A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Encountering Your Marriage

In the winter of 1998, after 12 years of marriage, my wife proposed to me. This was her proposal: "Let's do a Marriage Encounter."

I was surprised, and frankly skeptical. I was one of many who believed (wrongly) that a weekend Marriage Encounter was for people whose marriages were in trouble. Ours was fine. Why did we have to fix what wasn't broken?

But Siobhain was persistent and, after a few weeks of gentle nudging, finally wore me down. She was convinced we could make what was good even better, and Marriage Encounter would be the vehicle for doing that. So, grudgingly, I agreed.

Over Valentine's Day weekend in 1998, we headed out to Douglaston to spend a weekend with several other couples who were also taking the plunge into the Marriage Encounter movement. The priest who would be the spiritual director for the experience was none other than Bishop Thomas Daily.

I'm not quite sure what I expected. But the Marriage Encounter website describes it this way:

A series of presentations made by the Presenting Team, consisting of 3 married couples and 1 priest. Each presentation builds on the last as we examine ourselves, our behaviors and attitudes, our relationship with our spouse and God. Communication tools are taught on the weekend helping couples connect in healthy, constructive ways on areas that can deepen their intimacy and connectedness.

We ask all participants to attend ALL talks and participate intently using the tools with their Spouse in order to maximize their experience.

All sharing between spouses is PRIVATE, and this is NOT a weekend to solve problems! This Weekend will help couples in good marriages communicate even better.

That summed it up pretty well. Over two days, we listened to other couples share their lived experiences of marriage—the ups and downs, the heartaches and headaches, the joys and triumphs. And we were introduced to the practice of "journaling"—sequestering ourselves in quiet corners to write down our thoughts, fears and concerns, and then share them with one another. In fact,

one of the cornerstones of the Marriage Encounter experience—maybe *the* cornerstone—is learning how to strengthen communication skills. Couples dig deeper, share vulnerabilities, build trust, learn to listen, and work on seeing with new eyes that person who sleeps on the other side of the bed. I have to say, I found it challenging, uplifting, inspiring and enriching. Again, from the website:

Marriage Encounter Weekends are for GOOD marriages! Think about it: employers may send you to a seminar to gain new skills on the job, why not dedicate a Weekend to gain new skills that can benefit your most important relationship—your marriage!

A Weekend gives busy couples much-needed time together to focus on each other and deepen their communication. After the Weekend couples often return to their life and families, refreshed, with renewed commitment to each other.

Ideal Weekend couples are those going through life transitions: recently married, expanding the family, job transitions, blended families, empty-nesters or couples facing retirement or illnesses. These are times when compassionate communication and listening matter the most!

Amen to that.

Nowadays, part of my ministry as a deacon is working with divorcees as they begin the annulment process—and I often recommend that couples hoping to get married again in the church consider a Marriage Encounter weekend. I really think it can only help.

As Siobhain and I plan to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary later this year, I know that our marriage has been immeasurably strengthened by the tools we were given on that weekend 18 years ago.

Try it and see!

© Deacon Greg Kandra, 2016

To sign up for the Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) Parish Weekend on April 30 and May 1:
Go to www.ourladyqueenofmartyrs.org/wwme-parish-weekend and download the printable form (pdf).
Or apply online at www.bq-wwme.org (search for weekends for Brooklyn/Queens). Or call toll-free 877-697-9933.