

## A homegrown celebration

**Dan McWilliams**

September 7, 2003



*Photo  
courtesy of  
Deacon  
Bob Lange*

**IN CHARGE** Father Greg Boisvert, AA, and Deacon Bob Lange and his wife, Janel, are the national coordinators for World Priest Day. All three are from St. Dominic Parish in Kingsport.

***Marriage Encounter's World Priest Day originated in the Diocese of Knoxville.***

A nationwide celebration on Sept. 21 has its roots in the Knoxville Diocese, which is also home to the national coordinators for the event.

World Priest Day began in the Marriage Encounter community during the celebration of the diocese's 10th anniversary in 1998. Always marked on the third Sunday in September, the day offers a chance for laypeople to show appreciation for those in the priesthood.

Deacon Bob Lange and wife Janel of St. Dominic Parish in Kingsport and Father Greg Boisvert, AA, are the national coordinators. Father Boisvert is the associate pastor of St. Dominic and the diocesan coordinator of ongoing formation of deacons.

The Langes, a Marriage Encounter presenting couple for 23 years, sent a packet to each bishop in the country, urging him to spread the word in his diocese about the special day.

“This is something Worldwide Marriage Encounter is behind, but it originated right here in the Knoxville Diocese,” Mrs. Lange said. “It’s kind of special to the Marriage Encounter community here.”

Mrs. Lange said the idea developed before the church sexual-abuse scandals.

“We in the Marriage Encounter community believe that there’s a wonderful relationship between couples and priests,” she said. “Each of us is truly living our sacraments. Holy orders and marriage are living sacraments that require an awful lot of giving.”

Deacon Lange said that Catholics like him who were raised on the Baltimore Catechism had that sacramental definition drummed in at an early age.

“‘What is a sacrament?’ was one of the questions,” he said. “The answer was, ‘a sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.’ If you look at the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of orders, they are outward signs of the love of Christ in the way that they’re lived.

“Those two sacraments are really the embodiment of love. They are visible signs of the love of God and are the real rock and foundation of the church. You can’t have a viable, vibrant church without both.”

World Priest Day honorees have received food, cards, goody baskets, and a variety of other gifts over the years, the Langes said. For the occasion last year, couples from throughout the diocese participated in a prayer vigil for priests.

“Each couple took an hour of prayer for the 24 hours of World Priest Day, from midnight to midnight,” Deacon Lange said.

Mrs. Lange said she recommends that lay organizations and all East Tennessee Catholics—not just Marriage Encounter couples—get involved in the special day.

“We want to extend the invitation to Catholics beyond Marriage Encounter so that they can find their own ways of expressing their appreciation and love for their priests” she said.

At least one pastor will renew his priestly vows after his homily on World Priest Day, Deacon Lange said.

“A couple could come up and in the name of the parish witness those vows,” he said. “Actually, it doesn’t have to be a couple, just anyone, so that Father wouldn’t have to initiate the ceremony.

“We’re not looking at all for something else for Father to do. That’s not the purpose of World Priest Day. The purpose is to show our love and appreciation and to honor our priests for who they are and the gift they are to the church.”


Diocesan coordinators for the day are John and Anne Wharton of Talbott. For more information, call the Whartons at 423-581-1815 or contact the Langes at 423-246-1570 or [langeluvrz@earthlink.net](mailto:langeluvrz@earthlink.net).

Father Peter Iorio, diocesan director of priestly life and ministry, spoke of the World Priest Day packet at a recent meeting of diocesan directors of religious education. The DRE for Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Alcoa followed with a hearty recommendation.

“The big thing was that LuAnne Zelasko, who is very involved in Marriage Encounter, gave them the whole history of it, how it started here in the diocese, and how it’s now a national event,” Father Iorio said. “The feedback was very positive.”

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