

May 11, 2006

Contact: Sharon Brooks
Worldwide Marriage Encounter
2210 E. Highland Ave. Ste.106
San Bernardino, CA 92404
Ph. (909) 863-WWME (9963)
Fax (909) 863-9986



For immediate release

Worldwide Marriage Encounter Selected to Receive 2006 Franciscan International Award

Each year since 1957, Franciscan Retreats, in the name of the entire Conventual Franciscan Order, has presented the Franciscan International Award to men, women and organizations that represent the best values of Catholic tradition.

On May 11, Franciscan Retreats presented the 2006 award to Worldwide Marriage Encounter. Fr. Ken Bartsch, OFM Conv., Director of Franciscan Retreats in Prior Lake, MN noted, "Worldwide Marriage Encounter is one marvelous Christian response to the pressures of the modern world on marriage. It is a movement, summoned by the Holy Spirit, that calls husbands and wives to reflect on their experience, remember their personal histories, renew their commitments, develop their vocabulary and enhance their communication." He continued, "The couples and priests involved in Worldwide Marriage Encounter are generating a thorough reexamination of our theological and ethical doctrines as they bring new experience, thought, words, and awareness of the concept and value of marriage. Worldwide Marriage Encounter reveals the Sacrament of Marriage as more liberating, joyous and wise than celibate preachers, teachers and counselors could ever imagine, much less describe. We are very pleased to present the 2006 Franciscan International Award to Worldwide Marriage Encounter."

Accepting the Franciscan International Award on behalf of Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) were **Bob & Joy Hernandez** from **Upton, Massachusetts**, the United States Secretariat Leadership Couple and **Fr. Mark Willenbring** from **Kimball, Minnesota**, the former United States Secretariat Leadership Priest. In accepting the award they said, "We sincerely thank Franciscan Retreats, as well as the Conventual Franciscan Order, for honoring Worldwide Marriage Encounter with the 2006 Franciscan International Award. As the United States Secretariat Team for WWME, we gratefully accept the award on behalf of the many English, Hispanic, & Korean couples & priests who serve our ministry and who are dedicated to the mission of our worldwide movement, which is to renew our Catholic Church through the Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders."

Worldwide Marriage Encounter supports the Sacrament of Matrimony and the Sacrament of Holy Orders by providing a weekend and/or mid-week enrichment experience and ongoing community support for married couples and dedicated clergy. Since its creation in 1968, Catholic weekends have been presented throughout the United States in English, Spanish and Korean. WWME Interfaith also provides weekends for 10 other faith expressions. Worldwide Marriage Encounter is presented on a regular basis in 86 countries around the world.

Some of the previous recipients of the annual Franciscan Award were: Dr. Charles Mayo (1964), Alcoholics Anonymous (1967), Dr. Billy Graham (1972), Dr. Mildred Jefferson (1978), John Michael Talbot (1985), Rabbi Max Shapiro (1989), Sisters of St. Clare (1993), Archbishop John Roach (1996), Habitat for Humanity (1999) and Sister Helen Prejean (2003).

For more information about Worldwide Marriage Encounter, please call 800-795-5683 or visit our website at www.wwme.org.

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