

# LUTHERAN MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER DISTRICT REPORT

## For July, 2017 NAR, ILME & Interfaith Meetings

### District I

#### ROSTERS

*Leadership Roster*

*Area Staff Roster*

*Presenting Couple Roster*

#### WEEKENDS HELD (November, 2016-May, 2017): *(By Area within your District)*

<u>Dates</u>	<u>City/State</u>	<u>Facility</u>	<u># couples</u>	<u>#Lutheran Individuals</u>	<u>#Lutheran Clergy</u> (+ F.E., if not Luth)	<u># Presenters</u>
Nov 11-13, '16	Millersburg OH	H.Millersburg	12	16	2	4
Mar 3-5, '17	Myrtle Beach SC	Clarion	9	6	0	3
Mar 10-12, '17	Birch Run MI	Comfort Inn	16	16	1	
Mar 24-26, '17	State College PA	Toftrees Golf	12	16	2	
Apr 28-30, '17	Beachwood OH	Fairfield Inn	13	14	1	3 + BME deaf interpreter
Apr 28-30, '17	Lancaster PA	Heritage Hotel	11	12	0	

#### WEEKENDS SCHEDULED: *(By Area within your District)*

<u>Dates</u>	<u>City/State</u>	<u>Facility</u>	<u>Additional Information</u>
Sept 15-17, '17	Canadensis PA (N.E.)	Spruce Lake Retreat	
Sept 29-Oct 1, '17	Battle Creek MI (N.W.)	Quality Inn	\$79/nt room rate
Oct 6-8, '17	Lee MA (N.E.)	Black Swan Inn	
Oct 13-15, '17	Jacksonville FL (South)		contract signed
Nov 3-5, '17	Millersburg OH (Cent)	Hotel Millersburg	Another pay-your-own
Spring '18	Birch Run MI (N.W.)		Contract pending
Spring '18	Western Ontario tbd (N.W.)		tbd
Mar 2-4, '18	Myrtle Beach SC (South)		considering pay-your-own
April '18	Beachwood OH (Cent)	Fairfield Inn	most likely site

#### PRESENTING COUPLE STRENGTH: *(By Area within your District)*

<u>Area</u>	<u>#Clergy</u>	<u>#3<sup>rd</sup> Set</u>	<u>#2<sup>nd</sup> Set</u>	<u>#1<sup>st</sup> Set</u>	<u>#LOA</u>	<u>#Not CPO Ready</u>
Central	1	2	1+1W		0	0
N.E.	3	1	2+1W			
N.W.	2	1+1W	1+3W		0	0
Southern	1	1	1 part-time, shared with Central			

#### 5 POINT-GOLD STAR THRUST TO THRIVE UPDATES:

*What are you doing/planning in your Areas to thrive in the following 5 areas. Include personal, couple, Area, and District endeavors.*

**Prayer:** *Include specific prayer plans/activities/other.*

Central is blessed with a very active prayer chain (shared with wider audience) and conscientious prayer chain coordinators, but other than this we have not planned or carried out anything other than personally praying for our team, leaders, and WWME as a whole every Friday at noon.

N.E. holds presenter prayers (during Weekends) in the dining following meals, rather than in someone's room, to provide a visible sign that the Weekends run on prayer.

N.W. Area Leaders are prayer-partnered at each planning meeting

**Personal Development:** *What kinds of things are you doing/planning/do you recommend we incorporate in order to thrive in leadership in LME and in life?*

As a District, we took time at our break out tables at the March meeting to write notes of love and encouragements to every couple on the District Board.

Central reports nothing specifically to encourage the local Board, but has had many opportunities to gather - sharing groups, praise band practices, kyrap events - where we build each other up.

N.E. believes they have had a good start in reducing expense, but think even more is essential to keep the ask price down.

N.W. leadership is shared, and the Zelnors drove to Ontario for planning and fellowship, a much-needed relationship-building time.

**Pre-Encounter Excellence:** *Include inviting/recruiting/publicity/Pre-Encounter Contacts, etc.*

Central and N.W. rely on the mailings by Leinicke Group for our Weekends, and work hard to keep the church emails accurate. Central has not had time to send to those churches for whom we do not have emails and needs to work harder to develop contacts. Virtually all Central KYRAPs are open to the pre-encountered. (The wine-tasting/kyrap combo in February was attended by 11-12 couples.)

N.E. sends churches 3 bulletin or newsletter-ready emails with announcements for the spring Weekend and then again for all fall Weekends. All who have expressed an interest in attending, or have registered, pending, are emailed multiple times a year with reminders.

N.W. reports finding a local "Coffee News" paper that reaches out to local restaurants/businesses and are advertising for free in them.

South has sent "save the date" p.r. to Jacksonville Lutheran, Methodist and other churches for the Oct w/e.

**Encounter Excellence:** *What are you doing /planning to insure excellence in the Encounter Experience?*

Central has very faithful Weekend Coordinators who helps us all to be well-prepared. Central has experimented with a differently-bound, and printed-on-both sides Journal. Its Area Registrar sends out a series of letters before the Weekend to engage and raise the expectations of the attendees; they also have a faithful person who calls each couple the weekend before.

N.E. reports simplifying Weekend conclusions by eliminating sing-off/receptions, and ending the Weekend by 3 pm, hopefully to encourage couples who need to be home at a reasonable hour to attend. N.E. plans to hold a weekend-long retreat for its presenters in the fall, and will include presenting skills next time. They are choosing facilities that span across the wide-area, destinations that might appeal to couples as a getaway.

**Post-Encounter Excellence:** *What is being done/planned to engage/support the newly encountered?*

Central finds the best follow-up is that personal telephone call, and presenters do their best. Personal invitation to a post-w/e follow-up is offered, but of course that is only attended by those nearby. (It's mentioned in the 3-week letter.) Central has a eNewsletter that goes out every month or so reminding couples of upcoming activities, welcoming new couples, etc. Central has started to use the post-w/e questionnaire.

N.E. reports that couples attend from diverse locations, so they are using Facebook groups - just started this spring, and report some success.

N.W. uses the post-w/e questionnaire and is strongly encouraging more community members to invite to post-weekend activities, rather than just leadership doing it.

South sends out monthly weekend concept letters to the newly encountered, for one year. There is a large ongoing (28 years) ecumenical community, but Redmans tried to start a new spiral with 5 new couples from the March Weekend.

## ACTIVITIES/PROGRAMS/PROJECTS/BEST PRACTICES:

*Include things you are piloting or plan to pilot. If tried, please include observations/results.*

Central tried using the Journal format for the Workbook, and is weighing the pros and cons of providing a rough schedule for those couples who request it, as the lack of it distracts many.

Central and N.E. have both tried swapping Self Friday night and Focus on Feelings Saturday morning, which was very well received, and just seems to make so much sense. Those arriving late can easily do the Inventory on their own, and then don't miss the importance of focusing on our feelings.

N.W. hopes to offer a coffee/dessert/info hour at 2 nearby churches in Kalamazoo to connect active couples to those encountered long ago (everyone brings dessert, hears a presentation, finds out about upcoming activities).

## ENRICHMENTS/COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES:

Central has had a very active program for many years. Here's for 2017:

- ♥ **February 11**      **Valentine's Day KYRAP** ("Keeping Your Relationship a Priority") **Couple Communications Workshop: "Loving Each Other through Disappointments,"** 3:00, led by Pr. Jon ♥ Bonnie Bell; followed by FREE pizza & salad supper; & "Wine Tasting Part II" 6:00-8:00 pm. \$10/person or \$20/couple for tasting event. Pre-registration **required**. BOTH EVENTS are **OPEN TO ALL**. Childcare \$5/child, pre-registration only. (We received \$250 Thrivent funding for this.)
- ♥ **May 19, '17**      **Movie Date Night**, 6:00 pm for simple dinner; 7:00 pm to view a movie perfect for couples! **OPEN TO ALL**, an easy inviting opportunity. **Everyone can bring a dessert to share after the movie.** (expected 30 people at one point, but only 20 made it)
- ♥ **June 17, '17**      **Family Day in the Park**, a chance to bring the kids and friends to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park - picnic at 11 am; Ride the train for \$3 (so far 5 families have rsvp'ed)
- ♥ **June 25, '17**      **Romantic Dinner & Information evening** at Royal Redeemer Lutheran Church, 11680 Royalton Rd, North Royalton, 6 - 8 pm+. Invite your pre-encountered friends and help serve them a simple tasty meal at romantic tables-for-two, followed by an invitation to attend a Weekend. Babysitting provided. Details Steve ♥ Sue Rufe, srufe@sbcglobal.net for questions & rsvp's (part of a month's focus on ministry at their church).
- ♥ **July 14-16, '17**      **ILME Family Reunion**
- ♥ **Aug 4-6, '17**      **Annual Family Campout**, Cutty's Sunset Resort, Louisville OH. Save the date!! (For encountered couples and their families only, sorry, due to great popularity.) Contact Steve ♥ Sue at srufe@sbcglobal
- ♥ **October 14, '17**      **Road Rally 'Round the Bridges - Part II**. We had so much fun last year, Kevin ♥ Raye Guynn volunteered to organize another. Mark your calendars. **OPEN TO ALL**, a charming inviting opportunity and perfect for all members of the family. Pls rsvp to the Guynns at PastorG@FaithMentor.org no later than October 1st.

N.E. encourages attendance at Ohio Reunions and campout and the International Reunion. They also had a weekend at Deep Creek Lake, MD, attended by some faithful couples.

N.W. hopes to find a new campground for the annual Family Campout. It holds the annual Veteran's Renewal the first weekend of November at the Shack in White Cloud.

South planned a renewal wine and cheese for local couples from March '17, and are trying again in June.

## CPO ACTIVITIES:

*In what ways are you connecting with other WWME Faith Expressions?*

Central explored a lead to share a Weekend with the Mennonite-Brethren Expression in May in Ohio, but this fizzled. Personally, Fells are workshopping the Baptist Clergy, and our team stands ready to share a Weekend, and has a meeting with the state-leaders for WWME in June.

N.E. includes one UCC couple in CT as a presenter.

N.W. reconnected with the WWME expression locally, who joined in the Christmas activity and some Journey Group get-togethers.

## **VARIETY OF MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER EXPERIENCES:**

*If you're holding or considering anything other than the traditional Weekend, please include here.*

Central states often to Weekend attendees and in print to churches that we are willing to take the Weekend to locations outside N.E. Ohio, including non-residential W/E, but haven't found any "takers" for 2 years. A 7-week 3RE Weekend has been offered to a church - they are considering it, after declining to host one last year. N.W. is discussing the possibility of holding a non-residential Weekend in the future. South is considering a pay-your-own for this coming October.

## **UPDATES TO SHARE:**

Central: We are blessed with many couples pulling together, but also suffer from the same difficulties of finding it hard to engage new and young couples into sharing groups or onto the planning team.

N.E. has gotten many inquiries from New England regarding same-sex couples, and many churches will not advertise because of exclusivity. they even had one same-sex couple register, saying they assumed the wording was just outdated. So far all have been understanding about the rules. Other enrichments are suggested.

N.W. is working hard to combine new previous Areas. They recently send out a Journey Group questionnaire asking leaders in MI and W. Ontario to answer these questions (responses are in parentheses):

What are your Journey Groups doing for activities?

Day trips or vacations together.

Potlucks & presentation Gatherings, urging couples to attend Vet's Renewal & help sponsor Encounters. The potluck is important to build social community.

We have at least two family activities during the year; the annual Christmas concert at WMU and cookout at Zelners' house. Other activities are for couples only, including Journey Group meetings and opportunities to help at our Battle Creek weekend. We have also held a wine & cheese get-together a few times which was very successful and nice for relationship building. A potluck or an event such as this is especially good following a weekend.

Two special activities during the year are our annual Christmas party (couples only) and an annual summer picnic (families included)

We meet for a meal or dessert, presentation, and a 10/10. This will occasionally be at a restaurant.

What resources do you use for presentations?

Usually we choose a book and study it together. Mostly presentations of our own creation. We think it's important to have quality presentations that generate helpful dialogues and lively open sharing. Our couples alternate with short presentations at the meetings. These come from magazines, personal experience or books. On occasion, a short M.E. video is shown from the Godlovesmarriage e-blasts. Presentations are followed by a 10/10. We use DVD or tape series on couple relationships; "His Needs, Her Needs" by Willard F. Harley, Jr., Love Languages, Love & Respect, etc. We have also used standalone topics basic on Weekend concepts or on topics suggested by the couples. "Divorce Proof Your Marriage" by Dr. Gary & Barbara Rosberg. Last month we began our meeting with "Shrek 3" for fun. Opening good for feelings of inundation and overwhelming responsibilities.

Where do you hold your meetings?

Rotate houses. Parlor of Peace Lutheran Church in Saginaw.

We usually meet at the home of the members. On occasion we have met at someone's church.

Trinity Lutheran Church in Utica.

In our homes.

How are new couples invited?

They aren't since there has not been a M.E. weekend in a while.

They are sent invitation e-notices - an early one and then a reminder just before the gather. Also personally invited if local.

Currently, couples are invited via e-mails sent by the host couple, Chris & Pete Wilkins.

New couples are invited both by telephone call and by written invitation.

Through the weekend, on our website and in our newsletter - the Ontario Quest (sometimes we get a change of address to a different area).

When was the last time a new couple joined your group?

Many years. About a year.

We have had new couples come for the last few meetings we've held. We expect a recently encountered couple to attend our up-coming family activity at the end of April.

Last new couple to join our group was in 2016. Too long ago to remember.

Do you share host responsibilities, programs, meeting sites, etc.?

Yes. The potlucks are easy to arrange; couples bring their own place setting & dish to share. One couple reserves the room/kitchen at church and sends out notices to locals. Christiansen's send notices to the large master list. We do many of the presentations; others occasionally. A variety of couples share Encounter/Weekend responsibilities.

We try to. Larry & Liz Grupe serve as Journey Group leaders and hosts. Yes.

Do you have a contact list you share with members? Are other people inviting besides your leaders?

Yes. We urge couples to invite personally those they know have been encountered and see with some regularity. Not at this time. We are trying to work out the "bugs" and come up with a way to do more personal sharing of contact info without compromising people's privacy and information.

We try to update a community contact list on an annual basis. Couples in our Journey Group are encouraged to contact new couples, especially if they know them or have served as their Prayer Couple. Not that we are aware of.

Why do you think our Journey Groups are decreasing in size?

Too busy. Competition with social activity overload. We are holding our own in attendance in Saginaw. People are busy. Many don't see the need to continue with a group following their weekend.

Younger couples do not generally have the same need or desire to be a part of a support group, nor do they have the same commitment to an organization as did couples ten or fifteen years ago. We personally believe that changes in the outline have watered down the need for ongoing involvement and support. Lack of new blood. Members are getting older and passing on.

What can your community do to change that?

Nothing really. People are not committed to their relationship. There is too many other things getting in the way. It is very sad. Indefatigable inviting and receiving something of value when couples attend so that they way to come back. Personal invitations will help. It is difficult to say no when someone asks you specifically to attend a meeting or to help with an activity.

Until couples sense a strong need for an ongoing relationship with Marriage Encounter and/or need for continuing support for their marriage, we do not believe much can be done to change the attitude of couples. Much of that needs to happen on the Weekend when couples experience renewal and growth in their relationship. Sadly, while many couples experience a deeply moving and growing weekend, it is just that--a weekend experience that soon loses its luster as a couples return to the real world.

Develop anti-aging serum! :)

Weaknesses shared by N.W.'s Zelners: general discouragement and disillusionment as Lay Leaders, tired, overwhelmed and frustration that new people are not stepping up. They sense too many things on their plate, lacking motivation to write to 3rd set. They wrote job descriptions for 4 loving tasks and are seeking helpers.

## **PRAYER CONCERNS**

Central - that God be honored in everything we do, say, and try.

N.E. - the Registrar, Denise Etzler, is now facing hand surgery, and has many health issues. However, it rejoices that this is the first time for 16 years that all 3 key area positions have been filled by 3 couples, and they are together for this meeting.

N.W. - for our area leaders and for couples to feel committed and motivated to help; and for the health of our aging leadership.

South - for the Florida Weekend.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

The District found a coordinator for E.R./District I extra prayer letters in Lloyd & Joanne Wertz.

**MEETINGS:**

The Board has decided to meet once a year in person, and 1-2 more times using Go-to-Meeting. The District met most recently in Ohio in March with the following in attendance:

- David & Jean Fell, District I Lay Execs and Lay Contacts for Central Area
- Kevin & Raye Guynn, District I Clergy Execs
- Eigil Hillerup, Registration for Ontario (part of Northwest Area)
- Dick & Linda Holm, Clergy Contacts for Northwest Area
- Bob & Linda McGurn, Clergy Contacts for Northeast Area
- Dean & Marcia Redman, NAR/District Finance Couple and Lay Contacts for South Area
- Steve & Sue Rufe, APCCs for Central Area (also NAR Lay Execs)
- Fred & Julie Schamber, DPCC and Lay Contacts for Northeast Area
- Lloyd & Julie Wertz, APCCs for Northeast Area
- Brian & Donna Zelner, Lay Co-Contacts for Northwest Area

At this meeting both Interim Executives were elected to a new round of leadership. Everyone met Bill & Ann Bruggeman, newly moved to Georgia via Go-to-Meeting. We broke into Area groups and made personal commitments on what each would do to further the ministry.

The next meetings will be:

- Saturday, August 19      10 am - 11:30 am, roll out of NAR meeting information
- Saturday, Oct 28      10 am - 1 pm, Full virtual meeting
- Fri - Sat, April 20-21      District I meeting, in this geographical area.

Submitted with love,

David & Jean Fell  
Lay Execs

Kevin & Raye Guynn  
Clergy Execs

Fred & Julie Schamber  
DPCCs

(Who know that they will devote more time to our beloved District once the Reunion is over.)