

MATRIMONY MAGAZINE ARTICLE
Summer, 2000

COMMUNITY WHO ARE WE?

As used by Worldwide Marriage Encounter, the term community includes all who have made a Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend. Involvement in community is a vital means to help couples, priests, and religious deepen and enrich their spousal relationship. Community enables them to make the Mission of Worldwide Marriage Encounter a reality. Communities do this by providing ongoing formation and assistance by:

- A. Ensuring an environment of acceptance.
- B. Emphasizing that spousal relationship is a priority.
- C. Helping with discernment and use of their gifts.
- D. Supporting the Weekend.
- E. Meeting the needs of the local area.

Being involved in "Community" is how we in Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) live the Mission Statement that was adopted in 1996. Which states "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."

You may have been first introduced to the WWME Community when a committed couple gave a pulpit talk at your church. Possibly it was a community couple who helped you with childcare so you could attend your Weekend. It was "Community" that prepared the Weekend site, checked you in on Friday night, carried your bags and encouraged you to have a good Weekend. You were formally introduced to the Marriage Encounter Community on Sunday morning when you were told someone has had your name and they have been praying specifically for you during this Weekend. For us this was just the introduction to the "Community" which has become our family. We accepted the invitation to join them at the Weekend Reunion and other gatherings after the Weekend. We laughed, cried and prayed together. We joined a "Love Circle/Share Group" and our coupleness grew as we experienced their love and acceptance. We have been involved in many WWME "Communities" throughout the United States. No two Communities are alike. But, what they all have in common is the call to support those completing The Weekend in the renewed lifestyle offered to them through the WWME Values.

When we think about our involvement in WWME Communities, I (Karen) feel excited and joy-filled. It reminds me of the times of sharing special moments with family members and friends and getting more enthusiastic with every event or "story". My excited feeling looks like a child going into a candy store all wide-eyed in anticipation of the sweet goodies just waiting for them. I (Jack) feel grateful for the WWME Community who have been for me brother and sister, mentor and friend. The Worldwide Marriage Encounter families where we have lived have opened their homes, their hearts and their inner lives to encourage and support us to live a lifestyle with values of love and

acceptance. My grateful feeling is warm and secure like being in the comforts of our home watching a blizzard engulf the outside world.

The “Communities” have walked with us in happy and sad times. They have often reached out to us at times when others in today’s world had left us disillusioned and hurting. They have celebrated life’s milestones from baptisms to funerals. No matter how the Community has been involved with us and we with them, we have left heartprints on the souls of one another.

There are many ways to be involved in “Communities” or Post Weekend activities. They range from gathering and supporting just one other couple to a host of opportunities with many. One thing is for sure. No one couple, priest, or religious brother/sister is in a WWME Community alone! There are many activities and programs available. All you have to do is to ask your local leadership to point you in the direction of the many opportunities waiting for you! If there are no groups in your area, why not start one! There are plenty of resources available for established “Communities” and for those just forming.

There are several programs available to support ongoing and growing relationships including:

Weekend Reunion – An opportunity to get better acquainted with the couples who attended your Weekend

Journey Together – A six session series to strengthen your understanding and use of the tool of dialogue while experiencing the closeness that develops in a WWME Community.

Love Circle, Share Group, Core –Groups that gather at some regular interval to share presentations, dialogue and encouragement to live the values of Marriage Encounter. These groups have been known to develop bonds of friendship and love that surpass that of the average family.

Community gatherings – Some areas meet quarterly for a presentation and pot-luck. Other communities plan to support World Marriage Day and/or World Priest Day.

Conventions – Every other year Worldwide Marriage Encounter hosts a National Convention and on the alternate years many Sections hold a conventions closer to home.

Whether you become involved in “Community” two by two (you and another couple/priest) or with a whole group of people, we encourage you to make the commitment now to continue the growth and intimacy you started on your weekend.

Dialogue Question: WAMFA our involvement in the Marriage Encounter Community?

This article was originally printed in the Summer 2000 Matrimony Magazine and has been edited for posting in eMatrimony.