



International Confederation of Christian Family Movements



THE ORIGINAL MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER, THE HOLY SPRIT AND REVOLVING DOORS

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My feeling about going for help about our marriage was always negative. All Gerry and I needed to do was to work at it, talk about it, and we could fix it. After all, weren't we in love and the best of friends? Of course, the hardest part of this strategy was that, like writer's block, it was very difficult to get started at working out the problems that bothered us and so we pushed them away and behind us, or to one side, trying to ignore them with the hope that they would go away... and so our little problems grew, multiplied and always hovered in the background, causing a nagging and nippy unhappiness that was never enough to cause an argument, but just enough to start dulling the emotion and love we first had for each other. And so it continued, slowly bleeding our love to death, until one day a call came from a priest friend in Japan. He called and asked me to help with arrangements for a Marriage Encounter being arranged by a Japanese couple here in San Diego. Because their English language skills were not good they needed help with making the necessary arrangements for the retreat. It was not possible to refuse such a simple request from an old friend and so I said yes. My idea was to simply help with the retreat arrangement translations, maybe a short afternoon sojourn to the retreat center, do my thing, and then slip quietly out the side door and I was gone, finished, completed with my obligation to my old friend.. But it didn't end with that afternoon. The details continued to need my attention. The more I tried to escape, the more I was sucked into the fray of details and particulars regarding the cost of rooms, with and without breakfast, cost of coming for the day but return to their home at night, the deposit and where and how the final billing will be handled. This continued until the day of the retreat, when the final straw was added to the back of the camel. As my husband and I walked into the room, the banner boldly exclaimed "Welcome to the Original Marriage Encounter Weekend: from your hosts, Gerry and Elizabeth". A little numb, I sat down for the first evening's talks and presentations, and before I could even think we were being enveloped in a warm comfortable blanket of words from Fr. Donnon. He carefully explained that it will not be necessary for us to "spill our guts out" in the next three days. We would be expected only to listen to others talk, and then to do some serious sharing about ourselves to our other half, but this would be done in the privacy of our room or out on the grounds alone as a couple. The next day came and with the continued guidance of Fr.



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Donnon's encouraging words, we were given the first set of tools to work with that will help us to share our real feeling and way of thinking with our mates. More simple steps followed and they were punctuated with a Mass just before our midday meal. The central theme of this Mass was reconciliation and it set the stage for other steps that would come later. The evening was celebrated with a simple setting of bread and wine, followed by prayers for healing. The final day was more working on our communication skills, another Mass, and then almost too soon, the end. During the closing period, last Friday-nigh's burly and stoic husbands, commented (a few with teary eyes) on how they had turn up well knowing that they would come away with nothing, but tonight they were filled with spiritual substance and were humbled by the mixture of the Catholic faith, Christian sharing and the realistic, simple steps to improve their marriage lives. They were able to say much better than I what I felt and experienced during the three days with Fr. Donnan's gentle words and acts of love. How glad I was that the side door I tried slipping out of on the first day, was in fact a revolving door that held on to me and did not let me go until it was time for me to go.