

What is a Christian Experience Weekend (CEW)?

Since the Fall of 2003, St. Ann's and HMC have hosted CEW weekends for around 450 men and women. CEW stands for Christian Experience Weekend. My husband Jim and I (Shaun Kleitsch) attended when we lived in Dubuque. Little by little, people from our parishes began attending down there and then in 2003, our former church sent people up here to get us started.

A CEW weekend begins on Friday night and ends Sunday afternoon. The event takes place mainly in St. Ann's lower level. During that time, we listen to many topics of growing in faith. For example, there is a talk on grace and one on Christian ideals. These are given either by laypeople or by the spiritual directors. People who have participated in CEW in years past give these talks and share how their experiences have helped them to grow closer to Jesus and their Catholic faith. After each talk, there is brief discussion. You can talk if you want, or you can just listen.

During the weekend, we also participate in chapel/prayer time, Reconciliation and Mass. We also eat, socialize and have some fun. The food is fantastic and it really is a great way to get to know others.

So, you may still have questions like the following:

Why do people keep inviting me to go?

People invite you to go because it was a great experience for them. Their lives were enriched and their faith has grown. They felt a particular closeness to Christ on that weekend and they want that for you, too! No one means to bother you with their invitations. The problem is that people are often not sure if you have been asked about it before.

Do all people have awesome CEW experiences?

Everyone is different. There are many who describe the weekend as a pivotal turning point in their life. Some come away from CEW with a new closeness to Jesus that they have never experienced before. Others are able to let go of past hurts. Some people feel a peace that they have never had before. There are also people who just have an "ok" time. It is a different experience for everyone. For myself, my first CEW helped me to grow a much closer relationship with God. Each time I have attended since has been a "booster shot" of sorts to my faith. It also has allowed Jim and I to know people better in the parish. That is one of the greatest benefits of the attending!

Why do we have to stay overnight?

It is a retreat in the sense that it is important to get away from all your normal responsibilities. If we let people come and go, the whole feel of the weekend would be disrupted. We really do try to make it as cozy as we can and will go to great lengths to make sure you are comfortable.

Why are some things kept secret?

The only reason for this is so that you are able to have nice little surprises that make your weekend more special and fun.

How much does it cost?

It is only \$50 for the entire weekend if you are able to pay. Please don't let the cost prevent you from coming.

Why would I want to spend a weekend away at church when my life is too busy as it is?

This is something we have all asked ourselves and this is the one thing that is kind of a leap of faith. We all are busy, but most everyone who attends can tell you that at the end of the weekend, you will be tired but you will also be renewed. You will have peace in God's love for you and an awareness of His presence in your daily busy-ness.

Jim and I have attended during the thick of our child raising and yes, we did miss basketball games and other things that the kids participated in. But, even if you asked our children, they would tell you it was a small price to pay. Our family is so much stronger with Christ at the center of it! It was the best investment we ever made!

Still have questions?

Feel free to contact Jim, myself, or the leaders of this year's weekends. Their names and numbers are on the registration form.