

Ram's Horn

Marriage Retorno Newsletter
Spring 2006 Vol. 108

Strengthening Marriages
Through Scriptural Prayer



**Journey Together
To God**

From the editors

Mike & Maureen Oates

Greetings. In this issue of The Ram's Horn, our feature article, **Paralysis of the Spirit**, is by Norman Schauls. He & his wife, Delores, are long-time supporters of the *Marriage Retorno* ministry and were presenters at the 2003 National *MR* Conference in North Carolina. Norman & Delores are members of our diaconate community in the Archdiocese of Dubuque (Iowa). In addition, there are contributions from our executive team, Deb & Rick Giarusso and Father Mel Hemann. As a follow-up to Fr. Mel's article, we have added **Setting up an MR**, with specific details drawn from a weekend held in Hiawatha, IA, this past January. We are delighted to have received a letter from Fr. Al Winshman, and have included it as well.

While we were on vacation in California in February 2006, we met twice with Sandra and Lamberto Rodriguez. Please see the prayer request for the Rodriguez-Oates-Hemann collaboration on an upcoming *MR* weekend. Finally, there is information about the 2006 National *MR* Conference. Please make your reservation as soon as possible.



Paralysis of the Spirit (reflections on Mark 2:1-12)

Norman Schauls

For the weekend of Feb. 18-19, Father Denny, our pastor, suggested I preach from a wheelchair. I was a little

apprehensive about showboating yet it went very well. I was wheeled into the assembly to the back of the church (many of the people had very surprised or shocked looks on their face) and then wheeled down the aisle in the entrance procession. The wheelchair and I were lifted up one step to the first level of the sanctuary where I sat in the wheelchair next to Father. After the second reading, I was wheeled to a position near the ambo and it took 4 men (as in the gospel) to get me up the remaining 3 steps to deliver my homily with a portable mike.



The paralytic in Mark's gospel is a reminder to us of how delicate the human body is and how anyone physically challenged was looked down on in Jesus' time and in many places in our society yet today.

I think most of us know someone suffering with a terminal illness or chronic paralysis, or who is physically challenged in some way, due to any number of things from injury, or illness, or disease. There is something that may be more debilitating than physical paralysis, and that is paralysis of the spirit.

Most of the time when we are sick our bodies heal themselves. Doctors don't heal us. With medication and treatment, they merely free the body to do its work. Jesus did not use surgery, nor did he prescribe drugs. Everything Jesus did was by the power and authority of God. And in this case it was the power of God that freed this man's body to heal itself. So it is good to remind ourselves that God is the life giver and the freedom giver.

Doctors can also provide some relief for people with emotional problems. What doctors are less able to do is to free our minds to be like little children again and be open to welcome the love and freedom of God into our lives. Little children are enthusiastic; they are warm and loving, and they love to learn new things.

Children will say it like they see it. Recently, for example, our 2½ year old granddaughter was at our house. She was busy playing with her dolls and she kept looking at me with a puzzled look on her face. After a short time, she came over to me and said "Grandpa, put on your hair". Unlike this child, our teenage and adult minds are easily paralyzed. We talk about being "paralyzed with fear." We can be paralyzed with anxiety. People say "I can't even concentrate enough to get anything done."

There are several kinds of paralysis of the mind for which doctors can do very little; God can work wonders to free us of this paralysis of the spirit. We live in a busy world of speed and pressures that paralyze us in drudgery and consume us, drain our souls, dry up our hearts, and rob our spirit and our will. We spend time making telephone callbacks, answering emails, doing shopping, doing the laundry, running errands through crowded stores, and grinding through daily routines, going to meetings, doing repetitive tasks, standing in lines of one kind or another day after day.

Teenagers and adults alike can get caught in a grip of jealous envy, greed, rage, and revenge over a sometimes meaningless incident or object such as money, possessions or favoritism. Often, this leads to arguments, to mental and physical abuse of family members or friends. And this paralyzing of the spirit is accomplished by our busyness and jealousy.

One thing I have found that will help is hope. Hope is the vital energy that builds confidence and encourages improvement. Hope brings enormous value to the peace and tranquility of the household. Hope is the willingness to celebrate what can be, hope generates remarkable resources for creative, loving, connections with family and friends. Hope alone is realistic because it perceives the scope of our real possibilities. Hope is a choice — not a feeling, a choice to make and a change to free us from all that paralyzes us.

Look around you today in your home, your workplace, your neighborhood, your parish, and ask yourself: who is being excluded or harmed because of your own paralysis? Is it one of your children? Your spouse? Your friends?

If this sounds familiar and you feel paralyzed, it is time for a redefining moment in your life. Take control of your life. Get out your day planner, appointment book, or palm pilot and block out a little time each day to spend with God. Each week have a date day for yourself first, and your spouse, family, friends. Use some of this time to reconnect with your inner self, with those you love, and with God.

Being freed from the paralysis of spirit will be a joyful experience. Many of us have been through it, and may experience it again. Perhaps no one is freed all at once. Rather, it might be said that our Christian life is a steady process of being set free by the Holy Spirit.

We need each other's honesty, each other's support and encouragement in this process.

(Editors' note: Remember that Norman was sitting in a wheelchair as he shared this homily.)

The experience of using the wheelchair during Mass was very emotional, humbling, and an eye opener for me. As I was being carried up the steps to the altar, I was reflecting on how the paralytic was helped into the building to meet Jesus, just as I was.

For several days I have been thinking of the obstacles individuals with physical limitations have to deal with in our parish. I learned how difficult it can be for someone physically challenged to participate at Mass as a sacristan, altar-server, lector, Eucharistic minister, priest, or deacon. Sometimes it can be hard just to get down the side aisle when someone else is standing there and using the restroom can also be difficult.

Although I have several health issues of my own that I deal with on a daily basis, none are as confining as what I experienced that day. My own health issues include one that may not be easily noticed just yet by those who know me, but my doctor noticed it the minute he saw me.

On December 23, I learned I have the early stages of Parkinson's disease. The doctor assured me that, with this early diagnosis, exercise, and treatment, this disease should be manageable.

A couple days later during the Christmas Eve liturgy, I was assisting at Mass and I recognized several members of the congregation with this same disease. A tear rolled down my cheek for them. It was at that moment that I realized this disease is a gift from God for me to learn about and use as I minister to my family, especially our grandchildren, friends, and community. I have hope for the future and I will not allow this disease to dampen my spirit. With prayer and God's unconditional love and support, I will continue to be very active in my ministry.

At the center of all this stands Jesus with His unconditional love and support, as well as the reminder of what Jesus would say to all of us, "Child stand up, pack up your troubles and go to your home with Jesus" I will come home to the community of family and friends who are free of any paralysis of the spirit.

(Norman adds: The congregation was so mesmerized to see me in a wheelchair that they had to be invited by Fr. Denny to stand for the gospel. After the homily I stood up, bowed, reverenced the altar, and took my place next to Fr. Denny. It was so quiet in church, one lady told me she could hear a pin drop. Several people came to me after Mass, including two that really touched me. I believe that I was able to console them in their own contact with someone with Parkinson's. [Email Norman](#))

Questions for discussion based on Mark 2:1-12:

1. Do you recognize paralysis of spirit?
2. How do you deal with paralysis of the spirit in your life?
3. How do we free each other from this paralysis of spirit?



Married Together – Apart

Rick & Deb Giarusso

Communication has always been an important aspect of marriage to us. It was topic of discussion even before we were married. *Marriage Retorno* was a natural fit because it helped us with the framework of sharing scripture as part of our daily communication. While we have been married for almost fifteen years, we did our first *MR* in November of 2003. Like many of you, we had wanted to make a *MR* for many years.



There is an old cliché that says, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”. This may be true in the sense that after being apart there is the excitement of being together again. However, this is only true if you are communicating while you are apart. We have learned a lot about communicating while apart over our fifteen years of marriage.

Rick retired from the military in May of 2004. A military career assumes that you will be away from your family. We have experienced many separations during our marriage. Most of the separations were less than 14 days, but we experienced two longer separations. Rick went to Alabama for five months in 1993 and he was deployed to Iraq in February of 2003 for eight months. We learned how to stay close to each other even though we were physically apart.

When Rick went to Alabama in 1993, we stayed in contact by phoning each other every evening. This allowed us to be involved in each other’s life on a daily basis. While we missed doing things together, we could still share our thoughts and dreams. Deb also visited Rick in Alabama three times. We considered the dollars spent on phone bills and traveling costs a necessary expenditure just like utilities and groceries. We were investing in our marriage.

When Rick was deployed to Iraq, we did not have the same luxuries to stay in touch with each other. Fortunately, technology was our friend. We were able to e-mail each other almost every day. Some of the e-mails were short such as when Deb would send Rick multiple updates a day so he would know what was going on in Cedar Falls. Other e-mails were opportunities to share an idea about an article or a book. Talking on the phone was difficult, but Rick tried to call at least once or twice a month. A friend set up a website for Deb to post digital photos. This allowed Rick to see what was happening at home and most importantly to see our son grow and change. (Ryan celebrated his ninth birthday while Rick was gone.) Of course, we also wrote letters. The advantage of a letter is that it can be read multiple times, but it is not timely.

A strong marriage is built on communication. It does not just happen, it takes time and effort to set aside time to communicate to your spouse. Our forced separations taught us how important it is to share with each other every day. *MR* taught us how to share prayer and scripture. Currently, we are sharing our insights about our scripture reflections during walks in the woods with our dog.



From our executive team priest:

Fr. Mel Hemann

In the last issue of The Ram's Horn I discovered that in responding to Rick & Deb's request to serve as the priest on the *MR* executive team it's the 5th time I've responded in the affirmative. I have no idea how many times in

those years I have filled this space so my first inclination when asked again was the thought "what is there to write about after all this time?" On the other hand, the basic needs and the challenges never really change. They are always with us. However, although those basics never change, the circumstances surrounding them do. The need for something like **MR** in our world is perhaps greater today than it was almost 40 years ago when Fr. Gabriel and his friends answered a need that has continued to spread through out the world. Our world, in a sense, is much smaller today because of the technological advances made during our life time. None of us is as insulated as we were in our younger days. The external worldly pressures affect us all. Families are not what we knew in our youth. Marriages have struggles not even dreamed of 25 years ago. The call to commitment and faithfulness is challenged by many of the so-called societal necessities we simply must have. Consequentially we unknowingly allow many of our true values to slowly but inevitably erode.

The past few days have triggered my imagination.

- 1). I reread Joan Chittister's talk at Call to Action in which she talked about the relationship between culture and spirituality. Interesting perspectives as to what some of our values have become with such things as social stress, global envy, pride, lust, gluttony, covetousness, anger, and sloth.
- 2). In the current issue of Newsweek, Anna Quindlen's article is entitled "The Face in The Crowd." She says that the widespread use of cell phones, computer online dating, and the new BlackBerry device results in ever more enormous isolation as people hunch over their handhelds or stare into a computer screen. It gives the illusion of being in touch, but always at arm's length.
- 3). Our Archdiocese just announced we priests will cooperate in a new plan to promote vocations to the priesthood. So next Fall we will gather for a day in a place that for me is the swankiest place in our neck of the woods. I'm sure that all of us gathering together in such surroundings will really have an impact on young men responding to God's call. We all know that vocations always have their roots in the family.

So, **MR** has challenges that perhaps call for more commitment than ever before. One of the readings at daily Mass during the first week of Lent had Jesus calling his disciples to a commitment that requires more than words. It must be words and actions. What can we do? Obviously something more than moan about the fact we can't have a weekend.

For 25 years Mike, Maureen and I have put on weekends in my rectory. Now that we're retired we do them in our home or at a parish that invites us. We continue to use the same model. The local parish community is involved by offering their homes, food, etc. The weekend affects many more than the few experiencing the weekend. The results strengthen marriages and families. And it doesn't cost an arm and a leg. (See also Setting up an **MR**, below.) Only when we as Church begin reemphasizing the importance and value of marriage and family will we cope in a constructive way with some of the corrosion affecting our society and our world. Become creative in your commitment to **MR** and look honestly and realistically for ways to further the spirituality of love in your lives as well as those near and dear to you.



Setting up an MR

Maureen & Mike Oates

A year ago, we were invited to be the guest speakers at an evening for married couples at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Hiawatha, IA. The couple who invited us to do this, Marlene & Al Myers, made an **MR** many years ago here in our archdiocese. Marlene works for that parish. We feel honored and humbled when such an opportunity is offered to us. We sat at table for dinner with Patty & John Waldorf and two other couples. During

our sharing, we told those present about our own **MR** experience and how very important and special it is for us. Before the evening was over, Patty & John invited us to come to their parish for an **MR** couples' retreat. The date was set for January 21 – 22, 2006. Over the next several months, we worked with the Myers, Waldorfs, and another couple, Earl & Donna Mitchell to make this **MR** a reality. Parishioners provided much needed support. The Waldorfs, the Myers, the Mitchells, and the parish staff managed the publicity and organization of the weekend. We contacted **MR**ers from past retreats who lived in/near this parish to help us with meals, snacks, and lodging for those attending the retreat. The parish welcomed couples from their own parish, other parishes nearby, and a couple from near Saint Louis. This couple, Paul & Mary Brockmeyer, have been in touch with us and Dave & Lillie James for over three years because they wanted to make an **MR**. They were not free when a given retreat was scheduled or we had to cancel the weekends they could make because there were not enough couples. Fr. Mel Hemann and Deb & Rick Giarusso were part of the team for this **MR**. The spirit of participation during the weekend was exceptional. We were impressed by the warm hospitality of this parish, its pastor, Fr. Neil Manternach, and all who made it happen.



The following article was published in our archdiocesan newspaper, *The Witness* (February 12, 2006), in the *Together in Faith* column by Sister Marci Blum, OSF, Office of Family Life and Adult Faith Director.

Marriage Retorno

Marriage Retorno is a weekend prayer experience, a couple's retreat, for husband and wife, facilitated by a married couple and a priest. It is intended for every married couple who wishes to deepen a sense of communion with one another and the Lord. Marriage Retorno means turning toward God as a couple.

Eight couples participated in a Marriage Retorno on Jan. 21-22 at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Hiawatha. Marriage Retorno is geared to provide the participating couples with an opportunity for a renewal of their relationship as a couple with God.

The next Marriage Retorno is scheduled for March 18-19, at St. Patrick Parish in Cedar Falls. Contact Rick & Deb Giarusso at 319-277-8170 or [email](#) if you would like more information.

Marriage Retorno, which has been in existence for 30 years, was founded by Father Gabriel Calvo. Calvo founded the Retorno in Spain in 1970 as a response to couples' requests that a support system be established for the spirituality of marriage. The retreat was brought to the Archdiocese of Dubuque through Father Mel Hemann in 1976.

On a Marriage Retorno retreat, spouses are taught to find Scriptures that relate to their daily experience and to use them as a basis for their couple prayers. There is time for reflective time alone, as a couple, and as a group. Busy couples can easily accommodate partner prayer into their schedule. Prayers are usually short, lasting only a few minutes each.

[Picture from the **MR** weekend at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Hiawatha, Iowa.](#)

On March 15th, we were contacted by a parish in the western part of our archdiocese. The people from that parish saw the preceding article in *The Witness* and are interested in hosting an MR next fall. The vivencia of having an MR involves many steps: personal witness, organization of resources, and publicity.



A letter from Fr. Al Winshman
Dear Mike and Maureen,

*Congratulations and many thanks for the December issue of The Ram's Horn. I found it inspiring and encouraging. It has been a while since I was on the retreat staff at Loyola Retreat House, using my **MR** experience to give couple prayer retreats each year there. The current issue sparked the flame again in me to consider couple prayer experiences and **MR**, which are graced experiences needed by many couples today. Please continue to keep me posted.*

*Also I'd welcome being put in touch with **MR** couples and activities in my area of Boston. Let me know of any active couples in my area. Also I'd welcome being considered for sharing in any way that I can with couples in couple prayer and/or should you have a need any time for a **MR** team priest. This keeps coming back to me from time to time.*

*You and the **MR** community are included in my daily Masses and prayers. It is a joy to find so many couples with whom I have shared in the past sharing their commitment and ideas for promoting **MR** and couple prayer experiences - such as yourselves, Ben & Gladys Whitehouse, and Adrian & Mary Claire Auger. You may forward this to them and give them my greetings. Also my prayers and greetings to the new executive couple, Rick & Deb Giarusso, and Fr Mel Hermann. Thanks again for keeping me in touch with you and others though The Ram's Horn.*

*Blessings of Advent and Christmas be yours and all in **MR**,
Peace in Jesus and Mary, Fr Al*

PS: My residence at 300 Newbury St is being completing renovated over the next six months or so. Meanwhile I have been moved to Campion Center, 319 Concord Road, Weston MA 02493-1398. I made my theology and was ordained there in 1962-1966. Half the building is now our Jesuit Health Center and also the Campion Residence and Retreat Center. Please make this change on your mailing list. While my address is temporarily in Weston MA, my email remains the same, winshman@juno.com. I'll soon have a new phone number in Weston until my return to Boston. I can be reached on the house phone, 781-788-6800, Ext 1473.



Prayer Request

On June 3 – 4, 2006 there will be an **MR** for Archdiocese of Dubuque deacons-in-formation and their wives. This group is made up of Hispanic and Anglo candidates. Fr. Mel and M et M will be welcoming Sandra & Lamberto Rodriguez from Menifee, CA to Cedar Falls in order to provide a bilingual **MR** for these people. Sandra and Lamberto have been putting on Spanish language **MRs** in CA, Mexico, Canada, and Peru. The Archdiocese and the three Ms are fortunate that Sandra & Lamberto will collaborate with them in this endeavor.

The 2006 Marriage Retorno conference

The Conference will be held on the lower outer banks in eastern NC. The Trinity Center is a very beautiful spot between Bogue Sound and the Atlantic Ocean with a conference room and large gazebo right on the ocean, nice accomodations for attendees, and the surrounding sights and sounds of the ocean. It is an especially apt location for developing “coupleness” and growing in our experience of couple prayer.

2006 NATIONAL MARRIAGE RETORNO CONFERENCE

October 27-29, 2006

at

[The Trinity Center](#)

Pine Knoll Shores, North Carolina

Approximate cost: \$270 couple; \$135 single

Closest major airport is Raleigh (3hr drive)

or New Bern (30 minutes)

Ben's Taxi Service available at both airports if scheduled

Please email us [Ben and Gladys Whitehouse Host Couple](#)
if you think you will attend;

919-841-5594 home or 919-906-0289 cell

TOP



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