

Engaged Encounter offers marriage preparation in a retreat setting

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Engaged Encounter offers couples preparing for marriage an enriching and powerful experience of dialogue, trust and communication.

Offered in a retreat setting, Engaged Encounter brings engaged couples together for an entire weekend away from all the distractions of life – no phones, no e-mail, no people knocking on the door.

“They focus on each other for the entire weekend. It’s an opportunity to develop their relationship and find the support that the church offers married couples,” says Jordan Bergermann, who with wife Donna Lee, has been involved in Engaged Encounter for more than 25 years.



Donna Lee and Jordan Bergermann
Photo by “Reflections by Richard”

An Engaged Encounter weekend begins Friday evening and continues until late Sunday afternoon – an intense and personal time for young couples, who are introduced to a highly effective way to dialogue and communicate with one another about their relationship, their future life together, and their relationship with God.

After carefully prepared presentations by the Engaged Encounter team, couples are invited to use a process of writing, exchange and dialogue to more deeply explore the topics presented and their own relationship.

“When they read each other’s writing, they have that person’s total attention and total focus. There are no interruptions,” describes Jordan. “Normally when you are in discussion with another person, you don’t really give your full focus. You’re already busy preparing a response. You’re listening, but without really hearing what the other person is saying. But with this process of writing and dialoguing, it really puts the focus on the topic and on what the other person is saying.”

After exchanging their writings (which are private communications only between the couple, and are not shared with the group), it is then important for the couple to discuss them in detail, adds Donna Lee.

Through this process, communication between the couples is often taken to a new and deeper level. “As the weekend progresses, a new element of trust develops between couples as they open themselves up and make themselves more vulnerable, and deepen in understanding,” says Jordan.

Open all denominations, Engaged Encounter has a strong spiritual component, which invites couples to deepen their relationship with God and come to a fuller understanding about the sacrament of marriage.

“We try to put emphasis on marriage in the church and the importance of setting aside time to celebrate faith. As a couple we need to see and feel the support of other couples around us. That encouragement keeps you going,” says Jordan. “It gives you the strength and support you need to make a life, a commitment in the church come alive.”

Engaged Encounter presenting teams usually include two married couples and a priest (or religious sister). Presenting couples from across the province will gather at St. Michael’s Retreat Centre in Lumsden Feb. 17 and 18 for a retreat weekend of their own to prepare talks, to reflect on the program and fine-tune their presentations.

Married for 40 years this July, Jordan and Donna Lee say they have been enriched by their years of commitment to Engaged Encounter. “Every time we do an Engaged Encounter weekend it boosts our marriage too,” says Donna Lee. “It has been a support for us.”

Those times when a young couple responds with appreciation and enthusiasm are also a great boost, adds Jordan. “Then you know it’s well worth your time and energy.”

Engaged Encounter is always looking for new team members, notes the couple. “If you know that you can make a difference to someone, to their marriage, it makes it worth all the effort,” says Donna Lee.

The couple adds that they would encourage all parents to speak to their children and teenagers about the importance of marriage preparation, so that they grow up understanding that this is a necessary part of the process of getting married. “Marriage is important. It’s important that you receive some training for that life long commitment,” stresses Jordan. The support of the bishop and pastors is also vital, he adds.

In Saskatchewan, Engaged Encounter is presently offered at two picturesque retreat settings – St. Peter’s Abbey in Muenster in the diocese of Saskatoon and St. Michael’s Retreat Centre in Lumsden in the Archdiocese of Regina. Couples come from all over to experience the unique marriage preparation program.

Upcoming sessions will be held March 30 to April 1 and April 27 to 29, 2007 at St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster, and March 16 to 18 and June 1 to 3 at St. Michael's in Lumsden. To register for the next St. Peter's Abbey Engaged Encounter session, or to volunteer as a presenting couple, contact Todd and Tanya Schuler at 306-682-0777.