

WORLDWIDE MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER (WWME)

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1. Who We Are and Our Origin

Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) is a movement of couples, priests and religious in the Church which aims to renew and enrich marriage, the ministerial priesthood and the religious life.

Following Vatican II and in response to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI, Fr. Gabriel Calvo of Spain conceptualized and laid the groundwork for "Encuentro Conjugal," a seminar renewal method for strengthening marriages. Owing to its success, the method was introduced in the United States in the late 60's. Fr. Chuck Gallagher, SJ, seeing its vast potential, developed it further to include renewal of the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated religious life. Together with three couples, he launched it into a worldwide movement which today is known as the Worldwide Marriage Encounter. While the movement is Catholic in expression and intention it is open to all married couples regardless of religion, race, culture, education or social status. Today WWME is in 92 countries, 12 of which are in Asia, namely, India, Japan, Indonesia, Korea, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Bangladesh, UAE/Dubai and China.

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2. How We Are Structured

The movement around the world is coordinated by a World Council composed of couple-priest team leaders from six Coordinating Secretariats each of which represents a number of countries, namely, Asia (12 countries), Europe (29 countries), Latin America (20 countries), North America (15 countries), Pacific (04 countries), and Pan African (12 countries), that is, total 92 countries.

3. Our Name: What It Means

The word "worldwide" refers to "catholic" or "universal" and the word "encounter", in its Spanish usage, "encuentro," does not refer to confrontation but is taken to mean as a "discovery." Thus, WWME may be expressed in another way as the "Discovery of Catholic Marriage."

The word "marriage" is understood in a wider sense to refer not only to husbands and wives but also to the spousal relationship of priests and religious with the People of God and the Body of Christ, which in that sense, each of these three vocations is understood, in a relational perspective, as marriage.

4. Our Vision

We are a movement of couples, priests, and religious who dream of a future where Love and Life in the Divine Plan shall reign in the family, in the Church, and in the world.

5. Our Mission

In pursuance of that dream, we provide today a process of renewal to help them discover and enable them to live an intimate and responsible relationship centered in Christ who is the source of Life and Love. The process initiates participants to a way of life. Post-encounter support programs are offered to live such lifestyle.

6. What We Are about

Since WWME is a movement and not an organization, there is no demand for membership and there are no hard-and-fast rules to follow and bind. It is a free association guided by Christ's command: "*Love one another as I have loved you*" (Jn 15:17). The couples, priests and religious do not belong to the marriage encounter process any more than they belong to a retreat or a seminar. They belong and return to their respective parishes or communities to give witness to Christ's command and live an open, trusting, intimate and responsible relationship as a way of life.

7. Our Integration in the Local Church

WWME operates at the diocesan level and only with authority of the local ordinary. It is best integrated into the diocesan pastoral

structure under the Family Life ministry of the diocese from which it serves the parishes. It is self-funded and does not depend on the diocese or on any other sources for its logistic needs.

8. What Do We Renew

Since marriage does not exist in a vacuum, but is constituted by a web of relationships, the movement is about the renewal of relationship in the Church in all its dimensions:

- relationship with self in God
- exclusive relationship of husband and wife in marriage for the Church
- inclusive relationship of priests and religious with the Body of Christ and the People of God
- our relationship with God
- with God, our relationship with the World

9. Our Charism

The charism of WWME, as a grace-empowered movement, is the re-discovery and renewal of the beauty and dignity of the Sacrament of Marriage, the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Consecrated Life as visible and efficacious manifestations of God's gracious offer of Love and Life in Christ for the renewal of the Church and the transformation of the world.

10. Our Efficacy

The unity of husband and wife is the visible, clear and credible sign of Christ's love for His Body, the Church. The 'daily dialogue,' a technique which enables them to communicate more deeply and intimately, helps them maintain and strengthen their marital bond.

The ordained ministry is likewise the visible, clear and credible expression of Christ's self-gift to His Body, the Church and the People of God. The life of a consecrated religious is a way of serving the body of Christ in a more intense way other than being married or ordained to the priestly ministry. The charisms of celibacy for the priest and virginity for the religious express and intensify more deeply the giving of that self in an inclusive and loving service to the Church in the name and power of Christ.

11. How We Work and the Method We Use

Marriage Encounter is not a seminar, not a retreat, not a marriage counseling, nor a problem-solving session. It focuses on the possibilities of marriage, as Sacrament, to a way of life in following the Lord. It underscores the ordained ministry, as Sacrament, to a

way of serving the People of God inclusively. It also focuses on the dignity of the religious life consecrated for the Lord's purpose in serving His body, the Church.

It is a weekend process of 44 hours which starts at 8.00 PM Friday and ends about 4.00 PM Sunday which for that reason Marriage Encounter is otherwise called "the weekend." In the weekend, a series of presentation is given by a couple-priest team who share their lived experience in the various areas of their lives and of their relationship with self, with one's spouse, with God, with the Church and the World, after which the participants are given questions for personal reflection and then asked to share their responses by sharing their thoughts and feelings with one another in the privacy of their rooms. The priest or religious do the same with the team priest, likewise in private. The process is facilitative and evocative, experiential and interactive, and the only way to understand its dynamics is to go through the weekend process.

12. Outcome of the Weekend Experience

The participants, couples mostly, come to realize that the Sacraments are not things, but relationships in its most personal reality; that God calls them to a relationship that is open, trusting, intimate, and responsible; that to love is a decision; that God's plan is for them to be one; that it is in unity that their deepest longing for love and worth are fulfilled; that they can heal and forgive each other; and that God is offering them a view of life enlightened by faith, and a way of life empowered by grace, and promising them a future which is now at hand where He will reign with the fullness of His Love and Life in the coming new world and promised land.

For priests and religious, they re-discover themselves as "wedded" to the Body of Christ and people of God in a spousal relationship that is inclusive and open. They also realize that celibacy and virginity are special charisms which empower them to live their vocation in inclusive and loving service to all in the name and power of Christ.

13. Worldwide Marriage Encounter in the Life and Mission of the Church in Asia

Today, evangelization is the main challenge for the Church in Asia. Evangelization in Asia, however, must have a new expression adapted to the demands of Asian realities. 'Family solidarity' is a prime cultural value of the East. It is this cultural frontier that Worldwide Marriage Encounter takes into account in proclaiming the Good News to Asia – the solidarity of the family.

14. Marriage Stability: Key to Family Solidarity

“The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of the community of marriage and the family” (The Church in the Modern World #47). “Just as in the marriage covenant, the love of man and woman is raised by grace to become a sharing in, and an expression of, the love of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32), so too the family, grounded in that love, is called to be a “domestic church,” a place of faith, of prayer and of loving concern for the true and enduring good of each of its members” (Pope Benedict XVI, at Nazareth, 15 May 2009). Pope Benedict emphasizes first the importance of the marriage covenant, and then the family, and the witnessing of couples for the formation of conscience and the building of a civilization of love. The Holy Spirit, ever active to grant His charism to any organization, association or movement in the Church to answer her particular need at any given time, has again today empowered an ecclesial movement to address the crisis in marriage and family life in the modern world. Worldwide Marriage Encounter seeks to answer this crisis today.

15. The “New Style of Priest-Lay Teamwork”

At a seminar in Rome organized by the Emanuel Community and the Pierre Goursat University Institute, in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute “Redemptor Hominis ” (January 2010), Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko presented this “new style” of collaboration between priests and laity in ecclesial movements and new communities. This novelty, the cardinal suggested, presupposes that priests “recognize the identity proper to the lay faithful and value their mission effectively in the Church and in the World.” Cardinal Rylko pointed to the movements and communities as the “true and proper sources of the ‘new style’ of collaboration between pastors and laity in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church” (*Zenit*, 27 January 2010, Rome, front page).

Worldwide Marriage Encounter with its 50-year experience of priest-couple collaboration in all levels of leadership and activities within its structure, is an attestation to the efficacy of the two social sacraments - the Sacrament of Marriage and the Sacrament of Holy Orders - collaborating for the renewal of the Church and in service of her evangelizing mission in the world.

Concluding with awareness of the efficacy of our two sacraments *ex opere operato*, we dare to say: “We proclaim the Good News by what we say... Better by what we do... And best by what we are!”