

Starting Up in Louisiana...

A New Team's Success Story

Four years ago, the founding member of a new team in Alexandria, Louisiana, attended the International Convention in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Anna Sweat had raised the seed money needed to begin the new team and attended the Convention as its only member. She brought a banner, though—her new team tee shirt displayed on a hanger!

Two years later, she brought four more to the Convention in Phoenix, and at the 2010 Convention, the team was recognized as the newest certified member of the *Beginning Experience* family.

Anna was moved to start the team in memory of her late husband. "I wanted to 'pay forward' what I received from my weekend in Lafayette, Louisiana—so others wouldn't have



Four years ago, Anna Sweat was the only member of the newly emerging Alexandria team. She is shown here with Sister Josephine.



The Alexandria team now, shown at this year's Christmas gathering. From left: Chris, Gary, David, Donna, Katherine, Marla, Kendal, Anna, Michelle, Deidrah, Rose and Cindy.

to go through the grief process for as long as I did because I had never heard of Beginning Experience. I felt God was calling me to get the word out and to serve the northern part of the state."

Anna's biggest challenge was finding the money to fund the first weekend and to seed the team financially. What a feeling of success when that first fund raising effort resulted in over \$5,000.00 to start the *Beginning Experience* team in Alexandria.

Anna and the initial team members developed a strong bond with the International Ministry throughout the startup process. "All my questions were answered in a very loving way," Anna remembers. "Our neighboring teams, especially Lafayette and Lake Charles, provided both presenters and facilitators when we started. International Board members from all over the U.S. critiqued all the talks for the first weekend through e-mail and over the telephone. Carolyn Anderson, the International Board member assigned to our new team, was present on the weekend and a great support to all of us."

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From the Director's Desk

As our world changes rapidly around us, *Beginning Experience* teams and the ministry itself are changing too. I invite you, as friends and supporters of our work with hurting people, to peruse this newsletter for the latest developments.

Not long ago, we would have communicated with you only in printed form, sending you a newsletter through what we now refer to as "snail mail." As costs have risen and internet communication has become more and more widespread, our newsletters have moved to an electronic format wherever possible.

For many, though, primary e-mail is received at work. Since many work environments discourage the receipt of outside attachments, we've been using an "in the e-mail message" type of newsletter.

A graphic format, though, is more inviting to read so we decided to try this approach—including the first page of a downloadable newsletter in an e-mail message that with links to the remaining pages that you can print from your desktop.

Now we want to hear from you—how do you like this format, and does it work for you? A reply to newsletter@beginningexperience.org would be very much appreciated!

Kathleen Murphy
Executive Director

International Board Looks to the Future—

Strategic Plan focuses Board Work

With the pro bono help of two organizational development consultants from the Archdiocese of Chicago who contributed countless hours to assist our ministry, the International Board of Directors developed a new Strategic Plan to guide and direct their work.

The plan names an over riding goal: to ensure that the Beginning Experience International Ministry, with its unique spirituality of dying and rising, remains vital and viable.

The plan then identifies three long term strategies to meet that goal:

- 1) Enhance team development and ministry programs;
- 2) Increase visibility to internal and external audiences; and
- 3) Develop and maintain a financial strategy to meet the needs of Beginning Experience International Ministry, Inc.

It then develops each strategy with the action steps to be taken; the time line involved; the resources needed and the responsible point persons.

"In these times of limited resources, such a plan is vital," says Executive Director Kathleen Murphy. "We need to see not only what



Members of the International Board developing long term plans for the future of the Beginning Experience ministry.

needs to be done, but what actions need to take the highest priority to move the ministry forward. We need to ask ourselves not only 'Are we doing things well?' but also 'Are we doing the **right** things well?' This plan provides a framework for asking those questions 'and finding the answers.'

The International Board is divided into committees charged with responsibility for fulfilling various strategies. The Program and Team Development Committee is tasked with the responsibility for the first strategy, while the Marketing and Resource Development Committee is tasked with strategies two and three.

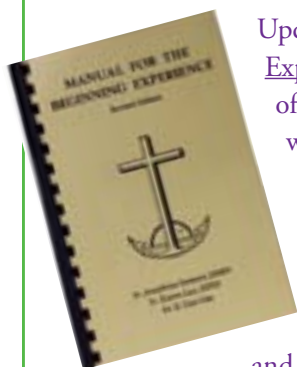
Step one in the process involved the entire board in a SWOT analysis to outline the ministry's strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities available and the threats to success. Walls filled with large Post It notes containing each person's input were organized into columns of like topics to move the initial ideas into the final organized document.

We'd Appreciate Your Comment

As *Beginning Experience* Alumni or friends of the ministry, you have either business, nonprofit or team experience that could provide valuable input for the ministry's Strategic Plan. **We invite you to review the plan and then share your comments with us based on your wisdom and experience. View the plan by clicking on this link: [Strategic Plan](#).** Share your comments by sending a return e-mail to: k.murphy@beginningexperience.org

Updating the 1984 Manual

Teams Test Manual Revisions



Updating the 1984 revision of the Manual for the Beginning Experience is a long overdue priority of the International Board of Directors. The revision process began with an all-team workshop at the International Convention in Winnipeg, led by Sr. Tarianne DeYonker. The objective: To identify those areas of the current manual that teams found dated or unclear, as well as those that are dear to the heart and should be kept.

The process continued at the 2010 Convention in central Minnesota. Fran Devlin, former technical writer and International Board member, completed a first draft of the

talk guidelines for use in a laboratory session there, conducted by Kathleen Murphy. Team members were given time to write a first draft of a talk using the revised guidelines. Then they shared in small groups, much as they would do in critiquing talks for a weekend. In this session, though, they had an additional objective—as they listened to what had been written, did it seem apparent that the guidelines for the talk had been clear to the writer? Finally, they were asked to critique the revised guidelines they had just tested.

Many helpful notes and comments came back for consideration in editing the draft guidelines, along with many comments that praised the revision for its clarity. Many participants in the session commented that they came away with a better understanding of the purpose of the talk they helped test. A typical comment overall was, “I loved that I had a chance to try out the new format for [writing] the talks. Thank you!”

The new edition will retain all the strengths unique to the Beginning Experience process. The format, the various segments of the weekend, and the order in which they are presented will remain the same.

Some parts of the Manual had been revised earlier; others are still to be rewritten. The completed revision will follow the format used in earlier program revisions such as those for Beyond Beginning Experience and Coping with Life Alone.

Like those two programs, it will consist of two Manuals to be used in conjunction with each other. The first will be essential for use by the presenters and facilitators, and include the talk guidelines and basic facilitator information. The companion Coordinator’s Manual will focus on the administrative information needed to hold the weekend program—from publicity and preparation for the weekend to screening applicants and the details of the schedule.

Bishop Patrick Zurek, bishop of Amarillo, Texas, will write the preface to the new edition. As the liaison for the Beginning Experience ministry to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, he attended the convention in Winnipeg where the process began and expressed his appreciation of the renewed emphasis on the program fundamentals.

As the project nears its end, it will be presented to teams at the 2011 Regional Conferences in Denver, Colorado; Cincinnati, Ohio; the West of Ireland and in Auckland, New Zealand. A few teams will also be asked to test the revision in its entirety before it is pronounced complete.

“I loved that I had a chance to try out the new format for [writing] talks. Thank you!”

Book Corner

A New Title

Letting Go: The Way Into Abundance is not only a life lesson Sister



Josephine has learned well, it is also the title of her recently completed autobiography. Finished just in time for the 35th Anniversary Convention in

July 2010, Sister Josephine held a special book signing event for those attending the convention.

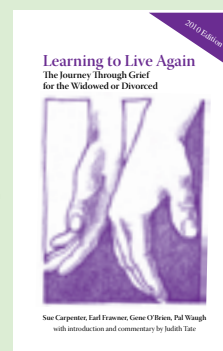
In the book she relates her personal life story, including how God led her to serve the world as the co-founder of Beginning Experience. The book is available from Amazon.com.

A New Edition

The 2010 edition of Learning to Live Again, a Beginning Experience classic, was issued just in time for the 2010 convention.

The authors’ stories of their losses have been augmented with a summary of their lives in the years since the book was first published. As moving as ever, two widowed persons and two who are divorced, relate their personal stories of loss and the emotions surrounding their experiences.

Proceeds will benefit the Beginning Experience ministry. To order the \$15 book, call the Ministry Center at 574-283-0279 or e-mail orders@beginningexperience.org.



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**Beginning Experience
International Ministry, Inc.**

Kathleen Murphy, Executive Director
1657 Commerce Drive, Suite 2B
South Bend, Indiana 46628 USA
574-283-0279
www.beginningexperience.org

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Donate Button is New Feature

New Web Site Design Introduced

With pro bono creative help from John Borys, owner of a Houston advertising firm, a new look is emerging for the International Ministry Center's web site.

The top of the page introduces the new tag line for the ministry, "Renewing the Light of Hope." The center of the home page features brief testimonials from those who are widowed and those who are divorced and have benefitted from *Beginning Experience* programs.

The site also meets one of the goals of the International Board's 5-year plan with the addition of a "donate" button.

The button leads to an on-line form, allowing supporters of our ministry to help us strengthen teams, revise our materials, and reach out with our invitation to healing and hope to more grieving people.

The form offers several giving options, from a one time gift to a recurring donation. Gifts may also be made in someone's memory or in their honor for a special occasion such as a birthday or graduation. You may visit the revised pages clicking on this link: www.beginningexperience.org. To give a gift, click on the Donate button.



**Beginning Experience
International Ministry Center**
1657 Commerce Drive, Ste. 2B
South Bend, IN 46628
USA



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