

This Year's (1981) Convention is #10!

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The Marriage Encounter convention has traveled from coast to coast, since 1975. We thought a quick glimpse of past conventions would be both interesting and exciting.

1972 - Holy Trinity High School, Hicksville, Long Island. Somewhere around 700 couples and priests, mostly from the New York area, but many from burgeoning communities across the country. Conceived as a "how-to" workshop convention (How to set up renewals, images, etc.), it wound up a tremendous experience. '72 was the first and last attempt at a conventional convention: we wanted to share our lives, not learn how to do things. Awareness of Sacramentality came alive that July, as did the need for re-evaluation of our life style. Our "Alleluia" was introduced at the final Mass, and we've been struggling with harmony ever since.

1973 - Holy Trinity again. Bigger than last year, and the tone for Marriage Encounter conventions was set. Series of talks were the order of the day—series of Privacy vs. Belonging, on Forgiveness, on topics related to changing, growing relationships. There was really a national flavor now, with people from every state in which Marriage Encounter existed. Delight in the halls and on the lawn, as faces from last year's convention reappeared. The sense of a countrywide community was growing stronger and stronger.

1974 - St. John's University. Graduation year—from high school to college!! Great fears: would St. John's be too big, and swallow us up? Forget it. 3,000 couples and priests—7,000 + people swarmed to Uniondale, N.Y. to hear talks on self-image and its effects, on commitment to community, on living out our mission in the church, specialness, "no criticism" (with its own 90 day guarantee). An explosive weekend, as entire plane loads came in and out of La Guardia and changed the whole atmosphere of the airport. The momentum was picking up.

1975 - St. John's again. No fears this year; we wouldn't be swallowed up. Instead we overwhelmed St. John's—crowds so large that the gymnasium couldn't hold us all for Sunday Mass. A second Liturgy was held outside—impromptu, beautiful, "His Banner Over Me Is Love". Conscience formation, sex & sexuality, life-giving as husband, wife, parent and couple. The Eucharist as the center of us all. And an international flavor—India, England, Belgium, Australia. "We can change the world" becoming a reality.

1976 - Philadelphia. Cardinal Wright. Mesmerized by us, and mesmerizing us. The Apostolic Delegate. And priests, priests, priests, marching into the Mass to tumultuous cheers. A smorgasbord of talks, panel discussions, workshops for giving Resource programs. And a parade, at last. A rather austere, polite parade of Catholic people and Catholic organizations. But what's that noise a few blocks down? And here we came—wave after wave of Marriage Encounter Catholics, marching by state and diocese, singing, laughing, breaking into the awe-struck parade-watchers to hug, to kiss, to include. "We love you, Sister!" to overcome nuns; "We love you Father!" to every white collar along the way; "We love you!" to an endless string of Philadelphia's Finest. They all were left believing that there is a new world somewhere. They had seen a glimpse of it.

1977 - Los Angeles. The University of Southern California. An airport gone mad as we descended, singing, upon the City of Angels!! A computer needed to handle registration. A rallying cry: "Back to the parish!" One gigantic Sacramento talk on Saturday morning to a jammed-packed Los Angeles Sports Arena. The O&A couple, and the romance, disillusionment and decisions involved. Housing available on campus for the first time. A marathon run for vocations by L.A. youth that ended in the L.A. Coliseum as we all gathered for the closing liturgy. The lighting of the eternal flame. A parade of nations. Balloons! And great beauty.

1978 - University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Catholic family values, the family and change, natural family planning. Presentations inside, and sharings under clumps of trees and on the grass under a blue, blue sky. An entire wall of one building filled with banners from all over the world. Bishops giving presentations. Canadians by the busload, and the news of a 5,000-couple waiting list in Canada. A Saturday night celebration of the growth of M.E., symbolized by one couple at its start, and culminating in a wildly exciting circle of people, people over the years and people around the world. A sense of something larger than life—Holy Trinity, Hicksville should see us now. And a sad note, hint that this may have been the last convention; costs were getting prohibitive.

1979 - Kent State University, Ohio. The grass roots convention. A plea to National leadership: Let us run it, it will pay for itself. For the first time, a stated theme: "We Have Only Just Begun." A homecoming. Back to the basics. A Rosary on the way to mass. And rain, for the first time ever. And more rain, but who cared? We were together again, and it could have been snow, it wouldn't have mattered. A sense of belonging, a sense of simple, humble people, who loved one another, their church and the world.

1980 - Los Angeles and USC again. Couple: Heart of the Family. And again, thousands and thousands of couples and priests, and on Sunday—children! Another first: a common Saturday experience, 50 presenting teams, giving the same step-by-step day to their own room full of people. The pressures of life; journey; intimacy. And Sunday, families! Legions of kids, of every size, shape and decibel level imaginable. Kids giving presentations, kids singing, kids gaping at this feast of loving families a giant hug of Guinness Book proportions. Another parade of nations: South Africa, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Korea—faraway countries which belonged to our family. A sense of awe at how much had happened in 12 short years. And hopes for tomorrow. Always hopes for tomorrow.

eMatrimony **Editor's Note:** Start planning and dreaming. Put it on your calendar NOW. June 27, 28 & 29, 2008 the WWME Convention will mark 40 years of WORLDWIDE MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER!