

# Long-lasting love depends on communication

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Communication between husband and wife is the theme of three programs available to married couples in the Diocese of Rochester.

Although the three programs — Marriage Encounter, Evergreen and Retrouvaille — each operate differently, they all embody the same emphasis on opening up channels of communication between couples. The most well-known of the three programs is Marriage Encounter. A weekend look at a couple's life together, Marriage Encounters are scheduled 10-12 times a year, according to Pamela Notebaert, who coordinated the weekends with her husband, John, from 1985 to 1987. Occasionally, Marriage Encounters are conducted in Spanish, she said.

Typically offered in a diocesan retreat house, the Marriage Encounter weekend runs from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. A priest and a lead couple present a variety of topical questions for participants to examine, related to such issues as money, careers, children and sexuality. Couples are asked to reflect on how they communicate their emotions regarding each topic.

Notebaert said that participants leave the weekend knowing how to use various communication techniques. To continue to improve those techniques, six follow-up sessions, covering two topics each, are offered using the same question/reflection format as the Marriage Encounter.

For information regarding Marriage Encounter, call coordinators Denis and Dee Stemmler at 716/872-3180, or 716/872-1175. The next Marriage Encounter is Feb. 24-26 at the East Avenue Inn. Registration costs \$30, and a goodwill offering will be requested at the end of the weekend. A Spanish Marriage Encounter is scheduled for March 3-5, also at the East Avenue Inn.

Evergreen takes a format similar to Marriage Encounter and breaks it up into 12 three-hour evening sessions. Each session occurs in the homes of the participants, who take turns hosting the program.

Developed by Father Chuck Gallagher of the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center in Elizabeth, N.J., and John and Kathleen Colligan, co-directors of the center's of-

ice in Endwell, N.Y., Evergreen is primarily aimed at couples who have been married for between one and three years, although other couples are also welcome.

Evergreen is promoted locally by Phil and Pat Brockmyre, parishioners at St. John of Rochester in Fairport. Phil is national administrator of the Catholic Kolping Society, an organization that supports Catholic marriages through branches in 13 communities throughout the United States.

Brockmyre and his wife learned of Evergreen through Father Gallagher and the Colligans, who publish various materials on the subjects of marriage and parenting.

Brockmyre said the Evergreen program was developed because more couples divorce in the first three years of marriage than during any other period. Evergreen seeks to strengthen a young couple's communication skills through the same topical question format of Marriage Encounter.

An evening session consists of a coordinating couple, or priest, presenting a topical question, and then speaking about their own experience regarding the issue it addresses. Par-



ticipating couples are then asked to discuss the question in private. The evening concludes with a general discussion of the topic, although Brockmyre emphasized that couples do not have to speak about their own experiences if they feel uncomfortable doing so.

The Brockmyres are currently coordinating an Evergreen program at their own parish, but Phil hopes other parishes will adopt the program also. For information on starting the program in a parish, call 716/235-3412 or 716/425-2937. A \$8-10 fee is usually charged to cover the cost of materials.

While Marriage Encounter and Evergreen are designed for couples whose marriages are relatively strong, Retrouvaille weekends are for couples whose marriages are in danger of ending. Coordinated by Jerry and Trudy Monaghan, Retrouvaille uses the same format as Marriage Encounter, but on a much more intense level.

Most of the couples who attend Retrouvaille weekends are separated, Trudy Monaghan said. Retrouvaille may be their last attempt at saving their marriage, especially if the couple has tried counseling and failed, she added.

Three Retrouvaille weekends occur each year, with 12-15 couples parti-

cipating in each. They often learn of the weekend through parish bulletins, friends or counselor referrals. The weekend costs \$20 per couple, and a optional goodwill offering is requested at the conclusion of the weekend.

Generally, Retrouvailles are conducted at an area hotel, rather than a retreat house, so that couples who are also alienated from the church feel more comfortable, Monaghan said. Although couples are encouraged to share a room, those who wish to remain in separate rooms may do so.

Each Retrouvaille is staffed by a priest and three couples. Like Marriage Encounter, a variety of topics is presented to the participants, but the emphasis is on private discussions. The lead couples present a marriage-related topic, and express their own experience with a certain issue. They then give participants a question, which each person is asked to answer in the context of their own marriage by writing a letter to their spouse. After writing the letter, the couples retire to their rooms, where they discuss what they wrote to each other.

For information regarding Retrouvaille, call the Monaghans at (716)663-2983.

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