



Questions for International Board Nominees

**Please provide answers to the following questions in your native language.
You can also answer some of these questions in your video.**

1. **Names:** John and Donna Bigler, Fr. Joseph Redfern
Candidate for International Board Position Title: Deputy International Coordinators

How long have you been married/ordained?

We have been married for 27 years. We have three adult children.

FJR: I was ordained to the priesthood in 2006.

2. **When and where did you make your original Retrouvaille weekend?**

We made our weekend in November of 2008 in Santa Clarita, California.

FJR: I think it was in 2007 or 2008, in Madison, WI.

3. **How do you serve Retrouvaille? (Positions held past and present)**

Chairs International Bylaws Committee (2021 to present)

Vice-Chairs International Bylaws Committee (2019 to 2021)

Community Coordinators Santa Clarita, CA (2014 to 2018)

Co-Chairs 2018 ICM Planning Committee (2016-2018)

Christian Multi-Denominational (CMD) Support and Development (2012-2014)

CORE Coordinators, Santa Clarita, CA (2009 to 2014)

FJR: I present to the Friday Night Couples and am the chaplain for Central WI Retrouvaille.

4. **Members are required to have been involved in presenting the program.**

When did you last present a Post or Weekend?

In 2021 we have presented one weekend in our home community (Santa Clarita) and one weekend in the Kansas City community. We have also presented several Post Sessions in our home community. We present Stage 1 and 3. We have written all the POST sessions except 5 and 6. We present around 3 weekends per year sometimes more. We have presented a lot of POST sessions for our community and neighboring communities.

FJR: I have presented 34 weekends, the most recent being August 20-22, 2021.

5. **What is your Personality Style? (Helper, Organizer, Thinker, Catalyst)**

Donna is an Organizer; John is a Thinker.

FJR: I am more of a Catalyst.

How do you see it contributing to your ability to serve in this position?

Every personality style has strengths and weaknesses. I (John) like the 30,000 foot view from an airplane. I like high-flying ideas, over analyzing everything and explaining complicated concepts in simple language. So, as I think through and analyze the 30,000 foot view, Donna points out the practical problem that we need to land the plane before we run out of gas. Donna organizes the landing by making sure we are on the right runway, in the right city (they all look the same to me from 30,000 feet), that there is air in the tires, (or that we have tires at all) and that we have clothes to wear at our destination assuming she stopped me from crashing the plane. Whereas I may become overwhelmed with small details, Donna organizes things into bite sized chunks in a logical order – a skill of hers that is invaluable and real blessing to me personally. I have really learned to appreciate her for this and many other wonderful qualities during our 27 years of marriage. Our personality styles have strengths and weaknesses and I hope to have highlighted some of both in each of us. We judge that together; we help minimize the other's weaknesses and believe we make a great team by relying on each other.

Donna and I met while I served as the Executive Officer of a 3400-member professional society with a Board of Directors comprised of 35 people. We served in our positions for 8 years and enjoyed working together. We see DCOR/ICOR as drawing from the skills that we learned when we ran the professional society, what we have learned from our Retrouvaille experience and our reliance on the Holy Spirit not necessarily in that order.

FJR: As a catalyst, I really enjoy mixing with people and getting a feel for a given situation, prior to injecting some life into the conversation, and then letting things develop as they may. Although I have very conservative views, I also enjoy looking 'outside the box' for alternative points of view.

6. Are either or both of you bilingual? If so, what languages?

We are not bilingual.

FJR: English is my only spoken language.

7. What are your technical skills? Retrouvaille website comfort level?

Donna and I are both comfortable with computers. I am a resource for technical issues in our community as well as in my profession. I'm not a computer programmer but I am an advanced user. I wrote the front-end registration form for the 2018 ICM, processed all the registrations and imported all the registration information into a database program to manage the data for the 2018 ICM including printing all the badges, tracking voting status and color coding all the badges accordingly.

Donna is good with numbers. She just finished her bachelor's degree in accounting. Donna handles technical aspects of dealing with numbers well. I handle most of the writing and editing. We are both comfortable with the Retrouvaille Website front and back end. I wrote a database program to track all the couples in our community along with any community events they attended and what talks they were qualified to present. I maintained that database for about 10 years.

FJR: As a parish priest, I am constantly in communication with others. I prefer the spoken word, but am comfortable with the use of a computer, texting, use of websites, etc.

- 8. Being a member on the International Board will require a good deal of time. Some roles will require organizational skills, some will require computer time, and some will require personal connections to strengthen, support and expand the ministry. Will you be able to adjust your life/schedule when you need to find the time?**

We have been self-employed for most of our adult lives. We have operated our own businesses throughout our 27-year marriage. Our self-employment status and having adult children made our life and availability very flexible. Our flexibility has allowed us the privilege of presenting many weekends and really came in handy towards the three months leading into the 2018 ICM. We don't see a problem with the time commitment and being able to adjust our schedules accordingly. Advanced notice is helpful for scheduling time out of the office for John. Fortunately, he has a capable, committed staff than can handle most issues when he is out of the office.

FJR: As a parish priest, I have learned to be constantly adapting to new things. Adaptation is a way of life for me. I would say that this is one of my strengths.

- 9. Please name some of your personal strengths which you believe qualifies you to serve in the role you've been nominated for. (Couple and Priest).**

These types of questions make us uncomfortable so perhaps a brief story will be a good lead into this question. Picture a dad relaxing in his recliner on a Sunday morning. Dad is reading the newspaper. Unbeknownst to him, his 4-year-old son is busy in the kitchen. The child has pulled out the drawers to make a ladder and has climbed up the progressively pulled out drawers to reach the counter. He walks across the counter and opens the cupboard. He grabs a plate, breaks another one in the process and puts three cookies on the plate while he helps himself to one. He grabs a glass and backs down the improvised drawer-ladder with his loot. He places the glass and the plate of cookies on the floor. With somewhat of superhuman strength for a four-year old, he manages to pull the refrigerator door open. On the shelf is an almost full gallon of milk. He grabs the milk and drags it out of the refrigerator. The jug is much heavier than his 4-year-old mind comprehended. The jug immediately hits the floor; the cap pops off spilling milk everywhere. He fills about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cup with milk, spilling about an equal amount on the floor. He takes the cookies on the plate and the cup of milk with milk dripping down the sides out to the living room. The child wins his father's attention and says, "Goot mor-ing, Dad. I make this for you." His dad takes the milk and cookies and says, "Thank you, son."

What does this have to do with answering the question? It is an image of our service to God. No matter what skills we think we have, no matter how qualified we believe we might be, He accepts our service such as it is because he loves us.

I (John) have mentioned previously that I am analytical by nature, I can manage a lot of information in my head and can think on my feet. I am logical and can put together a good argument on the fly. Through Retrouvaille, I have learned to persevere in the face of adversity which has turned out to be a sorely needed skill of mine both personally and professionally. We know from POST 4 that for each of these strengths there is a weakness that goes with it. I judge that Donna and I are very different and that her strengths compliment my weaknesses which can be both a blessing and occasionally infuriating (to me) at the same time. Donna is good at assessing how a policy will affect people. Donna is kind and considers the feelings of others. I appreciate the balance she brings to any discussion even though I may not agree with her. Seeing all sides of an issue is a real strength. Together we can do that.

FJR: My main strengths for the position would include: excellent communication skills, doing things in a timely manner, dependability, flexibility, a background in science, philosophy and theology, practical skills from my days as a farmer, a pleasant demeanor, and a desire to serve the People of God.

10. Do you suggest the dialogue process when talking with the couples, and if so, when?

When we find we are struggling in our marriage, we have found that the lack of dialogue is often a huge part of the problem. We believe in dialogue as a discipline and that it is the one tool that sets Retrouvaille apart from every other marriage help that exists.

When a couple is struggling, the first question we ask is how often are you doing a dialogue? If they are not dialoguing together then we help them get started and explain the benefits our marriage has received from dialoging, daily at first, and less frequently now. If they are dialoguing and it is not going well then, we try to troubleshoot what problem they are having. Done correctly, dialogue works 100 percent of the time, helps with problems, connectedness and does not lead to arguments.

FJR: When I engage in meaningful conversation with couples in the Retrouvaille Community, I often mention the benefits of dialogue and encourage them to make a return to regular dialogue. When I have priests shadow me on weekends, we often take time to dialogue during the weekend.

11. What is your leadership style when it comes to disagreements at meetings?

Our goal at any meeting is to make sure that everyone has a chance to be heard and that we understand what others are saying. We believe that the procedural rules used at any meeting should be simple, accessible and result in both democracy and efficiency while running the meeting.

As a family law trial lawyer, I (John) am dealing with disagreements at “meetings” on almost a daily basis. I have dealt with thousands of conflicts with most of those conflicts being resolved amicably and professionally. I’m not perfect. Humor and sarcasm are not far from me at any given time.

Donna and I are concluding a three-year term on the International Bylaws Committee. It is a small group of four couples. There are two lawyers on the committee and other members that are very passionate about the opinions they express. In that environment we have reached consensus on every opinion we have issued as a committee.

FJR: I lead meetings on a regular basis. When frictions arise, I often begin looking around the room at the body language. In some cases, if a person is butting in to prevent another person's view be heard, I will ask that person to let the other person finish what he or she is saying. I have a desire that all people present express their own opinion. There are times in which I will attempt to diffuse the tension with some humor or provide some clarifications, if I think that there are some misunderstandings. I think that it is important to resolve things, if at all possible, rather than delay things.

12. As you serve on the International Board, you will inevitably encounter different cultural and religious views. How will you deal with people who are different to you?

Donna and I are not Catholic. (Are you keeping score? I'm a divorce attorney and we are Christian Non-Denominational. So, we've given you two solid reasons not to vote for us at this point.) In Retrouvaille we are used to encountering people with different religious views than our own. We try to understand how we are different and resonate on the areas we agree rather than where we are different. I (John) have some cross-cultural ministry experience in Northern Ireland from a while ago. I learned listening is more important than speaking – especially when getting to know people from a different culture than my own.

FJR: While I am dealing with Catholics within the parish, I encounter people of different religious backgrounds on a regular basis and am aware of the fact that people often have views that are very much opposed to my own, which are formed in the heart of the Catholic Church. My goal is to find some common ground that we can agree upon, and continue our conversation from there.

13. Why are you willing to serve in this position?

Donna and I feel thankful for how much our marriage has been saved through our involvement and service in Retrouvaille. Whereas many years ago we served in different ministries, we have found we enjoy serving in Retrouvaille because it is a ministry that we are passionate about, and we enjoy serving together.

Candidly, a position like this not something we would normally want to do. We're both introverts. We are not politicians. We are reluctant leaders at best. We wanted to say no. We really did! However, after praying through the idea of serving, we judged we had to say yes. We are both in good health and we have the time and motivation to do it. In the crazy world of global pandemics, we might be unable to say yes in a couple years. Who knows? So, for us, the time is now. We feel honored to have been asked and we are excited to be able to say, "Yes!"

FJR: Just as Christ said, "The Son of Man came to serve, not to be served." (Mt. 20:28), my own attitude is the same. I have offered my life as a means of working for God's Kingdom and would enjoy the opportunity to serve the Retrouvaille Community in a leadership role.