**SPEECH**

**FOR**

**REGINA CLEMENTE**

Hello everyone!!! Well... I have a feeling that last year at this time, **NONE** of us would have or could have predicted that we would find ourselves connecting and celebrating like **THIS**!!! But here we are... and **THERE** you are, and we all still have so much for which to be grateful. We have many reasons to celebrate. Every year is filled with challenges and triumphs and 2020 has been no different. We’ve learned so much these past twelve months and I believe we have all searched and discovered greater capacity for so many things... not least among them patience, understanding, resilience.... **storage**... yes.... how many of us, when faced with the previously unimaginable shortages in “essential” supplies... cleaning products, disinfectants and so on.... really found new and interesting ways to “stock up and store...” (**Wait for the laugh**). You know what I realized from all of that? Learning to deal with those “shortages and solutions” became a metaphor for how we live, how we cope, and how we all have a miraculous, expanding capacity to cherish and care for our lives and our loved ones. An increased ability for appreciation... that is truly cause for celebration.

(**Name your husband**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I, as president couple of Marriage Encounter Southern California, have spent the past year in a condition of ever-evolving discovery, observation, renewal, and recommitment to each other, our faith, and our belief in the work of this organization and those of you gathered, possibly from far and wide, with us tonight. 2020 has given us the opportunity to really experience that “God is everywhere.” While our capacity to physically gather may be restricted, our willingness and commitment to live “godly lives” has not.... in fact, it’s more important than ever to honor and celebrate our relationships and **THAT** relationship. We thought we needed the strength of our faith before??? Those times of challenge prior to this year have proven to be our warm up!!! Thank goodness we have each other and the courage we have developed and nurtured to explore the sheer divineness of the humanity and humility we all share!!

This Zoom celebration is probably one of the most important “gatherings” any one of us might attend. While some might feel awkward and not sure.... of how to join the conversation... literally... just tap the microphone icon on the lower left... (**Wait for the laugh**) Please know that we **ALL** share in those moments... we **ARE** you... and as a connected, compassionate, CO-supportive group, we will continue to learn about **ALL** of these details and find the ways to celebrate **TOGETHER**.

Holiday is a time of gathering, gifting, and expressing gratitude.... ehhhh two out of three... **NOT BAD**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). In all seriousness, let’s take a moment to acknowledge our deepest appreciation for those around us, in our lives... those who support us and cheer us on... those who comfort us when the road ahead seems impossible to navigate and conquer... and to those who just are, simply lights in our lives... who provide a moment of solace or a much needed smile. I could go on and on ... and on, demonstrating just how blessed we are, but I will shorten my laundry list of thanks. Soon enough, you’ll get the picture and you will find within you, the elements and objects of your own gratitude. To all of the general members of our wonderful organization, and thank you for expressing your trust and faith... or at the very least, your curiosity in the mission and message of this organization. We have always believed that it is God’s work to bring people together, no matter how, and support them, and us, in seeing the beauty and power in strengthening one’s faith and belief in the most important relationship we have... our marriages.

To the executive officers, (**Do you want to name them?**), thank you for your guidance and the structural support you provide in encouraging, coordinating, and administering the matrix that allows us to experience the revelations possible within our marriages and our relationship to the church. To (**Name the incoming couple**), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I want to congratulate you both on your newest accomplishment, that of attaining the role of head couple. You will soon see, as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I have experienced, that, as head couple, the rewards are great. The hard work pays off and allows us to achieve new depths of understanding, compassion, and respect for our partners and those in our lives.

While our term may have technically been cut short due to “unforeseen circumstances...” **REALLY** unforeseen... (**Wait for the laugh**) our joint experience as head couple has brought us closer and allowed us to treasure the essentials in our life together. Of course we are referring to each other and our family, but in large part, each one of **YOU** is also our extended family. We want to welcome new members and encourage you, along with our “veterans,” to continue to participate in this wonderful organization.... after all, without you, there is very little... it is your energy, curiosity, and willingness to always go deeper in discovery and acknowledgement, that keeps this organization as vital as it is. There is no limit to the meaning and depth of what is possible when we choose God, and our spouses, to achieve greater understanding and deeper love for ourselves, each other, and our collective faith.

Psalm 143:8 teaches us, “Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.”

We wish all of you a happy, healthy, peaceful, and safe holiday, and may next year see is reunited in body, mind, spirit, and faith. Thank you all!!