



## Retrouvaille

Twenty years ago a man called to tell me his marriage had fallen into ruin. His wife had grown unreachable distant and wandered into adultery. There seemed to be no way the two of them could recover lost ground and go on together. But he clung to one last straw of hope: she agreed to go with him to a weekend program for couples who had lost their way. It was called *Retrouvaille*—French for “re-discovery.”

I never learned exactly what happened, but they came home transformed. Somehow *Retrouvaille* showed them how to start over as husband and wife, and these many years later they’re together still.

I understood why when I made a *Retrouvaille* weekend as an observer myself. Before my eyes, couples bowed down by years of indifference, contempt, rejection, and betrayal reached deep within the ruins of their relationship and found the courage to stand up together and come to grips with their brokenness. They gave each other strength they didn’t dream they had to re-discover each other and make their marriage whole again and new.

Briefly, this is how it works. With the accompaniment of a priest (a continual reminder of the Christian foundation of all that takes place), three married couples “host” the *Retrouvaille* weekend. Each couple tells the story of the disappointment, pain, anger, and conflict that brought their marriage to the brink. Then they recount their long struggle against all odds to reconcile and heal. Never have I heard such

convincing testimony that “With God all things are possible.” I could feel the thought dawn on couples listening with me that their problems were not unique, that they were not alone, that maybe, just maybe, they too could find a way back to the beginning. As one participant put it, “I had to hear someone else survived what we are experiencing.”

They had plenty of time during the weekend to search for the root cause of their marital troubles. After each presentation everyone went back to their rooms to reflect on what had been said and set down what they came up with in a letter to be written in no more than ten minutes. After exchanging the letters and reading them carefully, the couple then spent ten minutes in dialogue about what they had written. At no time were they asked to reveal to others the problems that had brought them to *Retrouvaille*.

My experience has given me great confidence in recommending *Retrouvaille* to couples whose marriage is tearing them apart. If you’re on the verge of separation or divorce, I urge you to look into upcoming *Retrouvaille* weekends publicized in your parish bulletin or in the *Chronicle*. It may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the two of you to re-discover the love that first drew you together and learn to live it anew.