

Marriage Encounter in Australia

By John & Anne Ellis

In 1973 Ron & Mavis Pirola (from Coogee) and Australian Oblate, Father Joe McCann (at that stage unknown to each other) experienced their M. E. Weekends in the United States and were so drawn into the vision of sharing the dream that they decided to work to bring this gift to Australia.

This visionary couple and priest organised a small hard-working support network in the latter part of 1973 and were able to arrange for two American Team couples to come to Sydney in early 1974. American M. E. couples had been fundraising for about nine months across the USA to allow this to happen and one team couple even gave up their job to share in this dream and present the first Weekends in Australia.

The first Australian Marriage Encounter Weekend (financially under-written by one of the support network couples) was held at Sancta Sophia College, in the University of Sydney on the weekend of 22nd to 24th February 1974. Other Weekends followed shortly afterwards while the American couples were in Australia and within a few months, Australian teams were presenting weekends around New South Wales.

Later in 1974 teams took the M. E. Weekend to Melbourne and Brisbane. Thereafter, these Weekends spread out to all capital cities and many major country towns. Prior to 1980 it was not unusual for a Weekend to be happening every 2 weeks somewhere in New South Wales and often there were over 30 couples on a Weekend, especially in Sydney.

At the request of the bishops in Fiji, Australian couples and priests presented the initial Weekends in Suva and Nadi in 1977.

Then the same happened in New Zealand in 1979 and for a year in Papua New Guinea in about 1981. Sadly, the counter-cultural impact of the Weekend was not seen as acceptable in Papua New Guinea.

Fijian couples and priests took the Weekend to Tonga in 1992 and to the Solomon Islands in 1996. New Zealand outreach teams have held Weekends in the Cook Islands.

One Sydney team couple, Jeanette & Reg Lam Po Tang, were members of the first presenting team that took M. E. to Mauritius in 1986. They had to translate their talks into their native French language.

Over 30,000 Australian couples, priests and religious have received the invitation to change the world during their Weekend and we give thanks for the difference this has made to so many families and church and religious communities.

February 2006 will be the 32nd Anniversary of Marriage Encounter in Australia, so let's rekindle the fire of enthusiasm to invite more couples and priests to experience the joys of a Weekend and join us on our journey of romance in living God's plan for us.

John & Anne Ellis
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