

**Project of Deacon Jaime A. M. da Fonseca & his spouse Ligia Maria Moniz da Fonseca
in the Archdiocese of Bombay, India.**

Deacon Jaime A. M. da Fonseca was ordained Deacon by His Eminence Oswald Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Bombay, India, on 04-Apr-2009. For many years even prior to his ordination, Jaime & his spouse Ligia, had been working together in various initiatives of the Archdiocese of Bombay e.g. Catechetics, Family Life Enrichment, Small Christian Communities, etc. After the ordination in 2009, Ligia has been accompanying Deacon Jaime and getting involved in the catechetical and family life enrichment initiatives in the Parish, where he fulfils his diaconal duties.

Besides involving in the Health Promotion Trust Project of the Archdiocese of Bombay, Deacon Jaime & Ligia being members of the Archdiocesan Family Commission in Mumbai as well as of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Rome, started in 2010 conducting retreats for married couples – the retreats consisting of very innovative, out of the box processes, whereby the married couples discovered their own **“Body Wisdom”**. By way of playful methods of destressing, the couples pay attention to what is welling up within themselves thereby discovering some profound truths about themselves and in the process they invariably open up fully to connect with the spouse at a deeper level. This is coupled with inputs on the **“THEOLOGY OF THE BODY”** the teachings of St. John Paul II on human sexuality, married life and family life. We also screen a movie of a couple whose marriage is falling apart – and how the marriage is finally saved with one of the partners immersing himself/herself in prayer, doing everything to reconcile and waiting in the Lord to bring about the necessary complete reconciliation. This is followed up with a discussion/reflection on the highlights of the movie/story. This retreat is organized and conducted solely by Deacon Jaime & Ligia. However, there is a priest that comes in each day for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to celebrate the Eucharist.

Since 2010, the retreats are being conducted over a weekend (Friday evening to Sunday evening) biannually. We announce the Retreat in The Examiner, the Archdiocesan Weekly and also through posters that we send out to some of the major parishes in the Archdiocese. The Retreat is titled **“HEART 2 HEART”** Retreat for Married Couples and is presently conducted at Vinayalaya Retreat House in Andheri, Mumbai, which is run by the Jesuits. A poster of the latest retreat scheduled for 14-16 Jul-17 is attached. We have had anywhere between 5 couples to 15 couples registering for each Retreat. We restrict the number to max 12 couples, as we wish to give each couple individual attention in case they wish to talk to us and receive some counselling.

This is a project solely of Deacon Jaime & Ligia da Fonseca. There is no institutional backing for this project. We consider it our ministry to build up couple life and help married couples to discover the rich presence of Christ in their relationship and in their family, as well to help them cherish the jewels of teachings of the Catholic Church for their married life. We have had couples at our retreat from all age groups. Some 1 year married and others even more than 50 years married and many in between. We have had couples of other faith traditions too, and they have testified to valuing the teachings of the Catholic Church on Marriage.

Many times we have not been able to cover the financial cost of the retreat, as the number of participant couples is low. In that case, we ourselves bear the shortfall, since we have chosen this as our ministry. Sometimes, there are couples who do not pay the full amount as they cannot afford the charges, or they pay nothing at all. We cover the shortfall each time and we depend on Divine Providence to make good at a later date.

The testimonies of the couples speak volumes for the retreat. Those who take the time out and come for the retreat go back greatly enriched. Their common refrain is that the retreat is something they have never experienced before and the most amazing part they find is that without a single word of counselling from us they have found a solution to the problems in their marriage and go back rejuvenated. We have had couples who were separated and came to the Heart 2 Heart Retreat

and going through the processes we take them in the retreat, they have been able to make a breakthrough in their difficult relationship. Some video testimonies of two Catholic couples and one Hindu couple is attached to this report.

For couples who wish to register for the retreat, a detailed email is sent out pointing out the content of the retreat (which is different from the normal retreats they might have attended), and the cost of the retreat. Then the couple has to meet with Deacon Jaime & Ligia for a brief interview when they are explained about the retreat and the frame of mind and heart they should have in order to participate in the retreat. This also helps the couple to discuss their difficulties (if any) with regard to the retreat charges. They should have no regrets later on about the type of retreat they registered and paid for. This process makes the couple very relaxed and excited about the retreat right from the start of the retreat and helps them to participate fully in the various sessions/rituals. Our focus is not the money but to help the couple get into a deeper relationship with the Lord and with each other. So we suggest to such couples to pay what they can, or not pay at all. Money, or rather the lack of it, should not be a deterrent for them to come for the retreat.

We are now in the 7th year since we began. We praise our Lord Jesus Christ for having given us the grace to get into this ministry and persist in carrying on despite the odds.

- **Deacon Jaime & Ligia da Fonseca**

Encl: Heart 2 Heart Retreat Poster
3 video testimonies