

# Communication is focus of Catholic Engaged Encounter

Communication is what it's all about for couples attending Catholic Engaged Encounter. Designed to draw couples closer and build stronger relationships, the weekend retreat encourages engaged couples to explore all aspects of married life in an open and honest way.

"If we can't communicate beyond a surface level, then our marriage relationship doesn't stand a chance," said Patty Ruppert, a parishioner of St. Anthony/Most Precious Blood in Baltimore who leads Catholic Engaged Encounter weekends with her husband, Ken, and who serves on the movement's national executive team.

"There is no intimacy without good communication," she said.

Each Catholic Engaged Encounter weekend features presentations by two married couples and a priest. Couples are asked separately to write responses to a set of questions before coming together for private discussions. Some of the topics include decision-making, finances, family life, sexual intimacy, forgiveness and the sacramentality of marriage.

"It really helps the couples to understand where the other person is coming from," said Ruppert, a teacher at St. Joseph School in Cockeysville. "It tends to be a very intimate weekend. You learn a lot about the other person."

There are times when couples discern that marriage is not for them after participating in the weekend, Ruppert said.

"My husband and I both came from divorces, so our goal is to prevent couples from going through the pain we went through," said Ruppert, who married her husband, Ken, 18 years ago at St. Patrick in Fells Point. "To hear a couple say, 'we're just not ready' or 'we need more time' can be a good thing if that prevents the hurt that comes with divorce."

While many couples are reluctant at the start of the retreat, Ruppert said, they often

leave with enthusiasm.

"I would say a very high percentage leave feeling very enthused and very affirmed," she said.

Catholic engaged encounter has grown into an international movement. It has operated in the Archdiocese of Baltimore since 1975 when it was part of a joint program with the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Arlington, Va. The Baltimore program became independent in 1980. It is recognized as one of the several marriage preparation programs Catholic couples may take to be married in the Catholic Church.