

Retrouvaille offers hope, healing and practical help to couples in troubled or broken marriages

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

SASKATOON – Retrouvaille is a program that offers hope, healing and practical help to couples in troubled or broken marriages.

The word “Retrouvaille” means rediscovery – which is precisely what the program is about, according to Rita and Ken Wolfe of Saskatoon.

“It is really about rediscovering your relationship, rediscovering your love, but most important, rediscovering yourself,” Rita said.

“Retrouvaille is about self awareness and being given the responsibility for fixing the marriage,” agreed Ken. “It also gives you the communication techniques to work things through.”



Retrouvaille is not a form of marriage counseling, Ken stressed. Whereas counseling tends to focus on events in the marriage and what happened in the past, Retrouvaille offers a way to move forward in healing the marriage relationship. “It’s a serious decision to start now and make things better,” said Rita. “The past stays in the past,” added Ken.

The Wolfes are members of the Marriage Task Force for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, which is currently working to establish Retrouvaille in Saskatchewan.

With help and support from Retrouvaille communities in Alberta, the first Saskatchewan session will be held Sept. 21 to 23, 2007. In the meantime, Saskatchewan couples must

travel to Calgary or Edmonton to obtain the help offered by the internationally-known program.

That's exactly what Ken and Rita did last year, driving to Edmonton for the intense opening weekend, as well as returning for the six weekly follow-up sessions.

The couple found both hope and healing through Retrouvaille, and have renewed their commitment to their marriage of 27 years.

The parents of five children – Megan, Shivawn, Erin, Kathleen and Aidan – the Wolfes started their marriage as a committed young Catholic couple, involved in the church and active in community service and the pro-life movement. Their eldest daughter Megan began experiencing health problems at the age of six. and it was eventually discovered that she had a rare genetic condition that claims the life of children in their teens. The couple then experienced an unanticipated pregnancy. Two years later, daughter Shivawn was also diagnosed with the fatal disease.

“You choose life and see where it takes you,” said Rita. “We saw a lot of hope in giving our children the best lives possible, until they took their last breaths.” Son Aidan and daughters Erin and Kathleen are now healthy young adults.

A lot of richness came from the difficult situation faced by the family, described Rita. “We had such a community of support, and that to me was daily and constant evidence of the grace of God working, of the face and hands of God in our lives.”

Megan and Shivawn were both personable, determined and faith-filled youngsters, and their difficult journey had an impact on a lot of people, the couple said. During the second Latimer trial in which a father was convicted of killing his disabled child, Shivawn asked Rita to take her to the proceedings. Shivawn's visible presence provided another focus for the discussion around that trial, said Rita. “Before that, the media really had no awareness of what they were saying to families like ours, when they said this father killed his child out of love.”

When the Wolfes began experiencing difficulty in their marriage, counselors would invariably attribute it to the situation of having two children with a fatal illness. “That was a huge thing to deal with, but, no, that wasn't the problem. The problem was there aside from that,” said Ken.

“It's just so important to realize that if you get hold of your relationship and make it healthy, you can withstand anything,” said Rita. “But if there is severe weakness already there, it won't take much to break it.”

Often couples find themselves living a “married single life” in which both parties act as individuals, without the unity and intimacy so crucial to a healthy marriage, noted Ken. “A real distance sets in for the relationship.”

Even church involvement and community service can be part of the problem, added Rita. “We had that involvement, and perhaps assumed that we did think the same about everything because we were so outward directed,” she said. “I don’t think it started out that way, but it became a way for us to avoid things that were developing, and then it wasn’t until we ran into family crisis that we really had to take care of ourselves as a couple.”

The Wolfes turned to Retrouvaille when they realized they didn’t have the tools they needed to fix their marriage by themselves. “At a point in our lives we faced difficulties in our marriage. We are people of faith and we didn’t want to give up; we want to choose life and make a loving decision to try again,” said Rita.

“It was with the deepest regret that I had given up on my marriage. But with Retrouvaille’s help we are able to continue to make a new decision to love,” Rita said. “I look to Jesus and I look to my faith and make a decision to love, because I know that I am loved.”

Faith and the spiritual dimension is an important part of Retrouvaille, which is Catholic in its origin, growing out of the Worldwide Marriage Encounter movement. However, the program is open to people of any faith, as well as to those with no faith tradition.

Couples involved in presenting Retrouvaille have all been through the program themselves. Hearing the leader couples share their stories is a powerful sign of hope, said Ken. “To hear what they went through, and then to realize that their marriages are not only intact, but flourishing – that’s what really hit me.”

After presentations, participating couples have a chance to reflect and to dialogue on issues in complete privacy. There is no pressure to be involved in group discussions.

The program is realistic and practical, added Rita. “The focus is on the things that will help you to rebuild, and hopefully you won’t get to the point where you give up again.”

The Retrouvaille weekend is not a “magic bullet” but provides a way to heal the relationship with new understandings of behavior and positive communication skills. The process requires an ongoing commitment – just as marriage does, said Ken. Follow-up sessions are an important part of continuing the work started during the initial Retrouvaille weekend.

The Retrouvaille logo – a life preserver hanging upon a cross – expresses a lot about the program, noted Rita, describing Retrouvaille as a lifeline. “When people turn to divorce they have lost all hope,” she said. “This is a lifeline.”

For more information about Retrouvaille contact Blake Sittler of the Marriage Task Force at the diocese of Saskatoon Catholic Pastoral Centre, 242-1500 or toll free: 1-877-661-5005.