

# Engaged Encounter: What is it?

**Engaged Encounter, a program designed to help couples concentrate on each other and their married life together before their wedding, has grown steadily since it began in the Rochester area in 1975. The following article, written by Terry Patti, describes what Engaged Encounter is and how it has helped many couples. Mrs. Patti and her husband Jerry are the originators of the program in this region.**

By TERRY PATTI

Rochester Engaged Encounter began in 1975. Now, with a weekend every two months, 101 engaged couples have made this unique weekend experience. Engaged Encounter is a marriage preparation program whose goal is to help engaged couples build a strong relationship before marriage as well as to come to a realization of the importance of the vocation of marriage. Engaged Encounter's motto, "A wedding is a day, a marriage is a lifetime," also illustrates an important point — that the love relationship should be the focus of the engaged couple — not the wedding trappings or arrangements.

The term Encounter — encuentro — meaning to discover. Although the term may have negative connotations to some persons, the Engaged Encounter weekend is NOT a sensitivity session, or group dynamics, and DOES NOT involve group discussion. The weekend is a meditative, deeply personal experience offering the couple an opportunity for private reflection and dialogue with each other. The weekend is not like a retreat, except for the quiet retreat-house setting, but is an experience completely different and unlike anything else.

Engaged Encounter may be substituted for the Pre-Cana sessions required by the diocese, and a standard Pre-Cana certificate is given on the weekends. Many older couples are choosing the Engaged Encounter as an alternative to the Pre-Cana, because of the private dialogue which they see as a chance to discuss what is personally relevant to them, rather than spend time discussing something they have already covered. As one couple wrote, "It truly was a meaningful experience for us by allowing us to be removed from the rush of wedding plans and giving us the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of marriage."

The program also relies on the belief that what the engaged parties say to one another is much more important than what may be said during presentations. There are fifteen presentations on the Engaged Encounter weekend and each is followed by time for individual reflection (on important questions handed out to the couples) and couple discussion (on the answers to the questions).

Although Engaged Encounter is a Catholic weekend, many couples of other faiths (mostly Christian) have attended the weekends. Each weekend has at least one or two non-Catholic couples, and inter-faith couples as well.

One drawback to the Engaged Encounter is the cost — \$60 per couple. The cost is pared down as much as possible, but because of the cost of rooms and meals, the weekend cannot be done cheaply at present. Any engaged couple who wishes to make the weekend will be accepted whether they can pay the full amount or not.

## Life, Liberty and Law



Nancy Murphy

Although the secular press and some contemporary misinterpret Vatican II on the Blessed Mother as early as 1963, the Council itself did not publish the Chapter on Our Blessed Mother until Nov. 21, 1964. Sometimes dissenters get ahead of themselves in their haste. I do not know why this most important of the Council's documents remains unknown to many Catholics, why it is not taught with emphasis in many Catholic schools and CCD classes, why it is unavailable in most religious pamphlet racks and unheralded from most pulpits. Can it be that we are so little faith that we are afraid to urge our religious leaders and teachers to speak and teach Catholic doctrine in this pluralistic world?

Directly from the text: "The Father of Mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined Mother, so that just as a woman had a share in bringing about death (Eve) so also should a woman (Mary) contribute to Life. The Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but freely cooperating in the work of man's salvation through her faith and her obedience. For as St. Irenaeus says, 'Mary being obedient became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race... the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.' This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's conception until his death.

"Mary cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to the human soul. (Devotion to her) neither takes anything

away from nor adds anything to the dignity or efficacy of Christ. Through her faith and through her obedience she gave birth on earth to the very Son of the Father... in the manner of the new Eve who placed her faith not in the serpent but in God's messenger without once wavering in doubt...

"Under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church) let all theologians and preachers of the word of God carefully refrain from whatever might by word or deed lead separated brethren or any others whomsoever into error about the true doctrine of the Church.

For information on how to obtain the complete text of the Vatican II Chapter on Our Lady, please send a stamped self-addressed envelope to me: P.O. Box 8450 Rochester, N.Y. 14618. (Continued next week.)

## READING INSTITUTE

A state-wide institute for reading teachers and supervisors will be held Aug. 8-12 at Nazareth College, under the auspices of the New York State Reading Association. Information on

programs and housing arrangements, and registration materials, may be obtained from Mrs. Olga Vaughn, 72 Angora Drive, Rochester 14617.



At least two married couples and a priest conduct the weekend. Although they are responsible for the direction of the weekend their function is more that of catalysts than experts. Their aim is to facilitate open communication between the engaged couples.

Although the team is willing to share their own experiences and difficulties, the point is that the engaged couple must recognize their own problems and develop their own solutions. There is no magic and no easy answers. In other words, the success or failure of a couple's weekend, or their marriage, rests on their own shoulders.

The weekend also challenges the couples to examine the fundamental question — the degree of intimacy, the amount of trust and openness that is going to characterize their marriage. Couples are asked to reflect on and discuss how and to what degree God is to be involved in their marriages.

Although the weekend is more intensive than other forms of marriage preparation, its effect on the engaged couple is correspondingly greater. Engaged couples who have made this weekend often enthusiastically recruit friends, neighbors, sisters and brothers.

The next weekend for the Rochester area is scheduled for September 16-18 at St. Michael's Divine Word Seminary. Reservations can be made by calling Mrs. Bobbie Diehl at (716) 254-8582.

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