

Spanish priest developed marriage encounter system

By NC News Service

Everybody devotes time and effort to keeping their homes and cars looking good, themselves neat and attractive and their friends and bosses happy with them.

Why not, then, give the same kind of attention to your marriage relationship?

Thousands of people are doing just that through involvement in Marriage Encounter, which exists in the United States in two similar, though distinct, organizations: Worldwide Marriage Encounter and National Marriage Encounter.

Leaders of the two organizations estimate that more than 200,000 people will attend a Marriage Encounter weekend during the next year.

Marriage Encounter sessions usually begin on a Friday evening and last about 48 hours.

There are slight variations in format between the weekend sessions conducted by the two Marriage Encounter organizations, but both are aimed at enabling couples to improve their communication.

Whether Worldwide or National, the weekend experience centers on presentations to the couples attending. In Worldwide, the presenters are couples and a priest. In National, which is ecumenical, the couples may be joined by a priest or by non-Catholic clergy.

Leaders of both organizations emphasize that Marriage Encounter is not a panacea for serious marital problems,

nor a retreat or sensitivity session, and certainly not an occasion for married couples to throw privacy to the winds and share problems with others.

Couples are, indeed, urged to reveal their feelings, frustrations, hopes, fears and joys — but only with each other. There are no group discussions.

The weekend is seen merely as the beginning of the Encounter. There are follow-up programs and the development of an Encounter community on the local level.

Each of the organizations is led by a couple and a priest.

The leaders of Worldwide are John and Barbara Bertrand of St. Anne's in the Mountains Parish, Running Springs, in the Diocese of San Bernardino, Calif., and Father Patrick Grace of San Diego, Calif.

The leaders of National are Charles and Sandy Ogg, a Lutheran couple of Orlando, Fla., and Capuchin Father Bob Lexa of St. John Parish, Little Chute, Wis.

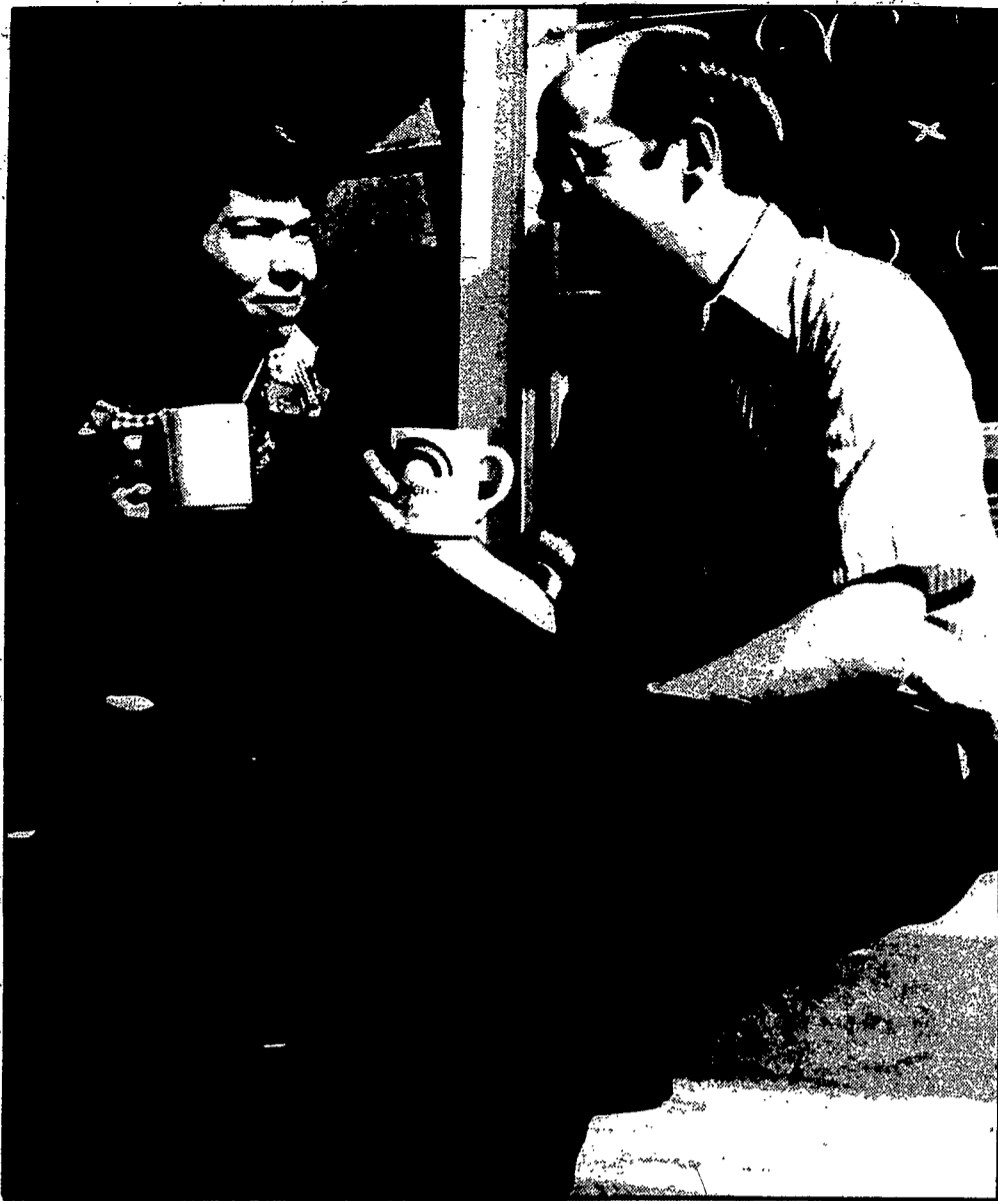
All are unabashedly enthusiastic about Marriage Encounter.

"I discovered a special person in my life," said Bertrand, referring to his Encounter weekend.

"It is the greatest thing that ever happened to us," said Mrs. Bertrand.

Added Father Grace: "It was my second ordination."

Father Lexa emphasized that Marriage Encounter can be "very important for priests as well as married couples."



NC photo from CLEO
Norb and Lolly Santoski of Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in St. Paul, Minn., are among the many couples who have enriched their marriage through a weekend retreat known as Marriage Encounter.

The Marriage Encounter movement had its beginnings in 1952 in Spain, when a young priest, Father Gabriel Calvo, founded The Marriage Teams of Pope Pius XII, a group of priests and couples who traveled throughout that

country giving conferences for married couples.

The movement, under the name of Encuentro Conjugal, gained popularity, and in 1966 spread to Latin America

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