

Marriage & Family Life

Program prepares couples for remarriage

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — John and JoAnn DeMott are looking for a few good remarried couples.

Parishioners at St. Monica's Church, 831 Genesee St., the DeMotts have served as "lead couple" for New Horizons, a diocesan program that prepares for marriage couples with at least one partner who has been married before.

But the demand for the program far exceeds the capacity of the DeMotts and three other "team couples" to meet it, John said. About 25-30 couples use New Horizons every year, John said.

"We've estimated there's twice as many couples who would use it," he said.

DeMott hopes to recruit more team couples this year from parishes.

"I would bet that every pastor in the diocese knows a couple that would be suited for this kind of a program," he remarked.

Developed in the diocese by remarried couples and concerned clergy in 1979, the program comprises one two-hour session and three three-hour sessions on weeknights sometime in March, May or October in the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road, Gates.

The diocese also offers a weekend version of New Horizons called Once More With Love, according to Barbara Carroll, diocesan coordinator for Sacramental Life. But that program may be scuttled due to lack of interest from couples, she added.

The DeMotts and the three other team couples are assisted by Father James Lawlor, pastor of St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place, and Sister Nancy DeRycke, SSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Helen's, 310 Hinchey Road, Gates.

Most couples who seek out New Horizons are in their 30s, DeMott said, but couples ranging in age from their 20s to their 60s have also attended sessions.

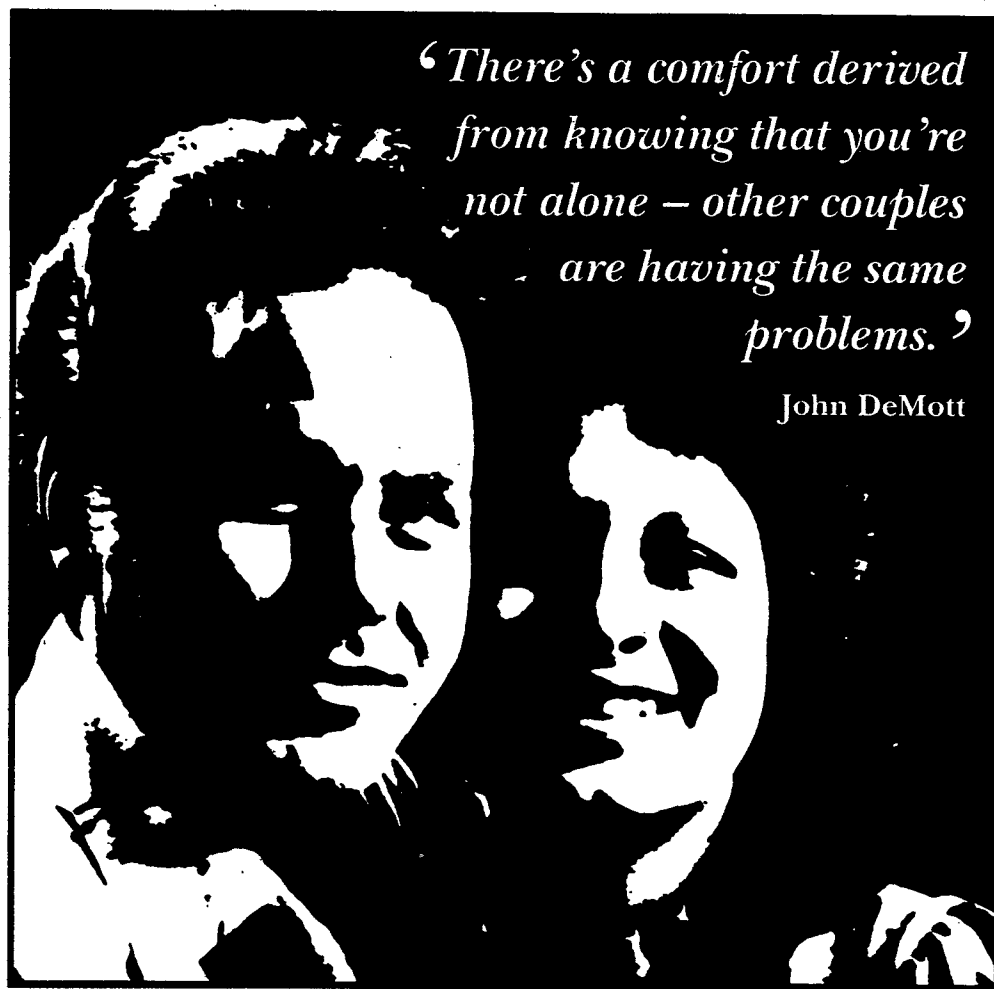
Whether a couple wants to use the program depends on whether they have heard of it through their pastor, DeMott said, noting that many couples wind up going through their parish's own marriage-preparation program.

Nonetheless, he recommended that couples with one or both partners remarried explore New Horizons because of the camaraderie the program offers widows, widowers, and those whose previous marriages have been annulled.

"Many times, remarried Catholics feel like second-class citizens in the church," he said. "There's a comfort derived from knowing that you're not alone — other couples are having the same problems."

Couples in New Horizons cover the following topics at their sessions.

*Self-Awareness* — How do you see your-



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John DeMott

selves; how well do you like what you see.

*Attitudes* — How do you feel about a variety of topics, and from where did those feelings come.

*Communication* — How and how well do you communicate; how do you resolve differences.

*Intimacy* — Achieving psychological as well as physical closeness as a couple.

*Spirituality* — How important is your relationship with God; what does the sacrament of matrimony mean to you.

Four steps are taken for each topic. The team couple shares their positive and negative personal experience with each topic; then each participant completes a written questionnaire.

For example, the "attitudes" exercise sheet asks such questions as how a man or woman feels about having any children with their future spouse, or what are their feelings on paying child support or alimony.

In the third step, each couple discusses its answers privately, and the process is completed when small groups of four-to-six couples share their thoughts together.

The program also explores assorted "mini-topics" that deal with such issues as "instant" parenthood; difficulties with church teachings; in-laws, ex-spouses and old friends; and what remarriage is like after several years.

When asked about some of the most common concerns couples have, DeMott noted that, at first, many often have resentful feelings about the church's annulment process.

"Why did I have to bear my soul with these annulment papers to a person I haven't even seen," is a common attitude, he said.

DeMott urges couples to see the annulment process as a chance to express many feelings on paper that otherwise may remain bottled up over the years.

"It was probably cathartic to put it behind you," he tells couples. "We try to prevent these feelings from becoming a barrier for getting involved in church again," he said.

Interestingly, he explained that couples' attitudes toward the often painful annulment process is sometimes paralleled in their attitude toward New Horizons — at first.

"Couples usually begin New Horizons with feelings of fear, or resenting the time it will take," he said. "At the end, the same couples wish the program could have been longer!"

*EDITORS' NOTE:* For information on New Horizons, call the diocesan Marriage Preparation Office at 716/328-3210.

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