

Reaching for full potential

By LORAIN McCLISH

Rick Neff and Nancy Sharbach have been leading encounter groups together at the Universalist-Unitarian Church of Farmington for two years.

"We don't always agree with one another," says the minister of the historical church on Halstead Rd., "but we do work well together."

He defines the word "encounter" as a "mish-mosh term that everybody understands having to do with the human potential movement."

"There must be 300 different sects of encounter therapy. We've put together our own style — put in new things — thrown out some old — but we get pretty positive results."

Neff does not think of counseling to his congregation as an extra activity, but rather as a prime function of the ministry.

"THAT'S WHAT this religion business is all about," he says. "If you can't help people achieve their full potential as human beings then you're not doing anything."

He estimates that of the "400 persons who have passed through these doors, I've counseled about 200. They (the congregation) hired me because I was into the history and psychology of religion. I'm a therapist and I've done an enormous amount of counseling."

Ms. Sharbach is director of the Gateway Crisis Center in Madison Heights and holds a master's degree in social work. Most of the work she does there is problem-centered.

"There we work with people who have a specific problem and we're helping them get through an immediate crisis," she says. "This is not so with the work I do with Rick. Here we meet normally average people who simply want a growth experience."

SHE EXPLAINED that together they create an organized situation through which the participants will move. The ultimate end is obtaining a self-awareness in learning how you act, and react, in this contrived experience. Then gathering the tools to change what you see that you don't like. "To do creative things with these feelings rather than destructive things," she explained.

As to the self-awareness that comes from this, Neff called it "a revelation." "You are just not conscious of how others see you."

When asked if some of his participants in the groups didn't get frightened by seeing something not very nice, he answered, "Fear is useful."

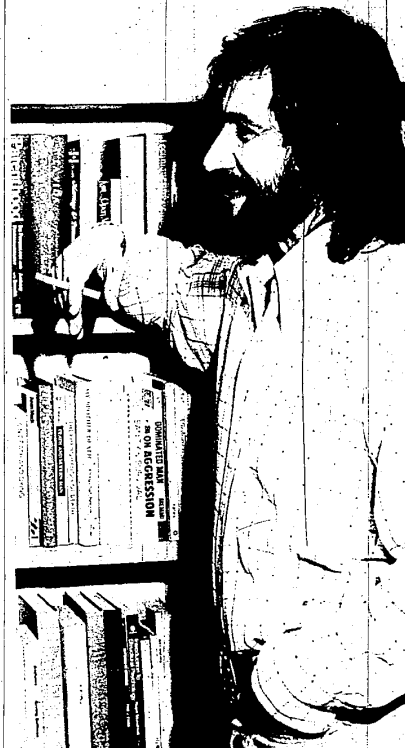
"We can use it to show it is sometimes more scary to stay where you are than face the fear of taking on something new. But more often you see something very lovely... something you never even knew was there."

MS. SHARBACH added that one of the fringe benefits the twosome give their encounter groups is that "We're available after the meetings so we can help those who need to tie up any loose ends. In many groups when it's 10 p.m. the class is over. Period. And some are just left hanging."

Both agreed they had a high rate of success in helping others gain through these experiences.

Neff said, "Some good results we see right away. Other times it will be as much as two years later we'll get a feedback that something good came out of a group."

"And we've watched some marriages wholly reorganize right before our very eyes."



RICK NEFF



NANCY SHARBACH

Throwing some light on preteen sexuality

By JUDY ANN LYNN

He's a graduate of Loyola University.

Mary has a masters degree from Wayne State University in family life and sex education, and teaches family living courses in high schools and human sexuality in adult education courses at Oakland Community College.

THEY ARE the parents of four children.

Paonessa, who is working on a book, "Boys and Puberty," has had an article co-authored with his wife published in professional journals.

"There's a great need to explain puberty to boys," he said.

"Many boys feel uncomfortable or guilty about normal bodily functions occurring at puberty," he said.

"There is currently a lack of literature for parents who want to communicate."

"AS WE BEGIN to see the need for fathers to communicate with wives and children and to be more openly affectionate, we're beginning to realize young boys need proper preparation to develop their full potential personages."

Mary Paonessa thinks the need for better communication with pre-adolescents is necessary for both boys and girls.

"Young girls are usually well-prepared for biological changes at puberty, but often their emotional and psychological needs are not as well understood," she said.

"There's a growing emphasis for self-understanding of ourselves as persons, rather than as stereo-

typed versions of males and females."

At 8:30 p.m. Friday, May 3, the opening seminar will take place in the multi-purpose room of the Parks and Recreation Building of the Southfield Civic Center.

"THIS FIRST talk is for parents and has to do with human sexuality as it relates to their children at varying ages. There will be special emphasis on the needs and questions of children as they enter puberty."

The Paonessas will explain to parents why it would be helpful for their children to participate in the second seminar.

There will also be a discussion of the adult's own sexuality and sex role attitudes.

Children ages nine and up, with specially-oriented lecture for the family at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 5, at Marygrove College's Liberal Arts Building, 8425 W. McNichols, Detroit.

PAONESSA WILL discuss puberty and adolescence with the boys, while his wife will discuss these topics with the girls.

Adolescents will remain for additional questions after the younger children have left.

This two-hour seminar is open to the community.

There will be a nominal charge for the Friday seminars.

For Fridays, May 3 and 17 — \$1 for Southfield-Lathrup PWP members, \$1.50 for associate members and \$2 for guests.

These seminars are part of the education, cultural and family-oriented activities of PWP in Southfield-Lathrup.



Celebrate Music Week

All kinds of music, from Palestrina to Bacharach, pour forth from the 59 members who make up the Harrison High School Concert Choir. Under the direction of Maurie Wildt, the group will celebrate National Music Week with a performance at Tel-12 Mall on Friday.

May 10 at 7:30 p.m. The choir is one of 15 groups that have been invited to participate in a week-long series of concerts by the sponsors, the Farmington, Southfield and Birmingham Musicales. (Evert photo)

The blue and white Plymouth Fury swung into the ambulance area and stopped. Two police officers, a man and a woman, got out and helped their 12-year-old passenger into the hospital.

She was there because she'd been raped. Her assailants, she said, were two boys from "down the block." One was 13, and other 12.

A New York girl attempted suicide recently. She said her boyfriend had dropped her and "life was empty without him." She was in fifth grade.

Sexual awareness — and sometimes sexual activity — is coming to children at an increasingly early age today. Sexual knowledge often isn't keeping pace. But some people are trying to close the information gap.

Human sexuality in young children will be the subject of a three-part seminar for Southfield-Lathrup's Parents Without Partners (PWP) in May.

NOTED LECTURERS Mary and John Paonessa will lead the seminars to focus on parental communication with children during puberty.

For 15 years, the Paonessas have been lecturing on family-oriented programs.

For the past five years, their special topic has been puberty.

John Paonessa, with the credentials of a certified marriage and family counselor with a masters degree in social work, conducts in-service seminars for practicing social workers in the Detroit area.