

Couple says calendars are key to ministry

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atypical of families where both breadwinners are involved in ministry.

Because of the Mahoney's work schedule — often involving evenings and weekends — their children's extracurricular activities, and their own need for time together as a couple, Monette observed, "Your calendar is your best friend."

"She doesn't make a commitment without checking my calendar," Michael added, "and I don't make a commitment without checking hers."

Still, Monette and Michael are able to make time for family and each other. In addition to regularly going out on "dates," the couple schedules its days off together. They also try to hold prayer with their children each evening.

And once the boys reach age 16, they join Michael on his annual retreats. The family also has a rule that after church Sundays is family time: no outside commitments are allowed save for exceptional circumstances.

That both Monette and Michael

chose to work for the church is not surprising. After all, they first met in an elevator in a nursing home while on their way to sing at a St. Vincent De-Paul Society concert. Both have remained active in the church since their wedding 22 years ago.

The Mahoneys also learned over those years how to cope with being apart. Michael was in the U.S. Marine Corps, retiring as a major in 1988. During his time in the service he was overseas for extended periods.

"The boys were used to not having the both of us at everything," Monette observed.

One way for the Mahoneys to spend more time together might be to work at the same parish — as they did for a time in Caledonia. But Michael noted that such a solution is not realistic. Parishes sometimes face difficult financial situations, he observed, so they both feel more secure by working at separate churches.

"You really depend on two salaries," he said. "You can't afford to both be out of work at the same time."

And potential problems extend beyond just parish finances. After a new pastor comes to a parish, "he might not want a deacon," Monette noted. "He might not want a woman working there."

Both feel fortunate that they work in parishes that are supportive and flexible in light of their family responsibilities. The two communities have always been warm to the couple and their children, they noted.

The Mahoneys said they feel lucky being able to serve the church in ministry. They suggest that couples who feel similarly called need to look at the possibilities — despite the challenges involved.

"If you have a married couple who both feel called, they won't be happy unless they do it," Michael observed.

At the same time, Monette cautioned, "You have to look at what community is calling you. You are parents. You are married. You have yourself, too."

"Part of it is just saying that the family is important," she concluded. "We, as a couple, are important."

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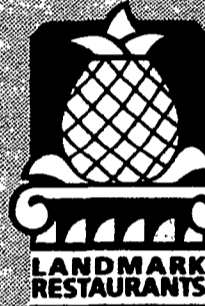
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ME implements toll-free number

SAN DIEGO (CNS) — An 800 number begun last August to help married couples contact Marriage Encounter groups in their area has received a steady stream of calls since its inception.

Teresa Villa, a public relations specialist working with Worldwide Marriage Encounter in San Diego, said the toll-free nationwide number got its biggest boost after a nationally syndicated columnist mentioned the number in his column. It received nearly 1,000 calls in one week.

Villa estimated the total number of calls received at "several thousand" and said that there had been little problem with callers receiving busy signals or not being contacted soon after their call.

The computerized system allows couples to call 1-800-795-LOVE at no charge and record their request for information about Marriage Encounter programs in their area. Based on their telephone area code, messages are automatically routed to the nearest local information team for response.

Bill Boylan of Wallingford, Pa., said establishment of the new phone line was part of the movement's 25th anniversary observance.

"Despite our success with more than a million couples, the need for this type of marriage enrichment remains acute," he said. "Society's continuing indifference to marriage is eroding the very foundation of family life."

Mary Anne Boylan, his wife, said the Marriage Encounter weekend program is not for couples teetering on the brink of divorce.

"The weekend definitely is for couples who do love each other but for many reasons can find themselves disillusioned, bored or isolated in their married relationships," she said.

The Boylans and Father Charlie Coulter of St. Columban, Neb., comprise the U.S. secretariat team of Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

I have never, never in all my life succeeded when I spoke with the faintest trace of harshness. I have always noted that if one wishes to move another's mind, one must be ever so careful not to embitter that person's heart.

St. Vincent de Paul