

# Not Taking a Happy Marriage for Granted



Timothy and Barbara Howland laugh during one of the presentations.



A bell signals end of each session.

Last month Father Paul Bryan, C.S.S.R., and three "team couples" came together for a weekend at Notre Dame Retreat House with 10 selected couples from Rochester and Oswego as part of a new diocesan program to "make good marriages better."

The Marriage Encounter program sponsored by the Office of Family Life has been started in the diocese to give married couples a technique of dialoguing with one another.

"This weekend is not a group retreat," stressed Father Bryan. "We want to teach these couples how to use what we call 'ten and ten,' that is, ten minutes of personal reflection and then ten minutes of discussion, on a daily basis to improve their marriages."

Participants in the weekends spend their time listening to the team couples talk about a specific topic as it relates to their own marriage, then they separate and write down their own feelings in plain notebooks. At the end of a set period, one of the team leaders walks through the halls ringing a bell to start the one-to-one discussions, then uses the same method to call the whole group back together.

Limiting the time of writing and discussion not only ensures that the group will cover all the topics in the course of a weekend, but gives the husbands and wives an assurance that they will not get into a broader discussion than they can handle.

After the Marriage Encounter, each couple continues to write about and discuss their feelings on one topic a day. Team couples stress over and over in their presentations that this dialogue is not a problem-solving device, that it should not be used to decide, for instance, whether the wife should return to school.

"We operate on the principle that you can't love what you don't know," said Father Bryan. The emphasis is always upon recognizing and accepting the reality of what the other person in the marriage feels. The husband in one of the team couples put it succinctly when he said, "You can't ever say to your spouse, 'You shouldn't feel that way,' because no matter what people think, their feelings are real."

Response from the couples has been enthusiastic. A typical couple married for 16 years, said, "We communicated on the surface, but since the encounter our life is a whole lot happier, we do more together."

One husband commented during the weekend, "I've also made a cursillo, and it seems to me that this encounter creates the same type of relationship with your spouse as the cursillo makes with Christ."

Marriage Encounters are starting on a regular basis in several locations in the diocese. Couples who are interested in taking part can get more information from Mr. and Mrs. Alan Monahan at 716-586-8464 or, in the southern tier, from Mr. and Mrs. John Callahan at 607-625-2937.



Team couple Fran and Mary Gutberlet go over each other's notes.