

Blessed Marriage Project's Energize! Couples Retreat in New Hampshire

Crescentia DeGoede
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New England's autumnal splendor was the setting of the seventh Energize! Couples Retreat, organized by the Blessed Marriage Project, where 34 couples hailing from as far as Virginia and Montreal joined together in historic Portsmouth, New Hampshire, from October 28 to 30, 2016. Couples together for over 40 years mingled with those newly blessed as they engaged in activities to refresh their connection and spend quality time, while bonding more deeply as a faith community.

The [Blessed Marriage Project](#) (BMP) is an independently funded, grassroots initiative that seeks to provide marriage enrichment to enhance relationship satisfaction, resiliency and vitality among Unificationist spouses at any stage of marriage through its [Energize! Couples Retreats](#). To extend the benefit of the weekend retreats, the BMP provides training for volunteers to facilitate Small Groups among past participants and other married couples in their local church communities.



The retreats are organized and led by professional marriage educators John R. Williams, LMHC, and Josie Hauer, EdD, and three young couples -- Mari and Richard Curry, Crescentia and Leighton DeGoede, Christoph and Lena Yasutake.



For each retreat the BMP staff partners with local community leaders to coordinate the logistics and get the word out. Kate Pugnoli serves as the BMP's community liaison. For this retreat in New Hampshire, BMP partnered with a young Unificationist couple Spase and Catherine Kace, Pastor Jim Edgerly in Boston and Pastor Heather Thalheimer in Manchester, NH.



During the retreat, participants received fun, informative and interactive presentations on “Marriage over a Lifetime,” “Key to a Healthy Marriage,” “Talking Safely,” “Dealing with Differences,” and “Sex, Health and Happiness.” All presentations included 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 several breakout sessions couples could choose from on: “Breathing Together,” “Talking about Difficult Topics,” “Improving Your Marriage by Yourself,” “Romance in Daily Life,” and “The Art of Kissing.”



Couples were also able to connect with other couples over meals, and chat with old friends and make new ones throughout the retreat. Each morning offered opportunities for Hoon Dok Hae and yoga. On Saturday afternoon the couples had several hours to relax and enjoy each other's company while taking advantage of the seaside charm of Portsmouth. In the evening couples got dressed up for a date night, and enjoyed fine dining and entertainment of their choice.



Reflections by Retreat participants:

“I really enjoyed meeting brothers and sisters that are going through the same struggles as we are, and learning from other couples that were able to overcome struggles my spouse and I are currently facing.”

“What I enjoyed most about this retreat is being able to just have time to focus on my wife and our relationship.”



“The retreat staff were so real and vulnerable that they made the content presented easy to apply to my couple. The encouragement for date nights and recreation was fantastic.”

“I loved the Sex, Health & Happiness talks and the related breakout sessions. It helped me think about our physical relationship differently, as well as, let me think about how I can be more romantic with my husband.”



“Even though I have been married for many years, I was able to learn something new about my spouse, and am excited to put into practice some of the techniques I learned.”

“I really appreciated that this retreat helped us identify areas and topics that we may not have realized we should talk more about. Specifically feeling listened to and appreciated. [This] provided us with tools and skills on how to effectively tackle topics together.”



The BMP initiative was conceived in 2013, and formally launched the following year, with the [donor couple](#), David and Mitsue Wolfenberger, generously giving \$100,000 to cover annual expenses. In 2015, the donors also began funding PureMind.Online and related initiatives as a service to Blessed families. Although the Wolfenbergers and the BMP staff would like to continue offering Energize! Couples Retreats for years to come, considerable additional funding is needed in order to keep these retreats affordable in 2017. Therefore, your monthly donation, large or small, can help make it possible for couples to participate in Energize! Couples Retreats in the future. To learn more about the Blessed Marriage Project or give a donation visit www.blessedmarriageproject.org. If you're interested in having a retreat in your community you can also contact the BMP staff via the website.

