

## **A look at WWME Community**

Where two or more are gathered...  
(second in a series of five articles)

By Jack and Karen Baker and Fr. Dennis Koopman, OFM

In *Community: Who Are WE?*, we shared an article with you regarding four ways WWME Communities provide ongoing support. They are:

- An environment of acceptance.
- Focus on priority of spousal relationship.
- Help with discernment of gifts.
- Facilitating the Weekend.

In this article, we would like to continue the discussion on support for the WWME Community by sharing our thoughts on the first area of an accepting environment.

For some, an environment of acceptance began with the call on the Weekend for unconditional love. It is the way we love our spouse just the way they are. To love them even with their flaws and faults. It is to love them in sickness and health, in good times and in bad. The same holds true for our WWME Communities. It is no coincidence that the WWME Vision is the Great Commandment that Jesus gave to us: to “Love one another as I have loved you”. To love another is to accept them. We can best nourish the couples, priests and religious in our communities when we set aside our own agendas, open our arms to embrace them, our hearts to accept them and take the time to show that we care about them. In acceptance, we all are given support and hope to face change in our lives. Through acceptance of one another, we become a stronger, more vibrant and inviting Community. Acceptance is life giving. Criticism destroys.

For me (Karen) acceptance gives my self-worth a lift. It affirms me as a child of God, a wife, a mother and a participant in our WWME Community. It gives me strength and hope to grow and stretch beyond my self-imposed limitations so I can be more for Jack and my Community.

For me (Jack) acceptance is a daily decision. I was raised in a family where love was conditional. Acceptance was based on what you did, not who you were. It continues to be a challenge for me to love myself, or others, as human beings rather than human doings. When I receive unconditional acceptance, my first reaction is skepticism. I wonder what I did or what is wanted of me. When I let go of my past, I thank God, Karen, and Marriage Encounter for the gift of unconditional acceptance that I receive simply because I am a child of God.

For me (Fr. Dennis) I remember how my parents and my aunts and uncles, and my teachers complimented me on what I accomplished. My experiences in the Marriage Encounter family is that of feeling at ease when I share something with the group on where I messed up. Even when I share my poorly hidden attempts at perfectionism, I feel warmth and affection from others. Other people’s acceptance of me for who I am is slowly removing my fears of doing a poor performance. My new relaxed attitude of growing in acceptance of myself is bringing better

outcomes in my new projects. I definitely need to continue to experience the acceptance from my Marriage Encounter family if I am to continue to grow in my abilities overall.

We ask you to think of your last Community gathering. What were your thoughts and attitudes surrounding that gathering? Were you supporting and accepting while you were with your companions on your journey, and then critical of them on your way home? It is so easy to slip into that pattern. To be the best couple that you can be and in turn to be the best Community you can be, we encourage you to become aware of your actions and words as you support one another in your continued quest for acceptance of one another. To further explore the area of acceptance, here are some dialogue questions for you.

- What are my feelings when I hear God created each of us uniquely wonderful?
- Acceptance involves a decision to love. HDIFAT?
- The Sharing Guidelines used at WWME gatherings help us accept one another. Which guideline is the most difficult for me to follow? HDIFSTWY?