

## HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER

Worldwide Marriage Encounter was at its peak when Protestant couples attending Roman Catholic Weekends starting begging for assistance in renewing their own churches. LME's organizational roots began in **May 1975 in Cheney WA** with Don ♥ Karen Kurtz and other dedicated couples in Los Angeles, San Jose, St. Paul, and Phoenix.

Episcopal Marriage Encounter helped adapt the Outline for a clergy couple instead of a priest, and all along the way, we were encouraged by our WWME Family to be the best of who we were as Lutherans. Catholic ME supported us emotionally, physically, and financially. They workshopped talks, supplied notebooks and pens for those early Weekends, and much more. Their enthusiasm and encouragement from all over the country reinforced us again and again. It is a story line you will find often in this movement.

The first Weekend was held in Spokane WA in October 1975, and other areas began holding Weekends in the next six months.

Just as with WWME, Lutheran Weekends spread like wildfire, with firsts including:

1975	First LME Weekend	1987	First Weekend in Finland
1978	First Weekend in Canada	1989	First Weekend in Australia+
1982	First Weekend in Norway	1995	First Weekend in Denmark
1983	First Weekend in Brazil	2007	First Weekend in Jamaica*
1985	First Weekend in Iceland	2017	First Outreach to Estonia
1986	First Weekend in Sweden	2018	First Weekend in India*

\*These were carried out with presenting couples from the USA. Despite great encouragement, no local couples stepped forward to carry on the movement in Jamaica. A stronger foundation was therefore built in India with hopes of fully preparing the six local couples who committed to becoming leaders.

+ Sadly, Australia "retired" from holding Marriage Encounter experiences after twenty years or so, but the spirit of outreach continues

**National Family Reunions** provide opportunities for continued growth for encountered couples, and are held every 2-3 years in a variety of cities. Inspiring presentations, small groups, shared resources, and the encouragement of being around like-mindedly passionate people keeps couples returning time after time. The first reunions were in Long Beach CA, followed by Northfield MN and Columbus OH. By 1983 such Reunions were scheduled every two years and were definitely international in flavor. The first in Canada was held in Calgary in 1993.

By the late 1990's, Europe was holding so many Encounters that we became two regions: North American and European. The US/Canada communities started alternating hosting the reunions with the Europe. By 2020, overseas sites include Finland twice, Iceland, and Norway.

By 2013 Lutheran Marriage Encounters adopted the "Common Protestant Outline," and now presenters of any Protestant expression can help with a wide variety of M.E. experiences (they no longer had to be held over weekends, and can even be 7-8 weeks of meetings once a week, in hotels/retreat centers or with couples sleeping at home - an expanding variety to accommodate a wide variety of needs!).