

Blessed Marriage Project Couples Retreat in CT

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In May, 2014, the Blessed Marriage Project hosted their first Energize! Couples Retreat in beautiful Lakeville, Connecticut at the stylish Interlaken Inn. Twenty-five married couples of all ages and stages of marital life attended. One of the couples just recently received the Holy Marriage Blessing this year. Based on the overwhelmingly positive responses from the participants, the retreat was a great success.

The Blessed Marriage Project (BMP) is an independently funded, grassroots initiative by and for Unificationist couples. It seeks to provide marriage enrichment to enhance relationship satisfaction, resiliency and vitality among Unificationist spouses at any stage of marriage. The primary offering of the BMP is its Energize! Couples Retreats, which are meant to allow spouses to experience God's love through a well-deserved mini vacation, learn useful information and tools, bond with and enjoy each other as couples, and to connect with other couples. The purpose of the BMP includes training young Unificationists as retreat staff to learn to carry out such programming on their own in the future. In addition, to extend the benefit of the weekend retreats, the project provides for training volunteers to facilitate small groups and seminars among past participants and other married couples in their local church communities.



The BMP donor couple generously gave \$100,000 to launch the project. The retreats are organized and led by professional marriage educators John R. Williams, MFT, and Josie Hauer, EdD, and three young couples—Mari and Richard Curry, Crescentia and Leighton DeGoede, and Christof and Lena Yasutake. Kenny Wolfenberger has helped launch the Project, and Kate Cochran now serves as community liaison.



During the retreat, participants received fun, informative and interactive presentations on the basics of a strong marriage, handling disagreements, talking effectively, friendship and fun, and lovemaking. All presentations included numerous exercises that gave spouses a chance to discuss what they were learning with each other, and to practice using the new skills and techniques. In addition, there were optional sessions on enhancing sexual intimacy, harmonizing faith styles, working on hidden issues, the power to change the marriage and love strategies.



Couples lingered and talked over gourmet meals, chatted with old friends and made new ones. Each morning offered opportunities for Hoon Dok Hwe (scripture reading) and yoga. On Saturday afternoon the couples had several hours to relax and enjoy each other's company while taking advantage of the amenities of the resort—upscale guestrooms, a scenic lakeside path, a game room, volleyball and basketball courts and more. In the evening couples got dressed up and danced the night away, played games and posed for silly photos.

At the close of the weekend, the attendees expressed gratitude and testified to the vitalizing effect of the experience for their couples. Here's what some of the participants had to say in response to the question, "What did you enjoy most about the retreat?"

"The atmosphere of support and of working together on issues that others experience too makes it possible and safe to go places that are otherwise dangerous or difficult. [This] common experience will allow us to face issues more confidently in the weeks and months ahead."

"It was a relaxing environment with lots of young couples and old friends. I spent quality time with my wife, and all the lectures and break-outs were significant to me."

"I was able to dig more deeply into issues with my wife about different viewpoints and attitudes regarding sexuality. The presentation on 'Hot Monogamy' was great. There is often so much reluctance and embarrassment to talk about these things, and I hope that retreats like this will prompt more people to be more open—as True Father was."



“The presentations are excellent and staff are organized. I enjoyed seeing Unificationist-born blessed couples involved in improving their marriages.”

“I enjoyed the opportunity to spend relaxed, quality ‘sexy time’ with my wife, to be with younger couples (peers of my children) at this retreat and to reconnect with brothers and sisters and make new friends. I have missed this in recent years.”

“The retreat was so AMAZING! There were too many high points to list. It was one of the best organized, detail-oriented, and fun events that I have been to in a long time.”



Fourteen couples indicated interest in becoming Energize! Marriage Enrichment Local Leaders. They received some initial guidance and training for their new role, and will continue to receive training in the months to come. In addition, participants offered over \$1,400 in donations to help extend the endowment and permit more couples to benefit from a similar experience.

The Blessed Marriage Project seeks to offer two more Energize! Couples Retreats this year, to serve as many as 100 couples, and to continue throughout 2015. This is dependent upon what hosting communities contribute in terms of funding and local staff, and how their open dates coincide with the availability of BMP staff. Several church communities have expressed interest in hosting a retreat, including Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Dallas, and Miami. For more information on the Blessed Marriage Project check out their Facebook group.