

Ram's Horn

Marriage Retorno Newsletter
Winter 2006 Vol. 111

Strengthening Marriages
Through Scriptural Prayer



**Journey Together
To God**

From the editors

Mike & Maureen Oates

Greetings! In this issue of the **Ram's Horn** you will find:

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NEWS AND NOTES

We received a note from Fr. Ed Flanagan. He and Bill Degrenia had been sent “get well” cards during the recent conference. Fr. Ed writes:

Dear Mike & Maureen - and – Joe & Mary - and – Ben & Gladys,

*I hope you and all yours - and all the couples and priests of the **Marriage Retorno** are well in the Lord as you receive this. ... Many and sincere thanks to you and all for your kind notes on the group get-well card from the Retorno Conference. I am indeed on the mend and once again reminded that the gift of health from God is never to be taken for granted. The surgeon said that in all his years of practice he seen a situation like mine only twice before - with Michael Jordan and Larry Bird! ... I just got off the phone with Bill Degrenia. He is in something of a cardiac limbo with the heart problem that caused their (Bill & Gerrie's) last minute withdrawal from the conference. He has a further procedure scheduled for 10 days from now and after that will have a better idea of the total situation. Thanks for praying for this prayerful and devoted couple. ... I hope that all our paths will cross again by and by. God bless you and all your families.*

Fraternally in the Lord,

Ed F., o.f.m.

PS - to Mike & Maureen,

I notice that Howie R. and his wife did not sign the card. No doubt they were probably at home down on their knees saying the rosary. (Editors' note: Fr. Ed has a wonderful memory and often mentions Howie, a boyhood friend of Mike and his brothers, who was "invited" to kneel and say the rosary with the Oates family on more than one occasion.)

Joe & Mary Ward forwarded a letter from Balazs & Krisztina Menesi, who live in Hungary, and who conducted an **MR** weekend in October. Their letter to Fr. Gabriel Calvo with a CC to Joe & Mary and a picture of the 11 couples is found below in section 4.

We have also heard, via Joe & Mary Ward, from two couples who agreed to relate how their **MR** weekend and subsequent couple prayer have influenced their lives. Their stories follow.

Hi Joe,

*My name is Emily Urban & my husband, Manny, and I attended a **Marriage Retorno** in Tucson, AZ in 1996. I recently saw our testimonial in the Ram's Horn. I thought you might like to hear how Marriage Retorno has continued to affect our lives.*

We have continued to pray together in the same manner that we were taught on that weekend ten years ago. Our reflections and meditations on scripture have increased our love for each other and for others. Manny works with teens in our local schools as a coach and I have gone on to achieve a Master's in Social Work. We include reflections using icons of St. Teresa of Avila, The Great Disciple, and The Divine Bridegroom. We pray every evening for those with whom we are involved through our work and our ministry.

We have recently celebrated our 39th wedding anniversary and ended our evening with a psalm on gratefulness to God where we gave glory to God for each other. Blessings on you and all whom you touch in the course of your ministry. Emily & Manny Urban, Jr.

Dear couples,

*We are Stanley & Esme Teo from Singapore. We attended our **MR** weekend in June 1999 which was shared by Kevin & Kathie Stogsdill and Fr. Pat O'Brien in Singapore. The weekend has made an impact on us since then. It gave us an opportunity to take stock of our lives, to reflect, and to make concrete plans and a commitment to God after leading our lives without God for so many years. The **MR** weekend also helped us love the Bible more as we have now put our hearts and minds on God's words more faithfully. The Bible and our conjugal prayers are now our source of hope, assurance, direction, and life with God. Our spousal relationship has grown more intimate and closer as a result. Since attending our weekend, we have been struggling, but never giving up, to continue to seek God's will for us even in the little things of our lives. Our 11-year old daughter has also benefited from our **MR** experience. She confidently shares with us the word of God and through us, she recognizes and experiences God as a loving and forgiving Father.*

*We are truly blessed with this experience of the **Marriage Retorno** program. Our lives have been transformed ever since we made our commitment to God with our praying as a couple, reflecting, and sharing the scriptures. We have been constantly seeking God's grace, living Jesus' teachings and commandments, and asking the Holy Spirit to move us so as to become a sacramental couple and a God-filled family.*

We hope that you, too, after this weekend, will share the same joy and peace in your lives as you constantly seek God's will. With God's peace and love, Stanley & Esme Teo.

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2. The Fall 2006 National *MR* Conference: kudos



Kudos to Ben & Gladys Whitehouse for all the hours of contact, setup, hosting, chauffeuring, etc., that they put into the 2006 conference in NC, as well as for the suggestion of the Salt and Light theme. Likewise, kudos to Rick & Deb Giarusso and Fr. Mel Hemann for all the energy and time given to organizing and running the very successful conference. Finally, thanks as always to Joe Ward for the conference photos that you find with this edition of the Ram's Horn. Joe & Mary think that Fr. Mel is looking very papal in his white vestments.

Deb & Rick wish to express their gratitude to all who helped with the conference and to the entire *MR* community on whom they depend for support.

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3. Prayer, Preaching, and Supporting the "Salt of the Earth" George & Shirlene Gonzalez

Shirlene:

For George & me to seek to be the Salt of the Earth depends on our realizing that we need to be spiritually nourished first in order to serve others. The Eucharist is a primary sacrament that brings me to a renewed celebration of God's love for me and for others, especially those in need. In receiving the Eucharist, the world falls away and I feel Jesus as a part of me. My worries leave and it becomes so much easier to reach out to others, to offer a smile, to say "yes" to a request of assistance. The Eucharist becomes my strength.

George's & my marriage sacrament is where we also are given the grace to mirror God's love, to serve others, and make the right choices, even when we may be criticized by those with differing opinions. We feel called to serve God together as a couple. We do this through taking the Eucharist to the nursing home, hosting the small Christian groups in our home, and through our church's Dinner For Eight groups. We touch others by sharing our coupleness and the blessings God has given to us as a couple.

Our annual *Marriage Retorno* Conference is always another spiritual boost for us. Coming together and being in the presence of couples that seek God as the center of their marriage is a blessing. Plus renewing these dear friendships which we have had for so many years and hearing how God works in the lives of holy couples reenergizes us.

When we share our faith journey to becoming Catholic with others, they frequently comment on how they feel our deep devotion to our faith. It also gives some of them hope that their non-Catholic spouses may also one day come to the faith. This gift of faith and our commitment to couple prayer sustains us in the good times and the not so good times, in sickness and health, and especially as we contemplate another rite of passage soon – retirement.

In these last couple of years, as we get nearer to retirement, our jobs have become the biggest detractor to our time together - longer hours, schedules that do not match, and too many times feeling like ships passing in the night. We keep reminding and supporting each other and just saying to one another to hang in here a couple of more years. Having less time together hurts and we definitely appreciate the time we are together. We always make it a point to attend Mass together, even if it means attending the the last-chance Mass at the downtown Cathedral at 8 PM on Sunday or catching the 6:30 AM Mass at our church on Holy Days.

We also try to take our coupleness into the work place. Although my work place is not a place that is conducive to broadcasting my Christianity, my family pictures and my actions and support of staff present the message. Many comment on how they know that I always choose to do the right thing, and for me the right thing is "what would Jesus do?". I keep a little framed reminder beside my computer of this question "WWJD?". It's such a simple little statement, but when I stop and really ask and listen for God's answer, the right thing to do always comes to mind.

As St. Francis taught – "we preach Jesus by the lives we live" – it is something for me to strive to do.

George:

For me to be an example of being the Salt of the Earth, I must have the mission to bring joy and peace to those I meet. To do this, I must demonstrate my faith and act in a manner pleasing to the Lord. In order to keep myself growing in faith, I must pray often, act according to Jesus' words in Scripture, go to Mass, and celebrate the Sacraments as frequently as possible.

Praying everyday keeps me focused on Jesus and how He would react to the good and frustrating things that challenge me each day. At work, I need to be a good example for others. I need to be kind and generous to them, giving my time, and offering help in a manner that teaches them to handle problems, rather than brushing them off. Having patience with co-workers is a small sacrifice for me in comparison to Jesus' sacrifice for me. I haven't been asked to die for them.

Bringing Jesus as a constant companion into our marriage is the strength we gain and it helps us to radiate our Christian marriage to the world. As marriage partners, we must stay focused on couple prayer, even when the world and little time together make it difficult. Praying and sharing the trials of our jobs and supporting each other is what helps us stay focused on our near-term and longer-term goals. Even as we long for more time together, we cherish our prayer time.

Last year I was diagnosed with kidney cancer and I had to have my right kidney removed. As frightening as this was, Shirlene & I knew that we had been truly blessed. At my annual physical, I just happened to mention to my doctor about having some back pain. Instead of just brushing my complaint off as a pulled muscle or arthritis, she sent me for a scan. I had had a scan five years before that showed a small cyst on my kidney, which is quite common. However, this cyst had now become a mass and was the size of an orange.

After two visits to surgeons, it was pretty obvious that the kidney had to come out, and so surgery was scheduled. Everything went well with the surgery, and I returned home to recuperate after five days in the hospital. The very good news was that the cancer was a stage 1, and it was totally removed with the kidney. The surgeon commented that the cancer was “in the bucket” along with the kidney.

Arriving home, I very quickly realized that I wasn't the guy who had walked into the hospital five days before. I have always been able to help others and enjoyed keeping my yard immaculate. I even mowed and trimmed the yard a couple of times a week. All at once, I was not the man with strength and stamina. I felt like I was back in a toddler mode and could do very few physical activities.

Well, I could not mow, and I knew that Shirlene could not do this task, so I began to think about hiring a professional service, even though I knew for them, it would just be a job, and not the pride and joy it was for me.

Before I could locate a professional service in the telephone book, my neighbor, Ray, came over and said he wanted to mow my yard for the summer and for me not to even give the yard a second thought. This was a very humbling experience for me. His generosity and caring for my situation was something I had never imagined. And, then my other neighbor, Joe, said that he wanted to mow the yard, as well. This was about too much for me to handle. I had never before been so ill that I could not take care of my household duties.

My neighbors demonstrated to me the real meaning of being the Salt of the Earth – doing for others without expecting anything in return and coming through for your friend and neighbor in a time of need.

When I can reach out and do something for others, it gives me great pleasure in knowing in some small way, I am the salt of the earth. But, to be on the receiving end was a new experience for me. To be open to allowing others to be the salt of the earth for me helped me to understand and relate better to others in need.

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4. A report on an **MR** presented in Hungary by Balazs & Krisztina Menesi



Dear Fr Gabriel, Dear Fr Donnon, and FIRES family,

Time flies... it is already two weeks ago that the *Marriage Retorno* ended. We felt the Lord helped each of the 11 participant couples in the very special way they needed in order to come closer to Him.

Like with all FIRES programs, the prayer background played a key role in the success of the program. Therefore we would like to quote some of what participants shared at the end of the program:

- *It was good to experience that the Lord speaks to others. It ensured me that He has indeed spoken to me, too, especially through my wife. His message was: Do not be afraid!*
- *And that the time I spend on prayer is never wasted.*
- *Jesus has spoken to me through the Scripture, namely, that it is time I started doing something.*
- *What touched me most was reconciliation with my spouse. From now on we will continue our struggle against our problems with the help of the Holy Spirit.*
- *The messages we have received through the Scripture encourage us that we must grow in love and faith in our family.*
- *I came here not with great hope but with a hardened heart. But Jesus has stepped into my life and washed my feet. His cross is my greatest treasure, this is what I take home with me.*
- *All my wishes have been fulfilled: my relationship with myself, my spouse, and with God has been renewed.*
- *The Lord has shown me that even I am able to be renewed.*
- *I consider it a great gift that I have realized: the Father loves me like a jealous lover, and that I must primarily concentrate on what is above, instead of what is in this world.*
- *This Retorno experience has been a gift and an opportunity resulting in what is taking shape in my heart: a wish to fully give myself to the Lord Jesus.*

We are attaching a group picture. Thank you for your prayers.

God bless, Balazs & Krisztina

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5. Prayer for a Married Couple by M et M Oates

*Lord, help us to grasp the beauty of our marriage You made sacrament.
Forgive us for the times we failed to see You in each other.
Teach us to plant our marriage in the welcoming ground of Your love.
Engrave charity, contentment, and compassion on our hearts.
Instill in all we are and do a spirit of politeness, kindness, and courtesy.
Encourage us to face each other with deep peace, trust, and joy.
Help us to love passionately and compassionately.
Strengthen our marriage with the solid witness of those who are married.
Make our married love shine as a source of strength for others.
We ask your blessing, Lord, as we strive to serve all with whom we interact. Amen.*



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