

**Marriage Preparation 1st Step,
A Tool for a Successful Marriage
“Catholic Engaged Encounter”
By Jose & Julie Santiago**

WHAT IS CATHOLIC ENGAGED ENCOUNTER?

Catholic Engaged Encounter (CEE) is an International organization founded in 1975 to offer a marriage preparation program to the Catholic Church. In 1991, Pope John Paul II approved CEE as a recommended method of marriage preparation for engaged couples to be married in the Catholic Church. Thousands of couples have attended CEE weekend retreats world-wide. CEE has grown since its founding from a few dozen couples and priests in just a few dioceses to several thousand working within the ministry to the pre-married. Engaged Encounter has moved from just several dioceses to almost all the dioceses within the US. CEE has expanded from the US to many countries throughout the world including Europe, South America, Central America, Mexico, Dominican Republic and most recently Cuba.

Catholic Engaged Encounter has won recognition from the National Association of Catholic Family Ministers (NACFLM) with the “Outstanding Organization in Family Life Ministries” award. They stated: “This award is presented to Catholic Engaged Encounter to acknowledge the number of years that this organization has provided excellent marriage preparation. Your presence in many dioceses throughout the world is a testimony to the impact that you have had on many families. The Georgetown University, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) study and evaluation of Catholic Engaged Encounter speaks of the value and importance of this ministry for the Catholic Church and other denominations.

The Catholic Engaged Encounter ministry is a community of volunteer married couples committed to providing weekend retreats for couples preparing for the Sacrament of Matrimony. Maybe someone you know.

COMMENTS FROM THE MARRIAGE EXPERTS;

On July 8th 2006 Pope Benedict XVI speaking to the 5th World Meeting of Families in Valencia Spain, said, “the family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love” This message is constantly reinforced throughout the Catholic Engaged Encounter weekend retreat.

Fr. Mike Miller, Pastor of the Sacred Heart Church in Salinas CA. said,
“Engaged Encounter is one of the best recipes for Evangelization we have. The ingredients --- presentations, personal exchange, prayer and especially significant time away from distractions --- are wholesome and life-giving. People come away not just with information but an experience. This is almost universal, with very few exceptions. In this post-Christian age, when so many young people are “unchurched”, and not many things seem to “work.” But Engaged Encounter sure does, and ought to be a priority. It’s the most effective outreach we have to people that age”.

Msr. Chuck Durante, Vicar Reno Diocese, said, *“Catholic Engaged Encounter is a gift to the church. It provides real life Christian married experiences to engaged couples. It motivates and awakens the real catholic in many of the couples attending who have been away from the church for some time. It enhances the cradle catholic understanding of the Sacrament of matrimony and promotes honest open dialog among the engaged.*

Fr. Toni Kerin, parish priest of St. Martin de Pores Parish, Avondale Heights, Melbourne, Australia said, *“A priest will be lucky to receive one of these couples as new parishioners or returning to their church to be married. These young couples come out of the CEE weekend fired up and ready to be a vibrant member of the church community”. Fr Toni shared his views of marriage as a voyage, not a destination and He said, “The CEE weekend is like a shakedown cruise for couples embarking on the life-long voyage of marriage”.*

Michael J. McManus, author of the book, *“Marriage Savers”*, syndicated newspapers columnist and radio commentator said, *“Engaged Encounter is the best marriage preparation program in communication for engaged couples of any denomination in the US”.*

Dr. James Dobson, author of *“Love for a Lifetime”*, founder of Focus on the Family, stated, *“In addition to pre-marital counseling, another wonderful way to eliminate the unpleasant surprises of early married life is a program called Engaged Encounter...I strongly recommend Engaged Encounter to every couple planning a wedding”.*

UNEDITED COMMENTS FROM ATTENDING COUPLES

“We learned to communicate compliments – even if I think he knows, I must share the positive. I also learned that he desires a stronger spiritual influence in our lives.”

“I have a PHD in psychology-however I never received personal support for my relationship as powerful as this.”

“This weekend has changed everything. The reason why we are here is because of God, so we want God as our number one guest.”

“We learned how to constructively make decisions and forgive one another. The writing/dialog cycle is a very powerful tool that we’ll continue to use.”

“It has brought me closer to God. Now I’m going to get baptism & communion.”

“It was an unforgettable experience for both of us. We heard about marriage in a positive way”.

COMMENTS FROM SOME OF THE PRESENTING TEAMS.

“Every time we present a weekend we are refreshed in our relationship. For us, it is a time away from the daily routine and life demands on our relationship. Our marriage always feels stronger by the end of each weekend”.

“Being part of this ministry allows us time to continue to enhance our own marriage as we associate with couples who really value and live the Sacrament of Matrimony”.

“As we prepare our talks and as we share our life’s stories with the engaged couples,

we relive those memorable times and improve our present interaction in our marriage”.

“Once you experience the joy of giving of yourself as a couple to an eager attentive group of couples in love, you will find it incredibly rewarding. The reward is far more than the investment.”

WHAT IS AN ENGAGED ENCOUNTER WEEKEND?

The Engaged Encounter weekend is an investment in the future—a weekend experience in which an atmosphere is created that enables each couple to concentrate exclusively on one another while free of the pressures and interruptions of daily life. It is a weekend to be shared privately by each couple, though the weekend will have from 20 to 30 couples. The weekend is not a recreational retreat. It is not a sensitivity session nor are there any group dynamics. Rather it is a private experience in a quiet and informal setting. It gives couples making a commitment to marriage the opportunity for honest Intensive dialog about their future lives together. The CEE program is designed to promote, in a face to face manner with each other, the couple’s strengths, weaknesses, desires, ambitions, goals, their attitudes about money, sex, family, their role in the church and in society. The couples are urged to communicate in terms of planning a lifelong commitment to each other not only a wedding day celebration.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The CEE weekend retreat is for engaged couples who are making a commitment to the Catholic Sacrament of Matrimony. This weekend will help couples to develop the skills needed to enrich their lives together. The encounter may be an opportunity to renew a church relationship.

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND?

The weekend experience offers each couple the insights, the tools and the confidence to enrich their relationship and strengthen their love for each other. The engaged couples learn that good marriages don’t just happen, they must be developed. For many couples, this weekend is one of the most significant experiences of their courtship. (See comments from attending couples above.)

HOW SOON SHOULD WE ATTEND A CEE WEEKEND?

It is recommended that couples attend as soon as they are engaged, or even when considering engagement. By attending early you can discover areas of growth necessary in your relationship and determine if engagement and marriage is right for you at this time. Attending early will avoid the last minute hassles created by trying to schedule a weekend while trying to do everything else your wedding day entails.

WHO ARE THE PRESENTING COUPLES?

Our presenting couples come from every walk of life, from the highly trained professionals to blue collar worker common folk, but they all have one thing in common. They believe in their marriages and the commitment they made on their wedding day. They are practicing Catholics who have been married for more than

one year and have prepared their talks following an outline provided by the National CEE. All talks are written from these outlines which have "content" that develops basic ideas and values. Each talk builds on the previous and is designed to deepen the relationship of the couples attending. The presenting couples and priests add their own life experiences to illustrate and personalize the concepts presented.

HOW THE PRESENTING COUPLES BENEFIT;

The presenting couples have a rare opportunity to work side by side in a ministry that not only helps the engaged couples but revitalizes their own relationship as they share and relive their marriage journey. Many couples have rediscovered some of the forgotten endearing qualities of their spouses.

HOW THE PRESENTING PRIESTS BENEFIT :

The priests will have the opportunity to minister to many attentive and very receptive engaged couples in a relaxing prayerful setting instead of counseling one to one with similar or better results.

The priests will spend a weekend away from their daily routine, no telephone, a change of pace, and a new routine, interacting with a new group of adults eager to listen and appreciative of the priest's time and knowledge. To some of these individuals the priest will be the first contact with the church they have had in many years. Many return to the church with a deeper understanding and dedication because the priest and presenting couples shared their life's experiences with them at a very important time in their lives. (See comments from the experts above.)

IS THERE HELP TO WRITE THE TALKS?

The outlines that we follow provide the structure, content and flow of each talk. An experienced CEE Couple will be assigned to help you to blend your experiences into your talks.

WHAT IF WE ARE NOT PUBLIC SPEAKERS?

Neither are we. That's why we have our talks completely written and simply read or refer to them as we tell our stories. Since the talks are your stories after several presentations the stories will flow naturally.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO WRITE THE TALKS?

It depends on the couple, some have written their talks in as little a couple of weeks, some over several months. As soon as you have written your first few talks, you are ready to do part of your first weekend.

ARE THERE FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS TO BEING PART OF THIS MINISTRY?

None, *all presenting couples, priests and supporting staff are volunteers. All cost of travel, preparation, presentation, attending out of the area meetings and conventions are covered by donations received by the ministry.*

WHAT TIME COMMITMENTS ARE EXPECTED FROM THE PRESENTING COUPLES?

The CEE presenting couples normally commit to do several weekends each year, several optional social community gatherings and optionally attend an annual convention at no cost to them.

As you read these words, the Catholic Engaged Encounter Ministry is in great need of couples who would want to help keep this valuable ministry of our church alive. CEE can use couples to support the ministry not only as presenters but as coordinators of the many behind the scenes activities such as, bookkeeping, registration, supplies, scheduling host couples, scheduling priests, promotion & advertising, recruiting and social activities planning.

Every year CEE presents weekends all around the world, in the last few years CEE has been short priests and presenting couples. For that reason the 2009 schedules are shorter than previous ones

In No Ca. CEE was fortunate that presenting couples from outside the dioceses offered their services to cover those weekends that had been scheduled but were short presenters.. They came from Monterey, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Jose and Reno just like some of our presenting couples have traveled to their areas to help present weekends at their location.

This year we are again looking for support from our CEE friends inside and outside the diocese to fill the weekend dates that have been reserved at Retreat Centers in our area. It would be great if we could fill all the scheduled weekends with priests and teams from the local Dioceses.

If you feel that you can help us keep this valuable ministry of love alive, contact, Jose & Julie Santiago at (831)338-4253 or email at, www.Jose.Julie@Comcast.net.