



Worldwide Marriage Encounter
Interfaith Board Meeting
 June 20-22, 2018
 Hyatt Place Chicago Lombard



FAITH EXPRESSION: LUTHERAN MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER

ROSTERS: North American Board & Staff Roster Attached

WEEKENDS HELD - JAN.-MAY, 2018:

NORTH AMERICA: *(The numbers below for North America are gleaned from leadership reports and may not necessarily match our official statistics yet to be provided by our Finance/Statistician).*

- Number of Weekends held: 10
- Number of Lay Couples completed: 82
- Number of Clergy Couples completed: 7

EUROPE:

- Number of Weekends held: 8
- Number of Lay Couples completed: 127
- Number of Clergy Couples completed: 5

INDIA – 1st Outreach Encounter held in May, 2018:

- Number of Weekends held: 1
- Number of Lay Couples completed: 3
- Number of Clergy Couples completed: 3

All six couples completing the India Outreach Encounter are beginning to write to become presenters. Two Non-Residential Encounters are being planned in India—one in May of 2019 and one in January of 2020.

WEEKENDS SCHEDULED – JULY-DEC. 2018:

<u>Dates 2018</u>	<u>City/State</u>	<u>Facility</u>	<u>Additional Info</u>
Aug 10-12	Omaha, NE	Hampton Inn (Airport)	New Facility
Sep 14-16	Canadensis, PA	Spruce Lake Retreat	
Sep ??-??	Mesa, AZ	Mesa Hilton (?)	Participants Pay
Oct 5-7	Indianapolis, IN	Comfort Suites, Fortune Circle West.	Outreach of N. IL Area
Oct 5-7	Ricon, GA	Ebenezer Retreat Center	Very small deposit risk
Oct 12-14	Rochester, MN	TBD	New Area
Oct 12-14	Peoria, IL	Quality Inn	
Oct 19-21	Ludlow, PA	Olmsted Retreat Center	
Oct 19-21	Battle Creek, MI	Quality Inn	
Oct 19-21	Colorado Sprngs, CO	Glen Eyrie Conference	Ecumenical w/Methodists
Oct 26-28	Lincoln, NE	TBD	
Nov 2-4	Millersburg, OH	Hotel Millersburg	Participants Pay
Nov 2-4*	Vancouver or Portland	TBD	(*or Apr, 2019)
Nov 9-11	Lenox MA	Hampton Inn Berkshires	
Nov. 2-4	Dittmer, MO	Sojourn Retreat Center	
Nov. 2-4	Dallas, TX	Wyndham Dallas Suites	
Nov. 9-11	Rockford, IL	Baymont Inn	
TBD	N. CA	TBD	*Evaluating destination locations

WEEKENDS SCHEDULED – 2019:

<u>Dates 2019</u>	<u>City/State</u>	<u>Facility</u>	<u>Additional Info</u>
Feb 15-17	Brooklyn Center, MN	Double Tree Inn	
Apr 26-28	Minnesota	TBD	
Mar 29-31	Birch Run MI	Comfort Inn	
Spring TBD	Ontario	TBD	
Sep 27-29	Battle Creek MI	Quality Inn	

3RE'S HELD - JANUARY-MAY, 2018:

- Number of 3RE'S held: 0
- Number of Lay Couples attended: 0
- Number of Clergy Couples/Priests attended: 0

3RE'S SCHEDULED – JULY-DECEMBER 2018:

- None scheduled at this time. The LME North American Board is meeting June 24-26, 2018 to further evaluate leadership piloting and 3RE Video Encounter scheduling.

PRESENTING COUPLE STRENGTH: *(This can be numbers only, or names and cities. List presenting couples outside of the U.S. separately).*

NORTH AMERICA:

- Clergy written to the CPO: 17 (1 writing, 1 on LOA)
- 3rd set written to the CPO: 15 (1 writing)
- 2nd set written to the CPO: 13 (4 writing, 1 on LOA)
- 1st set written to the CPO: 13 (1 writing 2nd set talks)

EUROPE: (Our European Region is not using the CPO outline as Faith Expressions there are not yet working together to sponsor Encounters)

- Clergy Presenting Couples: 13
- Lay Presenting Couples: 45

ACTIVITIES/PROGRAMS/PROJECTS/BEST PRACTICES:

- We continue to address each of the 5-points in our Gold-Star **Strive to Thrive** focus. In July, 2017 we focused on personal leadership development and prayer. Our January-June, 2018 focus has been on Encounter Excellence. Beginning in late June, 2018 we'll add the focus of Pre-Encounter (Inviting/Publicity/Marketing) Excellence. Post-Encounter Excellence will be the added focus in 2019.
- Some activities/best practices on striving to thrive in the Area of Encounter Excellence this year have included:
 - Presenting excellence: videos with presenting tips were made available for presenters meetings, all Areas were encouraged to have presenters meetings to focus on ways to avoid presenting pitfalls, give better presentations, reduce repetition in presentations, 'tighten up' and update talks to insure they are current and relatable, and generate positivity and encouragement within the presenting community.
 - Re-evaluation of facilities selection when planning Encounters to provide venues that couples want to attend, but with cost considerations being a priority. Innovation was encouraged: Can you negotiate bringing in your own catered meals instead of opting for the facility's options? (Yes, this has been done in more than one Area even though the facilities at first were not open to this option). Look for facilities that can accommodate a Saturday night Romantic Dinner where each participant couple has

their own candlelit table for two with dinner questions focusing on the journey through their relationship. It's a great way to give couples the extra time alone they are asking for within the parameters of the O & M schedule.

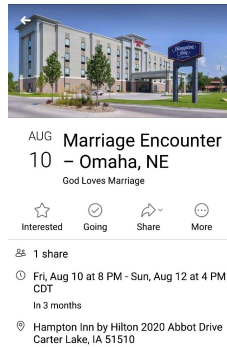
- Some Areas are including 'palanca' or small gifts to give to couples at different times throughout the Encounter to create a 'you are special' environment. Stuffed felt prayer hearts, candies, candles for their guest rooms (where allowed), 'To Love is A Decision' refrigerator magnets, scrolled copies of the Prayer Vigil rolled and tied with a ribbon printed on parchment paper are just a few 'gifts' that are given in different areas.
- Consideration is being given to the following ideas:
 - Including (in the Encounter PowerPoint) a professionally done short video clip with voice-over commentary showing real-life couples and families participating in community activities to be shown during the Continuing the Journey talk during that tool for keeping your relationship a priority. Instead of just talking about community, we'd like for couples to experience it.
 - Including a best-of-the-best video presentation (in the PPT) of the first sample dialogue in the Feelings talk.
 - Reviewing each presentation for other unique ways to enliven/create interest.
 - Having couples read some of the workbook content to each other.
 - Acting out or role playing parts of presentations rather than reading them.

INVITING/RECRUITING/PUBLICITY BEING DONE:

- Maximizing the visibility of our godlovesmarriage.org website through search engine optimization and other methods of increasing site traffic. The revamped web-site is now mobile-device friendly.
- Hosting 'manned' informational tables and giving presentations on ME at church-oriented conferences such as the Best Practices Conferences in Phoenix, AZ and St. Louis, MO, and at other Synod and District Conferences and Congregational Resourcing events.



- Inclusion of LME information in all-District e-news bulletins on the West Coast.
- Presentation on LME during a Marriage and Family Pastoral Care class at Concordia Seminary/St. Louis.
- Professional church e-blasts prior to all LME Encounters with embedded links for personalized publicity resources for the upcoming local Encounters. Church bulletin notices, bulletin inserts, announcements, posters, video slides and a video clip are included. (We have been experiencing more reluctance and out-right refusal to publicize our Encounters in churches in some Lutheran Synods).
- Facebook events are created for all LME Encounters on our God Loves Marriage Facebook page. Encountered couples are encouraged to engage with the posts (click that they are interested or going, sharing the post, making comments, etc.).



- Twitter and Instagram are being used locally in some Areas; will add at the North American level when we have the manpower needed to create and engage professionally branded posts on a consistent basis.
- A 30-second radio spot was created and used on a popular local radio station to promote a MI Encounter. (Rate for non-profits was \$30 per 30 second spot. Purchased \$500.00 worth of spots with money raised locally within the encountered community).
- “Fellowship First” feeder groups/activities to engage married (and often engaged) couples with the Encountered community (wine tasting events, romantic dinners, family fun-days, Art Museum Scavenger hunt, picnics, nature hikes, etc.).
- Encouraging more personal inviting within the encountered community.
- Pre-Encounter Excellence is our next “strive to thrive” focus. We’ll be actively seeking more innovative ideas.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO ENGAGE/SUPPORT THE NEWLY ENCOUNTERED:

- First interaction is an emailed invitation to evaluate their Encounter. Some Areas use Survey Monkey others use a fairly standard set of questions within the email. Responses have been opening doors to meaningful presenter follow up interactions.
- Modified version of the WWME Renewal is being used locally. This 2.5 hour post-Encounter event is hosted in a presenting couple’s home (preferably) or at a church or other venue. The 5 tools for keeping your relationship a priority are reviewed and the 6th tool, goal setting is introduced and practiced. Format is a modified journey group. Each of the 5 tools is reviewed then an open sharing question follows each tool review; the 6th tool is then introduced and practiced through exercises. Dialog, food, and fellowship follow. Presenters and Prayer Couples are invited to attend; non-local participant couples are invited to attend electronically through GoToMeeting or other electronic meeting venues.
- Journey Groups
- KYRAP (Keeping Your Relationship A Priority) Events
- Personal post-Encounter follow-up by presenters and/or prayer couples
- Post-Encounter Resources offered through our back-end godlovesmarriage site (accessible only to Encountered Couples). Resources include dialog resources, video presentations with sharing and dialog questions, state-by-state pages with local resources and activities information. Additional resources for encountered couples are also found on our ilme.org website.
- Dialog challenges and post-encounter letters/email connections

ENRICHMENTS/COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES:

- Wine Tasting Events (paired with cheese or chocolate)
- Family Fun Days (Hiking, Kiting, Picnic)
- Family Campouts

- Road Trip Adventures (upcoming: Ark and Creation Museum). Couples/families can join for the day or stay at a local hotel or campground for the weekend (at their own cost).
- Encountered Couples Retreats/Veteran's/Sweetheart Renewals
- Journey Groups (We are also offering social media journey groups; success so far has been limited)

CPO ACTIVITIES:

- We welcome 'orphaned' presenters of other Faith Expressions to present LME Encounters
- Our workshopers continue to workshop other FEs writing couples
- Nebraska LME leaders began communications with Methodists re: 3RE Video Encounter
- Nebraska LME clergy met with Baptist and Methodist clergy to build connections
- Arizona LME community is working with Methodist community to offer Community nights
- Mid-Rockies LME partners with Methodist community in all activities

VARIETY OF MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER EXPERIENCES:

- Traditional Weekend Encounters
- Non-Residential Encounters
- Participant 'self-pay' Encounters
- Non-Weekend Encounters
- Working on incorporating 3RE Video Encounters

UPDATES TO SHARE:

- **Strengths:**
 - Hardworking, small but committed core of volunteers
 - Strive to Thrive Focus (with positivity and can-do attitudes)
 - Innovation
- **Successes:**
 - Reduction of expenses
 - Increase in revenues
 - Mobile-friendly website updates
- **Challenges:**
 - Modifying the program to better accommodate the needs of today's couples
 - Motivating newly encountered couples to use the resources offered to personally invite others
 - Establishing/Re-establishing relationships with churches and encouraging them to use the resources offered to promote the ministry
 - Finding ways to involve younger couples' active participation in the ministry (in journey groups, activities, and service capacities, etc.)
 - Finding ways to help couples commit to and follow through with becoming presenters
 - Finding meaningful ways to engage all couples post-Encounter

FAITH EXPRESSION PRAYER CONCERNS:

- See "Challenges" above.
- Rebecca Miller, 5 year old granddaughter of one of our Area's leaders who was recently diagnosed with a fast-growing terminal brain cancer. There are many challenges medically and financially. Prayers for family, medical teams, insurance situation, finances.

WHAT TYPE OF HELP/IDEAS DO WE NEED FROM THE INTERFAITH BOARD?

- **Our European Region would like to work with other Faith Expressions sponsoring Encounters in Europe and requests the formation of an InterFaith Board in Europe.**
- **Suggestions for Discussion, Review of, and Updates to WWME Non-Negotiables**
 - Replace the word “Weekend” with “Encounter” throughout the document
 - Update #5 *“All members of any team on any WWME Weekend will be members of the presenting faith expression”* to reflect the changes in protestant faith expressions with the addition of the CPO, the sharing of presenters, and jointly sponsored Encounters
 - Review #4 *“The population of the Weekend will be such that the presenting denomination’s values and attitudes can be proclaimed readily without fear of offending and without apology.”* While it’s important for the presenting denomination’s values and attitudes to be readily proclaimed, increasingly, the population on some protestant Encounters is mixed with higher numbers of interfaith and non-churched attendees. While having less couples of the sponsoring FE on an Encounter can create challenges, it also offers new opportunities to ‘renew and strengthen the church.’
 - #2 Consider alternatives or additional options to Deeper Weekends for presenters training (possibly mentoring programs)? With the small number of couples committing to writing, hosting timely Deeper Weekends for couples to attend is extremely difficult in the protestant FEs.
 - Reconsider #7 *“As a movement, commitment to daily dialog as an indispensable means of living a dialoguing way of life is a non-negotiable.”* Consider making the commitment to *the daily decision to love*. The daily decision to love includes all five tools for keeping your relationship a priority—including daily dialog. Although dialog is foundational to the Encounter Experience, to be absolutist in requiring it—or any one tool over another following the Encounter is a barrier to strengthening and growing the ministry, and misses the opportunities offered in the other tools.
 - Address the viability of #8 *“As part of every local Encounter, a support community will become available to every couple who has experienced the Weekend. The impossibility of establishing such a community is always a contra-indication for conducting the Weekend in any Area.”* With a smaller number of active communities covering larger geographic areas, it is no longer feasible to hold Encounters only in areas where local active community is available. Couples are traveling greater distances to attend Encounters (often preferring destination locations to local ones), and increasing numbers of participants do not live near an active community.
 - Update #10 regarding the February 13, 1984 mission statement. (Hasn’t the mission statement been updated since that date?)
- The average life-span of an organization is 50 years, and we’re nearing/at that time and facing numerous challenges in remaining a viable resource for married couples in today’s world. **We need to take action now to re-vamp/reinvent our ministry (not its essential content) in order to thrive once again.** Despite professional and church marketing efforts our attendance is dwindling. Couples coming off Encounters are no longer personally inviting others to attend. Our post-Encounter Evaluations show consistent feedback that the days are too long, the presentations are too long and repetitious, there’s not enough down-time or time to move around/go outside, sleep more, time by themselves to practice the concepts, leave earlier. Couples aren’t interested in joining Journey Groups or making other post-Encounter commitments to the ministry (becoming presenters or becoming involved in

planning teams, leadership, or area boards). **The program needs to be updated and streamlined. Innovative ideas need to be shared and allowed to be piloted.**

FINANCIALS:

- Several years ago LME had a projected financial life of 3 years. A concerted effort to decrease expenses (less in-person leadership meetings and more virtual meetings, along with other cost-cutting measures) and increased financial appeals to the encountered community have turned this downward financial spiral around.

PROGRESS ON "ACTION ITEMS" ASSIGNED TO ALL OR TO YOU:

- **ACTION ITEM #4:** LME is now insured and in compliance with the WWME licensing agreement.
- **ACTION ITEM #6:**
In 2012/2013, a draft document for **InterFaith WWME Weekend Cost/Revenue Sharing Guidelines** was submitted to the IFB Board. As we don't have knowledge as to whether or not that proposal was adopted, and five years of experience in presenting jointly sponsored Encounters have taken place, experience has shown that equal splitting of costs, revenues, and statistics between all faith expressions jointly sponsoring the Encounter is a preferable method of handling finances and statistics than the proportionality formula originally proposed. Therefore, based on the input of leaders now regularly sponsoring joint Encounters, we propose that:

The equal sharing of costs, revenues, and statistics* be the norm for jointly sponsored Encounters with the local leadership teams of each faith expression involved in the Encounter working out the details of how that is handled for that specific Encounter. If at any time, additional assistance is needed to work through the details, the local leadership teams involved in that Encounter will contact the national leadership teams of each faith expression sponsoring the Encounter for further assistance.

While equally sharing costs, revenues, and statistics is preferred, it is recognized that not all faith expressions have the financial means to share equally in the costs of sponsoring an Encounter. When a faith expression involved in jointly sponsoring a specific Encounter is unable to contribute equally financially to that Encounter, the local leadership teams of each sponsoring FE will work together with their National Leadership teams to work out a mutually agreed upon method of financial and statistical accounting for that Encounter.

***For the purposes of statistical reporting, each faith expression participating in a jointly sponsored Encounter will report a proportional share of one Encounter. For example:**

If two FEs sponsor an Encounter, each FE would report 1/2 of an Encounter on their statistical report for WWME.

If three FEs sponsor an Encounter, each FE would report 1/3 of an Encounter.

If four FEs sponsor an Encounter, each FE would report 1/4 of an Encounter and so on.

It is important to note that this costs/revenues/statistics proposal applies only to jointly sponsored Encounters and not Encounters where presenters of one Faith Expression are invited to present as guest presenters on an Encounter sponsored by another Faith Expression.