

## Changing of the Guard in Rome

Reflections on the transmission of World Leadership for WWME and on the growing relationship of our beloved movement with the Vatican

With our love,  
Tony & Cathy & Fr. Emile

The first part of the World leadership transmission took place in the United States before we left. Arriving with stacks of files for the three of us, David & Bronny Lea were thankful to empty one of their suitcases before the trip to Rome. Fr. John Rate had mailed several boxes from Australia a month earlier. During our gathering, David & Bronny & Fr. John shared their personal reflections on leadership and they invited us to examine where we saw ourselves at this stage of the journey--what gifts we bring; what we see as our goals. Because we all had to get to the airport, we were only able to begin the discussion, but it was wonderful to share this thoughtful time together before our long journey.

Once we all arrived in Rome, the process continued at the Mill Hill House where we were fortunate to be lodged. The building sits on high ground near Trastevere and it is surrounded by gardens kept by one of the Mill Hill priests that live there. This 1920's mansion has four stories, each with high ceilings and six to ten rooms. There is a splendid marble staircase in one corner and even an old fashioned lift that helped get the suitcases up and down. We couples had rooms with twin beds and bathrooms down the hall, but it was wonderful to share this holy place with the six priests that lived there and of course, the two that we brought with us! Some of the priests are Mill Hill Missionaries, some are students from Sudan, India, Cameroon, and Wales--which made for lively conversations that brought another sort of world atmosphere to the meals we shared. Mass was offered daily in the chapel at 7:00, but with jet lag, we had our own private Mass a bit later most days. Fr. Olli Scallan, the man in charge, was a former classmate of Fr. Emile. They had only seen each other once since ordination in 1970. He was a marvelous host, providing a wonderful background for the transmission that was going on among the six of us.

Even though we had little sleep on our flights, and even though David & Bronny were recovering from an illness, we met on Tuesday afternoon. The six of us continued our deep and thorough look at ourselves, our mission, our letting go and taking on. Many feelings were expressed. It was sad to have to say farewell to David, Bronny and John, and sad to realize what they themselves were probably going through having to part ways for a while after being such a strong and loving team for 5 years. But there was excitement also on the other side of the coin with us three beginning another part of our journey, learning to serve at another level and experiencing the universality of Church and Movement in a very real way.

On Wednesday, the morning of our scheduled meeting with Cardinal Rylko, we were all dressed and ready to go early. After Mass and breakfast, Fr. Valentino and Felice & Paola Ranieri, the new Italian leadership couple, arrived with cars to transport us to the Vatican. Fr. John Marconcini from Rome was also with us. We were pleased to see Carlo among the drivers. He had picked us up at Fiumicino airport when we arrived there in January of 2008. There were three cars in all...and we were thankful for the ease with which they maneuvered in the Rome traffic. We arrived inside the Vatican gates with only one vehicle taking a wrong turn. Once our party, eleven of us in all, had gathered in the courtyard, we made our way up to the office of Council for the Laity.

When we heard that we would be meeting with Msgr. Delgado and not with Cardinal Rylko as planned, a wave of disappointment washed over our enthusiasm. Msgr. Miguel Delgado was known to many of us as he said that early morning Mass at the Vatican for us in 2008. He was so serious and sad looking during that service so we weren't feeling optimistic. David & Bronny admitted that they were a little angry at first that they had not been informed about the absence of the Cardinal in advance. Cardinal Rylko had been called away to the Pope's Wednesday audience because of the celebration for World Youth. We had no time to commiserate, as we were quickly ushered into the meeting room. Msgr. Delgado joined us and it became apparent that he was most positive and encouraging.



We began with introductions and Fr. John commented later that "the witness to what the movement has done for each of us personally was listened to and appreciated by Msgr. Delgado." He spoke about the relevance of the movement and its message in today's world in a way that was in line with the Church's own outreach. He particularly warmed to the evangelizing potential of the Weekend, of how the Weekend could bring couples into a deeper appreciation of their faith. Msgr. Delgado spoke about the domestic church as we do in the Sacrament talk.

The absence of the Cardinal turned out to be "much more beneficial for WWME" as David & Bronny put it. "Monsignor Delgado seems to be the one who does the work in the Office of the Laity, therefore having him on our side will be extremely important if we go any further with our official recognition. We think that at last, the Vatican has recognized us as a credible and important movement in our Church. In other words, we have come of age with the hierarchy." Fr. John added, "The Monsignor grasped the significance of our Movement – its large international dimension, its vitality in the numbers of couples, priests and religious experiencing the weekend each year." The 40 years of life-experience also gave us great credibility. Msgr. Delgado seemed anxious to formalize our relationship with the Council for the Laity – but he made it most clear that this initiative was up to us, both in how we went about it, when, and even whether. Msgr. Delgado's statement encouraging WWME to seek official recognition with the Vatican came as a breath of fresh air to all of us. We were suddenly aware that the topic we had been asked to avoid was now out in the open for us to pursue and the excitement was hard to contain. We looked at one another with joy as we realized that this was turning out to be a more fruitful meeting than expected.

Msgr. Delgado was very positive, insightful and affirming. He received our report attentively. We were all particularly impressed with his insistence that the Vatican was there to protect the movements and not to control them. The fears of Vatican meddling were pushed aside as he told us that official recognition would be helpful to us as we seek to reach out to new dioceses. Fr. John commented later that this fear is very real to our European brothers and sisters, particularly in the areas where the institutional church is not doing a good job with public relations. David & Bronny further reflected that this invitation signals that the Vatican believes we are worth protecting, we are important and we have made a difference in our world. We were also impressed with Msgr. Delgado's understanding that the movement offers a spirituality for priests, and that he seemed to acknowledge that the couple & priest working together is a good thing.

As we left the office of the Council for the Laity, Fr. Valentino took the opportunity to check with the Office for the Council for the Family to see if Cardinal Antonelli was available.

We had requested a meeting with him also, but we had been unable to get an appointment. By chance, the Cardinal was in and agreed to a brief meeting. That meeting was a real bonus. Fr. Emile remarked later at what a happy man Cardinal Antonelli is. He gave us the opportunity for a photo which we all appreciated, but we were even more grateful to see that there are joyful workers in the Vatican. That is a gift! David & Bronny also described this chance meeting as a treat. "His presence was



again a sort of official stamp that we are recognized and important. We will have fond memories of his smile and warmth, so special for us after our encounter with his predecessor!" We were able to deliver our report personally into his hands.



Following the meetings at the Vatican, Fr. Valentino took us to dinner at a nearby seminary where we met other members of the community and other priests as well. After the dinner, we spent time at the Franciscan Generalate discussing the meeting and its implications. Having Valentino and the Italian community working closely with us is encouraging. The way was paved by their efforts. We were blessed to share an evening with the community in one of the homes that same evening. It made for a very long

day, but it was a testament to what our movement is all about. We are family, and when we are together there are no language barriers....we always find ways to communicate and work together.

On Thursday, we had arranged to meet with Cardinal Foley because of his connection with Philadelphia. The three of us went alone this time, and imagine our surprise when we were met at the door by a former acquaintance, Msgr. Hans Brouwers. He had been the Family Life Director in our diocese and was heavily involved with Retrouvaille and Engaged Encounter. Not only that, Msgr. Brouwers is of Dutch descent just as Fr. Emile is, so we had an instant rapport with our host. Both he and Cardinal Foley gave of their time – no rush, even though our business in Rome had little to do with the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher, which is the office they run. Msgr. Brouwers offered to help in any way possible with what we are considering regarding Vatican recognition of WWME. Fr. Emile commented later that “The personal sharing from these two men was an eye opener for me. I felt ENCOURAGED by this meeting. It’s hearing an offer of help when there is so much still to be done.”

After the meeting with Cardinal Foley and Msgr. Hans Brouwers, we hurried back to the Mill Hill House for our final meeting with David & Bronny and Fr. John. Again, this was quality time in reflecting on our missionary journey to date and what we could look forward to in the future. We had lunch together with the resident community and then it was time to say ‘au revoir.’ Their bags were loaded into the car and off they went to the airport, to the next stages of their missionary adventures. Our time together truly was a blessed time.

Yes, we are set for a long and fruitful journey as we look at the relationship between the Vatican and WWME. It may take several years, but that is okay because we have much help along the way. We plan to stay in close communication with our European family in this effort as they have been most helpful so far. We will have much to talk about with all the secretariats, finding ways to best go about this process. We know we have many wise and gifted couples and priests ready to advise us so that the outcome will truly be a family affair.

Our ‘free days’ in Rome at the end of this time were a bonus. This time together was very good for relationship building as we had the opportunity for serious dialogue and serious fun. We know we will be back in Rome next year. We know we will have a home at the Mill Hill House. We know that we have a long way to go but we have so many wonderful missionaries around the world supporting us. We are blessed. All the more as we journey on, the words of Paul ring loud in our ears: “we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.” Yes we can.