

'Beyond Cana' gives couples the priceless gift of time together

BY PATSY PELTON
TODAY'S CATHOLIC

SAN ANTONIO • If you're looking for a gift for a special couple in your life, whether that couple includes a daughter or a son, a best friend or family member, then look no further. A special gift has been lovingly prepared and wrapped for couples in the Archdiocese of San Antonio — now all that's needed are couples to unwrap the gift. What is it? The gift is a marriage enrichment retreat, Beyond Cana®, offered by a team of couples from St. Francis of Assisi Parish.

For the first time since Beyond Cana began at St. Francis of Assisi Parish, the retreat will be offered for the benefit of any couple who would like to attend. The retreat will be held Feb. 15-17, 2008 at the Holiday Inn Express

and the Benedictine Monastery in Boerne. The retreat begins Friday morning at 10 a.m. and ends Sunday after a mid-day Mass.

The birth of this extraordinary retreat experience came about seven years ago when Sister Frances Briseno, OSB, pastoral associate, and Msgr. Jim Henke, pastor, were seeking a way to enrich marriages at the north San Antonio parish. But long before, Ken Koch had convinced his bride, Pixie, just six months after their marriage, that they could benefit by using a planning format that he had used at his firm. It served them well for over 10 years. The couple had an opportunity to explain their process to Sister Frances. With Sister Frances' guidance and direction, four couples met for a year of discernment to develop a marriage enrichment program at

the parish. The group agreed to try the Kochs' format with Sister Frances adding needed spirituality to the retreat.

A decision was reached to hold a retreat in January 2002 with the four initial couples, the Kochs, Tom and Linda Engelbrecht, Ann and Jesse DeLee, and Bill and Angela Stinner-Trimble and to ask three more couples to join them: Margaret and George Harvey, Mike and Cathy Portele and Karen and Tim Conrow.

After that initial retreat's evaluation, it was decided to issue an open invitation to the entire parish for the next retreat in April 2002. Based on feedback from the first retreat, two talks, "The Biblical Concept of Marriage" and "Marriage as a Sacrament" were added. Dee and Tony Patino attended that retreat and are now part of the Beyond Cana team. Dee remembers, "This retreat brought us to a new level of understanding and intimacy in our relationship. Each time we repeated the process using the tools that we learned on the retreat, it became easier to discuss the contentious issues and to deepen our relationship." That ability to 'repeat what is learned' is important to Ken. He pointed out, "What Beyond Cana does is help couples develop a lifelong skill that can and should be used time and time again to work through the issues that develop in each and every marriage. By putting Christ at the center of the marriage and realizing it is a covenant, not a contract, the weekend helps couples identify those issues, disarm the emotion that often accompanies them and formulate a plan to work through them."

After 46 years of happy marriage, Deacon Tom and Agnes Franklin made their first Beyond Cana weekend. The Franklins shared, "Younger couples ask us how we have managed to 'make it' this long and still be in love with one another. We tell them we work on it everyday. Beyond Cana provides a powerful step along the journey to reinforce the commitment of our marriage covenant."

Tom and Linda Engelbrecht noted that being a part of Beyond Cana has had a two-fold outcome for them. Linda said, "Serving on the team has given us a ministry that we can both participate in and help provide a much needed ministry for so many couples who have made the retreat." Tom added, "Making a Beyond Cana retreat has deepened



Photos provided

Above: Couples on retreat in January 2003. Inset: Beyond Cana logo designed by G.E. Mullan. Below: Msgr. Jim Henke and a retreat couple. Registration is now open for the first archdiocesan Beyond Cana retreat to be held Feb. 15-17, 2008.

our relationship. The experience has strengthened us as a loving couple and as caring, committed parents."

The group is very pleased with the name of the retreat, Beyond Cana®. They are also proud of the logo specially designed by artist G.E. Mullan. They feel the name and logo recall the first miracle performed by Christ at the Cana wedding feast. Beyond Cana provides the tools to help couples along their journey. And then it looks beyond that time when the wedding feast is over, and the couple must begin a relationship that will last their lifetime together.

The team supports the lifelong skill concept of Beyond Cana in various ways, the most recent of which has been the development of a follow-up retreat called "Cana Revisited." This weekend allows the couple to have a second Beyond Cana experience and encourages them to

use the process on their own.

This retreat has been held once a year for two years and will be held again in April 2008. The team also produced a "Retreat in a Basket" that includes a workbook, CDs and spiritual materials to allow the couple to conduct an annual retreat on their own.

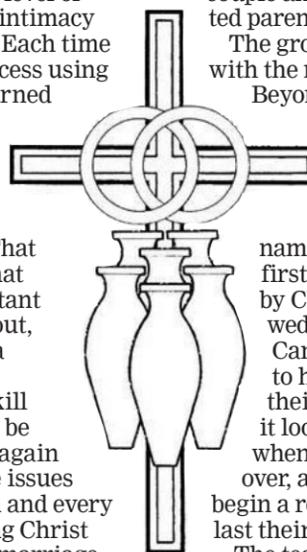
The team has begun outreach efforts. Several years ago, the Patinos encouraged one of their daughters and her husband to attend a Beyond Cana retreat. Subsequently, Rita and Gino Rossini asked the team to come to Dallas and help them begin the program at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. They are now holding three retreats per year.

Just as one good thing leads to another, the team now has approached Jake Samour, director of Family and Marriage Life for the Archdiocese of San Antonio, about offering the retreats to the entire archdiocese. Two have now been scheduled for Feb. 15-17 and Aug. 8-10, 2008.

For more information about the retreat or registration, contact the Kochs at (210) 493-2996, e-mail kenpixie@satx.rr.com or see the Web site at www.beyondcana.org.

Beyond Cana has been offered at St. Francis of Assisi Parish two to three times per year since 2002, and 200 couples have attended. Wisdom has taught the team to keep the attendance to 14-16 couples.

Wrap up a Christmas present (and get a bonus for the week of Valentine's Day as well) that truly will be priceless for someone you love.



weddingfair
San Antonio's Largest Bridal Show

Sunday, Jan. 6
12:00-5:00
Henry B Gonzalez Convention Center

200 Displays!
FASHION SHOWS
HONEYMOON
PRIZES And more...

Sponsored By: sanantonioweddings.com

All Brides will receive a copy of San Antonio's finest bridal magazine!

for more show information and to save \$3 on admission
WeddingFairShow.com