

Detroit Deacon Formation Weekend

By John & Belinda Brasley

John (on the phone): "Are you sitting down?"

Belinda: "No, but I will be. Okay, I'm sitting. What is it?"

John: "I just found out the count for the Deacon Weekend."

Belinda: "Okay, go ahead, tell me, what's the count?"

We'd been contacted several months earlier by our friend, Fr. Emile Frische, who serves Worldwide Marriage Encounter as the Ecclesial Leadership Priest on the U.S. Secretariat Board. Fr. Emile asked us if we would present a weekend in August 2007 in the Archdiocese of Detroit for the Deacon Formation Community: for all the men preparing for diaconate ordination and their wives. We immediately agreed said 'yes' to this opportunity, believing that these particular couples would benefit from having deacon couples on the team. John was ordained as a Permanent Deacon for the Diocese of Rochester in 2003. We've been presenting WWME weekends in our local Area of Rochester, New York, since 1992, and we've been married for 23 years.

Msgr. Chuck Kosanke (the former U.S. Leadership Priest) was instrumental in arranging for the presentation of this weekend. He called together a team which we felt humbled to be a part of, including the Section 6 Leadership Couple: Jerry & Fran Ashe; and the Southeast Florida Leadership Couple: Deacon Mario & Olga Lopez. Deacon Dan & Joyce Hurley from the local Detroit Area rounded out our team as the Post-weekend couple.

John: "The count is 45!"

Belinda: "What?!"

John: "You heard me right. We're presenting the weekend to 45 couples!"

We were both feeling overwhelmed at the prospect!

We felt mostly excited a few days later, as we flew out of Rochester on this special mission. We were greeted at the airport in Detroit by Dan & Joyce. Although we had never met, Dan & Joyce welcomed us warmly, as if we were all longtime friends. We instantly formed a deep and loving bond. Soon we were joined by Mario and Olga, who arrived at the airport shortly after us, and we were on our way. The car was full of laughter and joyful conversation. A dinner meeting gathered all of us together, with Jerry & Fran and Msgr. Chuck. We felt an instant camaraderie among the team as we briefly reviewed some last minute details and quickly prepared our game plan. A team dialogue and sharing at Jerry & Fran's home helped us to cement our newly formed friendships.

Our excitement continued to build as we arrived Friday night at St. John's Retreat Center. The deacon formation community was already beginning to arrive. All 45 couples already knew each other quite well and they all seemed eager to socialize and mingle. We began to wonder whether the couples would be able to focus on their spouses and make the most of this experience.

We soon found our concerns to be unfounded. The couples began focusing on their relationships and growing deeper in their intimacy. Jerry & Fran and Msgr. Chuck warmly welcomed them during the first presentation Friday night and we encouraged the couples to focus on their feelings.

On Saturday morning, Msgr. Chuck and Mario & Olga showed the couples how our behaviors don't always have to be ruled by our personalities, and they challenged the couples to invest themselves deeply in the rest of the weekend so they could discover more about themselves, their spouses, and their relationship. The weekend was obviously off to a great start!

As the day went on, it became obvious that these faith-filled couples were working hard at breaking down the barriers and opening up some new lines of communication through their experience of dialogue. The Open Sharing on Saturday night made it clear that these couples were growing closer together and increasing their intimacy. By Sunday morning, the conference room was glowing with the rediscovered love and the renewed confidence these couples had uncovered over the course of the weekend. We felt joyful and ecstatic as we realized the weekend was working!

Deacon Couples are a strong and visible sign of Christ's love for the Church. They're on the front lines in our parishes and in other ministries, and they often find themselves tossed into the trenches of Marriage in Today's World. We know this weekend experience provided a great benefit to these couples who will need to form a deeper Unity of Mind, Body, and Spirit in order to most effectively serve others for the greater glory of God. Deacon couples face tremendous stress and pressure as a result of their commitment to their faith and the sacrifices they make to serve selflessly and generously. We're convinced that the communication tools picked up on the weekend will equip these couples to better live out the Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders.

Dan & Joyce spoke briefly at the end of the weekend, inviting the deacon candidates and their wives to the Post Weekend follow-up, to help them to Continue the Journey they've begun.

We felt honored and humbled to be a part in this powerful experience!

Worldwide Marriage Encounter's mission of renewal in the Church and change in the world is to assist Couples and Priests to live fully intimate and responsible relationships by providing them with a Catholic "experience" and ongoing community support for such a lifestyle.

Here are a few emails, from couples who attended the Deacon Formation Weekend in Detroit:

“Thanks for all you did for the WWME program we attended. We wrote articles for our church group meeting and for our Sunday bulletin, and we’re trying to reach out to more parish members individually. We want others to share the experience we’ve had!”

“We both have always believed that openness and honesty is the cornerstone of our marriage. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to spend the weekend with us. We were with family the past weekend, and had a riot reminiscing about our weekend. We think the best part was when we had the 75 minutes to "dialogue." We couldn't stop laughing and enjoying sharing with each other. That was the highlight of the weekend!”

“We really learned so much on our Weekend. We have used so much of what you taught us already. Our marriage is so much stronger. We’re closer than ever before!”



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