aggressive, the zealots in the lot. Even though all the merchandise was basically the same, each vendor loudly praised the quality of their goods, pushed their merchandise into our hands so we could feel the materials.

The point of this story is the vendors who sold the most goods were the ones who were the most aggressive, the most **courageous**. They were in our faces and we didn't always like that, but they usually persuaded us with a deal we couldn't refuse.

We in WWME need to be courageously **in the face** of couples & priests to invite them to our Weekend! We need to offer a deal they can't refuse! When someone tells us they are not interested in what we are selling (the Weekend), do we simply accept their rejection and move on and start over with the next couple? Or is that when we re-double our efforts to help them see the **greater value** of the Weekend in their lives? Historically, prophets have always been rejected by the society to whom God sent them. But they didn't give up. Never, never give up!

JOY

An important ingredient in interdependence is **communication**. As leaders, we communicate our vision, provide direction, empower, motivate, encourage, and inspire those we lead. We must **connect** with couples and priests who share this ministry.

Communication is more than just conveying information, although that is a necessary responsibility. Communication is also **communio**n, the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings. As leaders, who are you? What do you believe? Where are you going and why? Unless you can communicate these things to those you aspire to lead, it will be difficult for them to invest in you or your leadership. Without consistent and effective communication, there can be no spirit of interdependence. Open communication increases trust, trust increases ownership, and ownership increases participation.

When we lead through relationship, face to face communication is the gold standard, but when that's not possible, we use available resources to connect with others. Telephone, teleconferences, email, cards & letters can help us "reach out and touch someone". As leaders, we cannot limit our communication only to those who serve on our Board. We, and you, do not simply lead a Board. We are leaders of our worldwide movement, and we cannot lead in a vacuum. Our communication must reach out to Presenting Teams, community, clergy, particularly our bishops, Family Life offices, the media, and the public at large.

BOB NEXT

Communication also means sharing good news with others, especially uplifting stories of success. We have the ability to inspire each other to greatness! I was inspired by Oscar & Luz Delgado as Luz shared their story of driving from Chicago to Milwaukee to visit one of their Hispanic communities. While there, they saw a church with a Spanish-speaking Mass and impulsively decided to go in. They sat in the first row and quickly wrote a note asking to be allowed to talk about Marriage Encounter.

Luz passed the note to an altar server who gave it to the presiding priest. That was courageous and aggressive, but the priest did invite them to talk to his parishioners right after Communion.

Success stories increase collaboration and foster interdependence by helping us to believe in ourselves, our mission, and our message. Ordinary people with commitment can make an **extraordinary** impact on the world.

CHUCK

Communication beyond our WWME movement is vitally important, whether within the Church or with various levels of government and society. This leads to greater collaborative efforts with others who are concerned about strengthening or renewing marriages (and priesthood). Effective communication with parish pastors and our bishops can lead to win/win outcomes for everyone.

Whether in a state capital or the nation's capital, we have tremendous opportunities to communicate our message to the wider society. We have entered a time when marriage amendments seek to change the definition of marriage. There are times when legislators propose bills that can be harmful to marriage and the family. Though these political avenues fall outside the mission of WWME, our witness and support of other efforts to strengthen marriage can lead to collaborative partnerships that make our movement more visible and more powerful as an agent of change.

BOB

Inviting others to the Weekend will continue to be a priority for our movement. Our theme for this year is "**Invite The Top 25 in 2005**". This theme refers to a process of identifying the top 25 parishes (by number of parishioners) in each Diocese and targeting these parishes in our inviting efforts. To be trustworthy stewards of our resources, we need to narrow our focus of attention to parishes that will bear the most fruit from our labors.

We stay focused on our primary goal of 25 couple Weekends which will help us to be most effective and make significant progress toward our mission.

BOB CONTINUES

We need to be **intentional** in our inviting efforts. Intentional is about focusing on doing the right things, moment to moment, day to day, and then **following through** with them in a **consistent** way.

We need to make every inviting effort count. We should meet each of the pastors in these 25 parishes and have bulletin announcements and brochures readily available in every church. These top 25 parishes are where we should direct our primary time and energy for Mass talks and Romance evenings. Success will come when we do the common things **uncommonly well**.

JOY

Community is another important focus in the coming year. Together with the Community Pillar, we have developed a **Community Building Initiative**, based on our challenge in 2004 asking each Presenting Team to choose two couples from each Weekend they present and invest themselves in their lives. A meaning for “invest” is “to give power to”. As couples & priests called to be prophets, that’s our role: to **empower** couples to live a radical lifestyle by inviting them into our lives, inviting them to **be** community with us.

Community is essential for effective leadership. In fact, leadership can be defined in part as “**accomplishment through community**”. Effective leaders get things done through others. Jesus surrounded himself with community and accomplished much of his mission through them as we hear described in chapter 3 of St. Mark:

*“He went up the mountain and **summoned those whom he wanted** and they came to him. He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, that they might **be with him** and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” (Mark 3:13-15)*

This is at the heart of our Community Building Initiative. We have a unique opportunity as Presenting Teams to “summon” those we want to be with us to form a community of love. By living the values we espouse on our Weekend in their presence, we will empower them and send them forth.

M. Scott Peck has defined “community” as “two people side by side with a shared understanding of their own need for each other.” We will build community, not by assigning “jobs” to couples, but by sharing our lives with them so they will **experience** a sense of “common-unity” and become aware of their need to journey with others. Unless we truly **connect** with couples to whom we offer the dream of a “new world somewhere”, they will never find that promised land.

BOB NEXT

BOB

WWME is a movement dedicated to the renewal of the sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony. But another very important part of our ministry is supporting Family Life. We want to establish ourselves as a movement that is concerned with the active life of families.

Our focus as a movement for over three decades has been on the intimate community of husband and wife. But most husbands and wives are part of a larger community that includes their children. We want to attract those couples to this apostolate as well, so we need to become more invitational in our outreach to them.

Children demand more and more of their parent's time today and in most families, both husband and wife have full time careers. Many are living apart from their extended family and find responsible child care difficult to secure, especially for a weekend.

Whenever possible, our community enrichments should include a program for children. General Team meetings can provide a separate space with popcorn and a movie for the kids. When Local Area leadership presents a Kick-Off for a couple with young children, we should go to their home, rather than expecting them to find a babysitter so they can come to us. Another way to be attractive as a movement that embraces families is to give a witness talk at Mass about WWME -- with our children standing beside us.

One of the gifts committed Marriage Encounter couples can offer to their children is a spirit of sacrifice for the greater good. We can help our children embrace a mission way of life by the way we live our faith outwardly for others.

There are many creative things we can do to appeal to couples with young families. Just like our Church, WWME is a "graying" movement. If we want to influence the future, we must **influence families**.

As the United States Secretariat, we will continue to reevaluate the impact of a changing society on the efficacy of WWME in renewing the Church and changing the world. We know we face many challenges as a movement, as does our Church and society in general. However, we can allow nothing to deter us from our primary focus of **inviting**. We are already enjoying the fruits of our labors and we are confident that, with God's guidance and wisdom, we will continue to persevere. More than ever, our movement is reliant on inspired, motivated, positive-thinking leaders whose vision of the future of WWME is hopeful and uplifting and who consistently communicate that vision to those they lead.

JOY NEXT

JOY

Each of us in this room has the unique privilege of having been selected by a community of believers who, influenced by the Holy Spirit, chose us to lead them. How many of us awaken each morning and say, “Thank you, God, for **entrusting** your movement to us!” How many of us truly **delight** in our leadership and see it as a precious trust? One of our primary responsibilities as leaders is to **embrace** our leadership with enthusiasm, with joy, and with hope for the future — and to share that with those who place their trust in us to lead them.

At the August Deeper Weekend in Orlando, Bishop Jack spoke from his heart to the couples and priests before him who were about to embark on their mission journey as Presenting Teams. He looked each of them in the eye and said with great sincerity, “This is the **best** role in the Encounter!” That is what each of us should say about every role in which we serve God’s people, particularly as leaders for WWME. We need **courageous belief** in ourselves, **zeal for our mission**, **aggressive collaboration** in fulfilling our responsibilities, and certain knowledge that each role is the **BEST** because it’s **where God needs us to be** to complete His plan for renewing His Church.

When it comes to living a life of significance, the vital question isn’t, “Am I committed?” It’s, “What am I committed to?” People who make a difference stand out from others because they are connected — to inspired leaders, to a powerful vision, to an impossible dream, and to other people who want to make a difference. You are called to be **inspired leaders!** You are chosen by the influence of the Holy Spirit to be in this place and in this time — to lead God’s people. For the sake of our Church, we ask you to lead with pride, strive for excellence, and let your devotion to God’s house **burn in you like a fire!**

Amen. We love you.