



Newsletter for the GB Regions

March 2006, April 2006, May 2006

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The cover shows a photo of a painting of the Annunciation which hangs in the St Nicholas Church, Lopud Island, Croatia

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Newsletter Editors

Please send all contributions for the June 2006 - August 2006 edition by April 1st, **preferably by e-mail, to**

Anthony & Janet Denman

Design & Layout by Brian Sheehy - Christchurch 1

If you require further copies of the Newsletter, or have changed your address, please contact your local Pre-Regional Couple - see addresses on the inside back cover.

From Chris & Frankie Lane

Dear friends in Teams,

As we enter into the beginning of Lent, we aim to prepare ourselves for the greatest feast of the Church's year. To enter into the joy of Easter fully, that time of preparation is essential. Perhaps then, we can spend a little time reflecting on how we will use this time of preparation.

Could we first of all propose a 'fast rewind' to last Autumn and in particular the Teams 'Gatherings' that took place in Womersley, Cheltenham and Darlington? The theme for the Gatherings was 'Making time for God and each other'. How appropriate to revisit that theme now at the beginning of Lent. Elsewhere in this issue is an article by Pat and Jim Gilhooley focusing on some of the key points raised at one of the gatherings. No doubt many of you who attended one of the events have shared your own thoughts and reflections with your team already.

One of the greatest difficulties we all face is actually finding the time in our increasingly busy lives. Psalm 23 has always been special to us. It was the psalm sung at our wedding and, somehow, seems to crop up in the Sunday liturgy just at those very times when we need to be reminded to take stock. A number of years ago we came across a modern version of the psalm from Japan. We often use it to remind ourselves of the need to pace our lives.

Psalm 23 for Busy People *Toki Miyashina*

The Lord is my pace-setter, I shall not rush;
He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals,
He provides me with images of stillness,
which restore my serenity.
He leads me in the way of efficiency,
through calmness of mind
and His guidance is peace.
Even though I have a great many things to
accomplish each day
I will not fret, for His presence is here.

From Chris & Frankie Lane

His timelessness, His all-importance
will keep me in balance.
He prepares refreshment and renewal
in the midst of activity,
by anointing my mind with His oils of tranquillity;
my cup of joyous energy overflows.
Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruits
of my hours
and I shall walk in the pace of my Lord,
and dwell in His house for ever.

In the struggle to find that elusive space in our lives perhaps we can leave you with a couple of quotes offered for the sit-down at our Southern Gathering, courtesy of Graham & Zof Stott:

Lin Yutang

“Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the nobler art of leaving things undone....The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of nonessentials”.

A.A. Milne: Winnie-the-Pooh

“Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it”.

Wishing you a very happy and holy Easter and, in particular, time to prepare for it.

With our love and prayers,

Chris & Frankie



From Father Gerard

‘All is good ...’

Would you let yourself be converted to your children’s way of thinking?

It could be risky, but the Holy Spirit often works in ways that we least expect. I recently heard the story of a teenager who converted his family to an extraordinary habit. It’s one that runs quite counter to what anyone, except a person of faith, might expect. But the whole family has now developed the habit of saying ‘All is good,’ whenever anything goes wrong. It first happened when the six of them were stuck in a traffic jam on a hot day, on the way to their holiday. While the rest of them were getting fractious, Gabriel (and that really is his name) simply came out with those three words, which startled the rest of them to the core: “All is good.” In time it has become the family response to every apparent difficulty or disaster. Gabriel understands that all is gift, and all is good. We can realise this most forcefully when the gifts apparently go wrong. If we see God’s goodness and grace in even the most trying of moments we will glimpse beyond the limits of our own vision to something of God’s will for us all. If we stay with our irritations and resentments we will always be irritated and resentful.

**If we see God’s
goodness and grace . . .**

At a really practical, day-to-day level, I remember hearing the vice-rector of my seminary preaching on the virtues of thanking God when the photocopier breaks down. I must admit that I gave him an old-fashioned and sideways look as he said this: was he kidding? But, on reflection, I know that my exasperation with contrarily-behaving machinery just encourages it to behave even worse! Pausing to thank God for all that the photocopier has already done for me is a far better preparation for resuming operations satisfactorily.

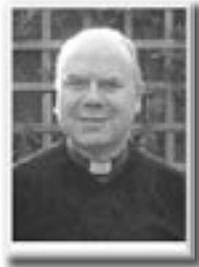
Young Gabriel is the son of the American theologian Scott Hahn. He is growing up accustomed to the idea of sacrifice. His family has an easy and happy expression of their Catholic faith. They know that it involves suffering, as well as joy, and that both are essential elements in our humanity. This is the season of the Church’s year when we can reflect so fully both on sacrifice and on the richness it brings. Whatever we sacrifice in Lent is simply the gift that we give back to God, from all that God has given us. Sacrifice is all the richer if we remember that it means ‘making holy’, rather than just ‘giving up’. However slight our offering to God we offer it in thanks. It holds us in expectation of the sacrifice which Jesus makes of Himself. At the sacrificial meal He lets us know that He really is with us always. On Calvary He gives His life for us. At Easter He shows that all is holy, all is good and all is gift, as He rises from death and overcomes the power of Sin. Then at Pentecost we know the power of God’s Spirit, the Spirit of sacrificial love, inspiring us.

From Father Gerard

That Divine sacrifice gives meaning to even the greatest suffering that we will ever know. It may be hard for the world to grasp, but when we reflect on Christ on the cross, we will find in every situation, no matter how seemingly grave, the final proof that "All is good."

I could never wish anyone suffering, pain or loss. But I know that they will happen, so I pray that, within them all, we Christians will find the full meaning of sacrifice.

All life is gift:
there is nothing that we have or are
for which we can claim any credit.
What we make of what we are made of,
working with the gifts of grace and nature,
is some measure of who we have been,
who we are
and who we will be.
God the Creator,
looked at all that God had made
and saw it as very good.
We are made in God's own image and likeness:
God looks on us and sees that all is good.
God of eternity and of all creation,
we thank you for all that has been,
that is and that will ever be.
We thank you for our life
and all its gifts.
We see in them your abundant goodness,
generosity and creativity.
Help us always to say, in thanks, "All is good."



Eddie Aitken R.I.P.



Eddie Aitken has gone ahead of us.

How best to describe him or recall him for family and friends? An enthusiasm for many things, half of a wonderful partnership with Margaret. A welcoming smile suggesting that your arrival was all that was wanting to make a perfect day. An immediate willingness to accept a challenge or opportunity, no matter what

the difficulties: for example, his trip to Rome in 1950 (Holy Year) on the back of a motor bike to rendezvous with Margaret Gourlay (and propose).

Eddie and Margaret led a full and satisfying life, whiling away the idle hours never a problem: not with Michael, Veronica, Edward, Peter and Stephen to entertain, cater for and educate.

Before the Aitkens encountered Equipes Notre Dame, Eddie was deeply involved with the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust and annual Lourdes pilgrimages. He continued that service until wisdom deemed it prudent that he join the backstage (fundraising) team.

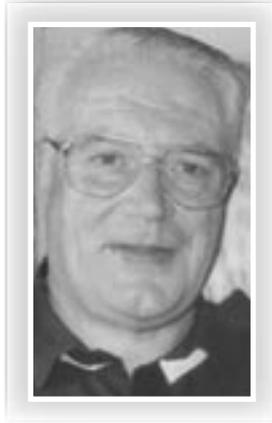
Teams came via the Aitkens' ongoing hospitality: friends from his World War II days in Belgium introduced Eddie and Margaret to their Teams experience and that was that. The Aitkens launched the first Scottish team, Fife 1, piloted lovingly by Peggie and John Corrigan in 1982-83: and firm ties with the North-east have kept us on the right lines ever since.

In the best sense a simple, uncomplicated man, a man of deep faith, a loving family man, a hard-working man proud of his Gas Board career at Lurgi, a retiring almost shy man, much in love with his mountains and glens, with a song in his heart or a tune on his "moothie" for any ceilidh or party.

We will miss him, but his spirit and example will live with us.

Dennis and Maureen Macnamara, Fife 1

Father Tom Cass R.I.P.



Our Team Chaplain, Father Tom Cass, died after a short illness on October 24th 2005. He was a great believer in the “Teams”. He had been our Team Chaplain for several years, continuing after his retirement in 2000. He loved the Teams, and was chaplain to Gosforth 1, before he joined us. He was with the last Lourdes Pilgrimage and came back inspired and wanted all married couples to join the Teams.

He was Parish Priest in Sacred Heart Church, North Gosforth for 16 years. He retired in May 2000 to live in St Joseph’s Home, Newcastle but remained very active throughout the diocese. His Requiem Mass was at St Mary’s Cathedral, Newcastle; where a congregation of more than 1000 heard Bishop Kevin Dunn thank Father Tom’s family for giving him to Hexham and Newcastle. Bishop Hugh Lindsey and 120 priests concelebrated with Bishop Kevin. Whilst there was sadness at the loss of a good priest, who reached out to everyone, the atmosphere was one of joy. There was a sense of family giving thanks to God for the love that Fr Tom had, and there were hearts full of stories of the great man’s deeds. He is sorely missed by our team, North Shields 1.

Ted and Mabel Duffy

Southern Gathering

Teams Conference 15th October 2005

Summary of Talks

The following notes were prepared by Pat & Jim Gilhooley of Fareham 2 team, following the October gathering at Wonersh seminary. The two key speakers were Fr. Jonathan How who lectures at Wonersh and is chaplain to the Godalming team and Bishop Kieran Conry of Arundel and Brighton

1. Making Time For God and Each Other Fr Jonathan How

Fr Jonathan talked about how it was important to find quiet places where we can reflect and allow ourselves to be in the presence of God. He mentioned some of the places where he had gone (and still goes) to find this and how Jesus in the gospels often goes to quiet places to pray. There are also examples where He advises the apostles to do the same. The key points he mentioned were:

- Places are significant in our lives and the significant places vary for each individual. He showed some pictures of the significant places in his life. He said that he liked dark corners where he was not going to be noticed. These were where he liked to pray.
- We need to conspire with ourselves to find space and time. He mentioned the value of holidays.
- There are places in the New Testament where Jesus often returns to, the significant places in His life. Fr. Jonathan talked about a few examples. The apostles also returned to places of significance, for example the Upper Room.
- Often there are places in our life which hold significance for us or have touched us spiritually and which we try to return to at points in our life. There is power in rekindling and renewing our encounters in these places. He encouraged us to think about some of these again and gave us the following questions to reflect on as individuals, couples and in small groups:-
 - What are our individual significant places?
 - What are ours as a couple?
 - What could we learn from holidays or “changed times” which had nourished us?
- We should think of part of our rule of life as getting away from our life sometimes.

Southern Gathering

2. Making Time and Space For God Bishop Kieran Conry

Bishop Kieran began by looking back at *Gaudium et Spes* from Vatican II. This was the only document which was not on the original agenda and some people say that the first sentence of this is the most important sentence which emerged from Vatican II.

- The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.
- The document was about reading the signs of the times. That the church should be a church turned out from itself, rather than a church turned in on itself. These times are different from our times now but we have to keep reading the signs of the times.
- The trends in the church since the '60s have been a reflection of the trends in society, not the other way about. However, there is an underlying feeling in the church that the church can sort out and remedy the changes in society. This is not true; the church cannot sort things out.
- The media has a big influence on values. Finding space for God is challenging.
- One challenging sign of the times today is communicating with the young. We need to understand 'their language' and communicate with them in that way. We are finding it more difficult to evangelize and we worry and are anxious about it. (He told a story of an early 19th century Jesuit writing during the period 1600-1800 whose papers had shown that he thought they were the worst times that the church had lived through – and compared that with modern thoughts in the church along the same lines).

Did I have time to think about my journey of faith?



Did I ask God for guidance on the road?
Did I have time to stop during my day?

Southern Gathering

- He said that we should not worry. DONT! This is an exciting time for the church. Be optimistic. This is the best time to be a catholic since this is the time God has given us.
- We cannot go back to where we were or how we felt in the church in the past, particularly pre-Vatican II. It is tempting to try to go back, but we cannot unknow things. We must move forward from where we are.
- How do we do this? He gave a couple of examples.

Welcoming in the church must be more than smiling at the door and giving out hymn books. We must be much more open and really welcome others and make them feel welcome. "We say we welcome sinners until we find out about them, then we bar them!"

People are attracted to and look for what satisfies them completely and deeply. We must, as Church, be open to attract them on that basis.

Where did my thoughts turn as I awoke, yesterday?



To God?

To my spouse and family?

To the busy day ahead?

**Prayer is not an occasional nod
Given in passing to God.
It's more like a marriage – a closeness
of living.
A constant receiving and giving.
Louie Horne, Society of Friends, 1987.**

New Sector Couple . . .

. . . for the North West

Welcome to **John and Rosemary Turner**

from Formby (near Liverpool) who are the new sector couple for the North West sector. They have been in Formby Team for 5 years and already have a reputation for hosting excellent



annual sector summer picnics in their garden. John and Rosemary are proud parents to 4 children ages 10 – 18, as well as keepers of chickens and bees. John is head of the geography department at a local secondary school while Rosemary is a physiotherapist at Alder Hey Children's hospital.

Their first task as sector couple was to meet up with us. Not as easy as it sounds, as they live on the west coast and we live near the east coast. The halfway meeting point was a pub, high up on a foggy, snow covered and very barren Saddleworth Moor (of Myra Hindley fame!) Initially not the most welcoming of venues but a pint and a good Sunday roast soon warmed us all up. We then found ourselves inadvertently having lunch in the middle of a prize-giving for that morning's half marathon across the moors. (Who is mad enough to run across snowy moors in January?) Despite ending our session together by finding their car battery had run flat while we were in the pub, we are delighted that John and Rosemary have not been daunted and have accepted responsibility for the North West sector.

Peter and Di Wordsworth

Northern Regional Couple

Northern Gathering

Annual Teams Gathering

The annual gathering took place in Eaglescliffe (near Darlington) on 29 October 2005. This was the first time any member of our team (Wirral) had attended. We set off at about 7am and, buoyed by smoked salmon bagels (thanks to Steph Sherlock and Dave Penny), clear roads and the occasional generous interpretation of the speed limits, found ourselves at our destination almost before we knew it. After a welcoming cup of coffee, the day began in earnest. After introductions, there were a couple of breakouts into teams style meetings, some interesting talks and mass to finish the day. The double act of Michael and Hilda Hedley was particularly inspiring.

We understand we may have been the first example of an entire team, minus our chaplain, attending the gathering. As a relatively new team (we have been going about 2 years), we found the experience very enriching. The comradeship of the journey up (rather like going on tour!), the mutual support that always helps when doing something new and the opportunity to reflect on the day on the journey home were all important. We had not previously had much chance to come together as a group outside of our regular team meetings. It was also helpful to hear more first hand about the teams movement and something of its history from Elaine and John Cogavin, the ERI Liaison Couple, standing in for Paul and Helena McCloskey, the new Super-Regional Couple (what a great job title!).

We would heartily recommend the gathering to any other new teams. It is probably fair to say that, beforehand, we were a little daunted by the prospect of the lengthy journey, but it was certainly well worth the effort!

Tim and Jane Scott

Northern Gathering

Echoing Psalm . . .

At the Northern Gathering at Eaglescliffe last October, the guest speakers demonstrated the technique of echoing a scripture reading to help appreciate the meaning. Try this as a couple, taking alternative lines :-

O God you are my God for you I long

O God my God for you I long, for you I long

For you my soul is thirsting

My soul is thirsting

My body pines for you like a dry weary land without water

Without water, like a dry weary land without water.

So I gaze on you in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory.

I gaze on you, to see your strength and your glory

For your love is better than life

Your love, life, your love is better than life

My lips will speak your praise

My lips will speak your praise

So I will bless you all my life

I will bless you, all my life I will bless you

In your name I will lift up my hands

I will lift up my hands

My soul shall be filled as with a banquet, my mouth shall praise you with joy

With joy I shall praise you, my mouth shall praise you with joy.

On my bed I remember you

On my bed I remember you

On you I muse through the night

On you I muse through the night

For you have been my help

You have been my help, my help, you have been my help

In the shadow of your wings I rejoice

I rejoice, in the shadow of your wings I rejoice

My soul clings to you, your right hand holds me fast

Holds me fast, your right hand holds me fast

My soul clings to you your right hand holds me fast.

Teams Diary

We list below future events throughout our Regions – some organised by Sectors, some by the Regions. We hope that, by advertising all events in this newsletter, if there is an event in a neighbouring area that you would like to attend, then you will feel free to do so.

Mar Apr	30 to 2	Lent Silent Retreat St Peter's Grange, Prinknash	Harry & Clotilde Meigh
Apr	1	London South East Lenten Retreat	Rosemary & Michael Cox
Apr	22	Surrey & Sussex Easter Ramble	Dave & Gill Meyer
May	13-14	Celebrate Love Seminar St Charles School, London	Edmund Adamus
June	17	Surrey & Sussex Retreat	Graham & Zoff Stott
July	2	North East Mass Picnic 2pm, Minsteracres	David & Eileen Hopper
Sep	1-3	North East Retreat, Minsteracres	David & Eileen Hopper
Sep	16-21	International Gathering Lourdes, France	Tom & Maureen Hoban
Oct	8	Central Gathering	Mike & Kay Vadon

2007

June July	29 to 1	Super Regional Gathering Weekend Gathering at Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick	
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The Intercessors

“Can You Not Watch An Hour With Me?”

Mt 26: 40

In May 1959, very concerned at the difficulties affecting Christian marriage, Father Caffarel, the founder of the Teams of Our Lady, called for volunteers to form a great chain of prayers to intercede for marriage and the family. This need is greater than ever today in view of the many ways marriage is undermined at present.



People who wish to become Intercessors are asked to pray for one hour a month at a specific time and on a specific day of their choice and, if possible, to do so during the night (Father Caffarel believed in the special value of night prayer). Intercessors spend their monthly hour of prayer in whatever way they chose. There are two alternatives to the one hour of prayer. They are:

1. committing oneself to fast one day a month on a specific day,
2. offering the daily trials and sufferings of one's life in union with Christ, for the intentions that the Intercessors are asked to pray for.

A quarterly letter links all Intercessors throughout the world and contains a list of specific intentions to be prayed for.

Intercessors today

Although the Intercessors were started by the Teams of Our Lady and are coordinated from their International Secretariat in Paris, many non-Teams persons have joined their ranks over the years. There are at present 50 Intercessors in Great Britain including a number of priests and religious.

Intercessors participate as individuals or as a couple and some may chose to link up with other Intercessors in their locality to pray their hour of intercession as a group, in each others' homes at an agreed time and date each month.

If you would like to join the Intercessors, please phone us on: 01242 514146



Harry and Clotilde Meigh

Accounts for 2004

TEAMS OF OUR LADY (GREAT BRITAIN REGION) is a Registered Charity (No 1044902). In 2004, the trustees were Peter and Mary Hayes (Regional Couple), Father John McLean (Regional Chaplain), and Nick and Veronique Furse (Regional Treasurers). The object of the charity, as stated in the Declaration of Trust, is the advancement of religion in accordance with the tenets of the Christian faith in particular by the promotion of Christian marriage, family life and the spiritual development of husband and wife.

The charity has only voluntary staff. The principal activities of the charity focus on supporting the monthly meetings of the 125 or so individual Teams around the Region. These monthly Team Meetings are the centre point of the movement, and enable couples to eat together, pray together, and share their joys and disappointments in a caring atmosphere.

The supporting activities of the charity are:

- The production of a quarterly Regional Newsletter sent to each team couple;
- Annually a Regional conference or 3 Pre-Regional conferences attended by around 100 couples and chaplains;
- Other events such as a weekend for widows and widowers and training sessions;
- Co-ordination and planning carried out by the Regional Couple and Sector Couples;
- Promotional activities to aid the expansion of the movement;
- Production of literature for use in the Team Meetings and for expansion;
- Contacts with the wider movement around the world.

In 2004, the charity had an operating surplus of £9,522 (2003 £4,279). Teams members contributions amounted to £16,319, 11% less than 2003, with a further £3844 reclaimed through Giftaid. There was a large balance in the bank accounts, but this is prudent in view of potential future expenditure, such as the organization of the next residential Swanwick conference.

A summary of the accounts is shown in the table on the following page. A copy of the full accounts is available from the editors, and is on the website.

Accounts for 2004

	2004	2003
INCOME	£	£
Contributions from Team Couples	16,319	18,347
Donations		560
Regional Events	1650	
Retreats & Sector Events	160	12,656
Miscellaneous		278
Bank Interest	110	118
Tax Refund (Giftaid)	3,844	3,901
TOTAL INCOME	22,083	35,860
EXPENDITURE		
Sector Administration	1,143	1,945
Assistance to Team Members	115	296
Sector Newsletters		136
Sector Events	390	14,166
Sector Expenses	53	335
Pre-Regional Administration	1,204	
Pre-Regional Gatherings	276	
Pre-Regional Miscellaneous	1,725	
Regional Administration	763	2,012
Regional Newsletter	4,226	4,112
Regional Conference	200	250
Printing of Literature	1,170	58
Expansion	100	38
Costs of Icons & Cards		1,250
Travel to International Meetings	284	3,133
Payment to ERI	267	2,045
Insurance	368	368
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	12,561	31,581

Questionnaire . . .

the results

We wish to thank all those who have returned the questionnaire. We have now received over 60 returns, which have been very helpful and interesting. As expected, there were a range of different responses, with some reading the newsletter cover-to-cover, and others being selective. Some wanted more local news of teams, but the majority of returns have indicated that they would like more articles of a spiritual nature particularly on study topics and endeavours. We will do our best to incorporate many of the comments and requests.

As you will note, we have changed the format so that each of the three GB Regional Couples writes a letter in turn – starting with Chris and Frankie. This will allow us to include more of the sort of content you asked for. There will be room for more news of local Teams, but you cannot now rely on your Regional Couple to mention this – please send it to us yourselves. We don't mind if we learn of an event or news from more than one source – better that than not hearing about it at all. Photos, preferably in digital format, are always welcome.

We thank all those who have offered to provide articles. We are beginning to take up these offers, and reproduce the first in this issue. We are happy to receive articles at any time, so don't wait for us to contact you – please send them in, we would be delighted to include them in future issues.

Antony & Janet Denman
Newsletter Editors



Celebrate Love Seminar

Saturday - Sunday 13/14 May 2006

St. Charles VI Form College, 74 St. Charles Sq W10 6EY

(Nearest Tube: "Ladbroke Grove":Hammersmith & City Line)



The Celebrate Love Seminar is a non-residential, marriage enrichment, weekend retreat which aims to enrich Catholic marriage and to empower couples to live more passionately and intimately for the sake of the mission of the Church. The seminar is facilitated by a team of married couples who are able to bring practical experience to an extensive body of understanding of the dynamics of marital relationship. The seminar is specifically targeted for couples looking to further enrich or 'rekindle' sound relationships. Celebrate Love promotes a healthy, celebratory attitude to sexuality, and makes clear the linkage of sexuality to the spirituality of the sacrament of matrimony.

The seminar is very practical, giving couples the tools to identify and change attitudes and behaviours that detract from the magnificent vision that God, and the Church, calls couples to live. The seminar draws together the insights of some of the most experienced international relationship educators and the vision of marriage espoused in John Paul II's Theology of the Body for a practical and effective renewal experience.

Celebrate Love is an initiative of the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Centre (PMRC) in Australia. The seminar was first introduced to Australia in 1992 and has since had over 800 couples attend. The newest initiative of the PMRC is "Embrace: Preparing to Live in Love". This is a parish-based marriage preparation programme that is facilitated by Mentor couples over six sessions. Celebrate Love is used with excellent results as a formation experience for those preparing for other ministries such as marriage preparation (including Embrace) and family ministry. More information about the seminar can be obtained at www.celebratelove.com.au

Places are limited so please book early to avoid disappointment!

contact: **Edmund Adamus**, Director for Pastoral Affairs, Ambrosden Avenue, London SW1P 1QJ.

Mary

Choices & Responsibilities

A sermon on Luke 1: 26 to 36 by Rev Pat Hall,
Epsom United Reformed Church, 18th Dec, 2005

Mary was right to be deeply troubled by the visit from the angel Gabriel. Little more than a child herself, she was about to be told that she would have a child, and not in the normal way of things either. It could hardly have seemed to her that she was being blessed by the Lord in all this. We understand that Mary was young, and poor and about to be married. There was no reason at all why God should have a message for such a person. There must have been any number of young women in more suitable circumstances than Mary. But we learn from Mary's story that what God considers suitable and what we consider suitable, are not necessarily the same thing.

We might suppose that Mary would have been overjoyed by being told that the Lord had greatly blessed her. But she knows better, doesn't she? Being greatly blessed by God has enormous consequences.

This angel that visits her, Gabriel, we are told, does not seem to be a bad chap at all. When he sees how frightened Mary is, he comforts her and tells her not to be afraid. Mary, however, is not stupid, and when the angel tells her that she will have a child who would be the son of God, she cuts through his talk with a simple question of how she can become pregnant while still a virgin. All the while, it is clear that God is *calling* Mary to do this. God is *not making* her go through with it. She is not yet pregnant. She has to agree to it first, which she does.

Mary must certainly have wondered if she really wanted to be blessed by God at all. If this is a blessing, she might have thought, what is a curse. For nothing could have been much worse than for her to marry while pregnant by a man who was not to be her husband. What terrible circumstances, we might say, under which to start a married life. Blessings *are* dubious, aren't they? If we are blessed, the implication is, then we must share that blessing. A blessing is not something that we own. It comes from God and therefore we do not have total control over it. Being blessed by God is sometimes, perhaps often, painful, if we take it seriously. There is an old hymn that tells us to count our blessings to see what God has done. But we need to do more than count them, we need to use them and share them. And this is what Mary seems to know, that being blessed by God does not mean a life of ease. For many of us, blessings have been seen as something that you invest or that you capitalize on in some way. Blessings for much of the western world have become equated with such things as material goods, happiness, ease, status, security.

Mary

Choices & Responsibilities

Luke actually makes it all seem as though it was easy for Mary to accept what the angel tells her. Yes, he tells us that she was afraid, but in the end, she seems to be calm in her acceptance. But we know this could not have been easy. She must have been desperate. She was, after all, about to become an unwed pregnant teenager. Who would believe her? Would this jeopardize her chances of getting married? We can only imagine the anguish that she must have gone through. She must have had thoughts for this child, how she would look after it. She must have wondered what would happen to her.

One aspect of the Christian journey is about being 'out there' concerned with the big questions facing the world. Travelling the advent journey means being caught up in God's concern for all of creation.

One thing that strikes me about this story is that Mary does not stop to say, wait until I am older, or wait until I am married, or wait until I have saved up a little money, or wait until I talk to my parents or to Joseph. She doesn't say, wait until the circumstances are a little better. And I am reminded of how perfect must be the circumstances before many people today will undertake an act of generosity or self-sacrifice. I am reminded also that some of the most generous people that I have ever known, have been people who did not have much in the way of material goods, who by most calculations had the least to share. At the same time, I also recall that often these circumstances under which Mary was called, are similar in some ways to ones to which we are called. People do not get sick at convenient times, for the most part, or lose their jobs only when all the debts are paid. We often do not perceive that God is present or absent until it is drawn to our attention, through an unexpected gift, perhaps, or through a crisis. We can be reminded from the story of Mary that what we think it takes to answer God's call, may not be what God thinks is needed. God is telling us that people can be generous and able even though they may appear poor to us. We have often thought that we are the ones who can help the poor of the world. We have all too frequently gone into countries and told them how to do things, without respecting what they might have to give or to teach us. Sometimes, too, that which we think is a gift or a talent of our own, may not be the thing God wants us to use or give. Sometimes our gift lies in what we can't do, or think we can't do. Sometimes our blessing lies in some perceived poverty. That may be where we hear God speaking most clearly to us. It can be tempting to look at our musical talents or our knowledge or our artistic ability and see God's blessing there, and indeed, these things *are* genuine blessings. But God's blessing for Mary came in her poverty and

Mary

Choices & Responsibilities

in her youth. It came at the wrong time in the wrong country. What I want to say, is that God may call us to do something we do not think that we are ready for. God may see in us and in others, things that we cannot see ourselves. This story calls us to look at one another, to look at ourselves, to look at people, with new eyes. It challenges us to really try to see others and ourselves as God sees us.

To be frank, I don't know what to make of all these angels and things. What do you make of them? I most profoundly believe that God works through the natural order of things, but that sometimes things happen that cannot be expressed through common everyday language, through the language of reason or science. At such times we have to resort to the language of poetry or art, to the imagination. I don't think that a belief in angels is a necessary component of the story, but I do think that a belief that God uses ordinary people as messengers is.



There is just one other thing in the passage from Luke that I want to look at and that is when the angel Gabriel says to Mary, "Remember your relative Elizabeth". God asks a great deal from Mary, but God does not ask her to face it alone. The angel makes sure that she knows where she can go for help and understanding. Elizabeth, after all, also had a visit from the angel. She is impossibly pregnant, as Mary soon will be. Perhaps this even is the turning point for Mary, that there will be someone to whom she can turn, someone who will understand. It is so easy for us to feel we must be independent, we must not bother other people, we must not ask for help, and so on. Who have you turned to for help at one time or another in your life? Did you seek out someone whom you felt would understand? We do not need to be Christians standing alone, either here nor in this country, nor in the world. We are here to share one another's burdens, and we do the will of God not only by helping someone else with theirs, but by being able ourselves to seek help when we are in need of it.

Update on the . . .

Trans Atlantic Super-Region

Progress is continuing in establishing and developing the Super-Region. The first meeting of the Super-Regional Support Team is due on 29th March to 2nd April, and the first official appearance of the Super-Region will be at Lourdes in September. The Support Team consists of

Super-Regional Couple Paul & Helena McCloskey

Chaplain Fr Ken Payne

Newsletter Couple Antony and Janet Denman

And the Regional Couples in each of the 5 Regions within the Super Region

Central Britain Mike & Kay Vadon

Northern Britain Peter and Di Wordsworth

Southern Britain Chris and Frankie Lane

Ireland Brendan and Moyra Bunting

Trinidad & Tobago Jeff and Pasqui Hoford

In addition, we have Teams in Austria, Malawi and South Africa.

International Leading Team

Gathering in Lourdes from all corners of the world.

Dear Team Friends

Teams of Our Lady has had substantial growth in numbers and in geographic spread in its short life. A contributing factor to this growth and unity has been the early pilgrimages which later became International Gatherings.

This September, Teams couples and Spiritual Counsellors will come from all corners of the earth to gather together in Lourdes. We will come to share together and support one another in our common goal of developing and living out more fully our married spirituality.

In the early days of the Teams movement, Teams pilgrims were mainly French couples and priests and the gatherings took place in France. In 1959 the first big change happened with a pilgrimage to Rome. While mainly European, this Gathering reflected the developing international dimension of Teams. Father Caffarel spoke then of: "The Magnificat, which each member of Teams recites daily, invisibly gathers together all the couples of the Movement from Europe, America and Africa." By 1970, again in Rome, reflecting on Pope Paul VI address to the Gathering, he spoke of: "the Movement of more than 20,000 couples grouped in 3,500 Teams established in 36 countries in all five continents. "

When we meet in Lourdes this September, we will be representing more than 50,000 couples from 10,000 Teams in over 70 countries. These couples will represent so many cultures joined together in the one faith. The joy we will experience together will be an expression of the words of Pope Paul VI to that group in Rome in May 1970 when he said: "Dear Sons and Daughters, the Church, whose living and active cells you are, gives through your homes a sort of experimental proof of the power of saving love, and brings forth its fruits of holiness..... You are preparing for the Church and for the world a new springtime whose first buds already makes us thrill with joy."

Why is it that the numbers of people attending Gatherings keep increasing, given that for many it is at enormous cost in time and money?

From our own experience, we feel that attendance at such an event is a life changing experience. Setting out from home, to come to meet our fellow Team brothers and sisters, is an adventure. We meet and share together, we pray together, we attend conferences together. The themes of the gatherings are a result of much collegial thought, listening to the responsible couples from every Region in the world – for Lourdes this was most especially at the meeting in Rome in January 2003.

International Leading Team

Living in today's world, we must always be aware of the signs of the times and the new demands they make on us, bringing forth new realities and new challenges. The orientation of our Movement always tries to help us to discern our responses to follow the Christian way of life, and meeting the needs that arise in our lives as a couple.

The Team meetings during the Gathering with other couples and spiritual counsellors from many cultures, sitting with us, pooling, sharing, praying together, are very rich and deep experiences. The relationships built over the short time at the gathering create a link which is never forgotten.

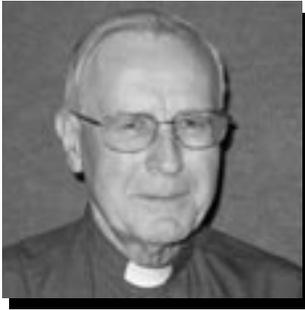
Such Gatherings of so many members are a wonderful expression of solidarity and unity! It reminds us of the feeding by Jesus of the 5,000 with the loaves and the fishes. We will come to Lourdes hungry to be fed spiritually, with an appetite for the messages which we shall receive. We shall not go away hungry and we will all try to bring home plenty of spiritual food to the members of our Teams who may not have been able to attend. Those at home will accompany us with their prayers and in spirit. We shall remember them daily as we pray and thank God for the opportunity given to us.

In Rome in 2003, while preparing for this next Gathering and while developing the Orientation of the Movement for the years ahead, we were addressed by Pope John Paul II. He reminded us of our responsibility in these words: "Dear Friends, I thank God for the faithfulness of your Movement throughout the world, encouraging you to witness untiringly and explicitly to the beauty of human love, marriage and the family."

Perhaps we are still in that springtime that Pope Paul VI spoke of and at Lourdes, we will see many new buds emerge and experience the joy!

Love and God Bless you all
John and Elaine Cogavin





Teams Turning Towards Our Lady Of Lourdes

Many of us are going to gather in Lourdes. Father Caffarel placed the Teams under the patronage of Our Lady. These are both good reasons to pause for a moment and meditate on the presence of Mary in the Church and in our Christian life.

Mary's role in the history of salvation could almost be summed up in one simple word: "yes". At the angel's annunciation, this daughter of Sion, in whom all her people's expectation is concentrated, accepted the mission of being the Mother of the Messiah. In her, humanity in its purest and beautiful form, accepted the presence of God. In her, the Word of God took on the human condition.

Mary's "yes" expressed her free, humble, unconditional faith. In Mary, hope nourished by listening and welcoming the Word of God, resulted in the central act of the whole of our history. All through her life, she pondered in her heart the Word spoken to her. Throughout her Son's life, she showed total compliance even to joining her self-offering to that of Jesus on the Cross. Beyond Easter morning, she witnessed the birth of the Church through the action of the Spirit, just as the action of the Spirit had caused the Son of God to be born in her. Present in the early church community, she lived out the Eucharist "as though she was welcoming again in her womb the heart that had beaten in unison with hers" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, No 56).

Through faith, Mary goes before us and inspires us. We pray to her with love, for we know how to find in her the perfect realisation of the Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure of heart, they will see God". Where better than in the immaculate Heart of Mary can human beings combine an intelligent understanding of the Christian message with the wholehearted contemplation of the love of God?

From Father Fleischmann

The grace which filled Mary and her total and humble “yes” to her vocation mean that she is an outstanding figure in the Church. Tradition has rightly seen in her, as Saint Ambrose taught, “a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No 63). Continuing its reflection on the link between Mary and the Church, the Council went on to say: “By her faith and obedience, ...she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father... whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (Rm 8:29) namely the faithful, in whose birth and education she cooperates with a maternal love” (L.G. 63).

We can – especially in Lourdes – entrust to Mary, our helpful mother, the couples in Teams and their children as did our predecessors in 1954: “All the couples in Teams open themselves to you, Mary. Dwell in our home. Teach us about your Son. Teach us to love and imitate him”.

In Lourdes, as in every mass, we will give thanks to God with the Holy Virgin. Is not the Magnificat the prayer of Teams? John Paul II invited us to read it again in a Eucharistic perspective: “When Mary exclaimed: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour’, Jesus was present in her womb. She praised the Father ‘for’ Jesus, but also praised him ‘in’ Jesus and ‘with’ Jesus... The Eucharist is given to us in order that our life, like that of Mary, be entirely a Magnificat” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, No 58).

François Fleischmann

Report From Mauritius

Small in size but great in Spirit.

Mauritius welcomed the 10th meeting of the International College of the Teams of Our Lady



As happens every year, the International Leading Team and the College met in July; this year it was at 'Quatre Bornes' at the centre of Mauritius.

This meeting of all the leaders of our Movement was a moment of grace. The written contributions of leading couples and Spiritual Counsellors, submitted during the past year, were read and re-read.

It was also a time of discernment of the signs of the times and for defining the spiritual orientations and the practical actions that need to be carried out in the current and following years.

It was a very special time of meeting the teams and team members of the country welcoming us. It is an opportunity to discover experiences lived in other places than those we are used to visit and to discover the Church. We appreciated the quality of our meetings with committed priests and lay people of Mauritius and also with their Bishop, Monseigneur PIAT. He shared with us his country's unique experience in the Pastoral Ministry to Families.

We reflected this year on the Sacrament of Marriage and on married spirituality. We also considered the roles of priest, religious or lay Spiritual Counsellors and also of Regional and Sector Couples.

Lourdes and its preparation were at the heart of our reflections and we were able to approve together, as a College, the Movement's orientations and post-Lourdes study topics. We gave thought also to the programme of this very special time that will bring very many of us together in Lourdes from the 16th to the 21st of September 2006 (8,800 people throughout the world have already provisionally booked...). What a grace are all these provisional bookings and the decision of all the countries of the world to participate!

All the members of the College committed themselves to pray for the success of this great gathering. It will be the 10th since the creation of Teams of Our Lady in the course of which we will have the opportunity to celebrate the 10th anniversary of our founder's, Father Henri Caffarel, call to God.

With our fraternal friendship

Gérard and Marie-Christine de ROBERTY

Teams In Syria

Syria, which has been densely and continually inhabited for centuries

is at a crossroads that has enriched the numerous civilisations that have shaped our contemporary world. Many Syrians have given their name to history such as Apollodore, the architect of Trojan's Forum in Rome and Publius Syrius the writer. The throne of the Roman Empire was occupied by four outstanding women: the famous Syrian Julias and later by Heliogabale, Severa, Alexandra and Philippa the Arab.

Syria was the first country to be evangelised. Setting out from Jerusalem, the Apostles came to Syria. It was in Damascus, the present capital, that Saul was converted and took the name of Paul; and it was at Antioch, the then capital city, that the name "Christian" was first given to the disciples. Furthermore, 8 Syrian Popes have occupied the see of Saint Peter; and there are a number of Syrian saints such as Saint Ephrem, Saint John Chrysostome and Saint Ignasius of Antioch.

There are many Christian and Muslim communities in Syria that live in perfect harmony and mutual tolerance. The Christians who make up only 8% of the population (1.5 millions out of 18 millions) are divided among:

- several Catholic Churches in union with Rome (of the Melkites, Syrian, Armenians, Chaldeans, Maronite and Latin Rites),
- Orthodox Churches (of the Greek, Syrian and Armenian Rites) and
- Evangelical Protestant Churches.

This diversity only enriches Syria's religious and liturgical life.

Pope John Paul II's visit to Syria in 2001, as a pilgrim in the steps of Saint Paul, was a turning point in the history of Eastern Churches. Indeed, the eyes of the whole world were turned towards Syria and the exceptional ecumenical situation that binds the various communities together, must no doubt have born fruits elsewhere. Furthermore, this visit highlighted the treasures of Christian architecture and encouraged tourism and Pauline pilgrimages. This gave Christian Syrians a new confidence in their country and, as a consequence, put a break on the trend to emigration.

Teams In Syria

Tteams of Our Lady were introduced in Syria, at Lattaquia, in 1970.

A Lebanese couple piloted the first Syrian team which is still in existence. Teams then developed in other towns simultaneously: Damascus, Aleppo and Homs. There are currently 44 teams divided into five Sectors.

The movement in Syria has three characteristics:

1. Mission

The couples appreciate the value of what they have received and are keen to invite young couples to join them to share in their spiritual venture. As a result, the movement has expanded as much in Catholic as in Orthodox circles. Indeed 8 Orthodox teams were formed in Lattaquia; they use the same documentation and practise the same spirituality without however being members of the movement.

Recently, after several contacts with couples in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and other Arab Emirates, two teams have started in Dubai composed of a mixture of Syrian and Lebanese couples. A Lebanese couple provided the information and is piloting the teams by travelling to Dubai for one week in each month.

2. Publications

Given that everything is done in Arabic during meetings and sessions, all documents are translated from French into Arabic and then printed in limited numbers. This requires special efforts and finances. Only one local study topic was written by a priest Spiritual Counsellor on the occasion of the Pope's visit to Syria. It is based on themes that the Holy Father spoke on during his visit and which are of interest to Syrian Christians. Recently, a degree of cooperation on translations has begun with Lebanese teams.

3. Spiritual Retreats

Since there are not enough retreat centres in Syria, this endeavour is made possible by the Syrian Leading Team by means of three three-day retreats in summer and one only in winter. All team members look forward eagerly to these retreats so as to live out together these special times in the year when they can draw spiritual nourishment.

Father Caffarel Speaks To Us



PHASE 4: EXPANSION & LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

From “Vocation and Itinerary of Teams”
1959 Rome Pilgrimage

Concluding his presentation at the 1959 Rome Pilgrimage, Father Caffarel noted that the Charter had taken three years, from 1947 to 1950, to be established; and that the Movement had, by 1959, lived by it for 9 years and was the better for it.

EXPANSION

In the period after the Charter, Teams developed rapidly in France, Belgium and Switzerland. It is obvious that the Movement was the answer to many couples' aspirations; but would it leap over language frontiers and over the oceans? In fact, and independently of any publicity - for we are strongly averse to it - Teams have spread from year to year to 19 countries by 1959: in 1950 to Brazil, in 1951 to Luxemburg, in 1952 to Flemish-speaking Belgium, in 1954 to Spain (teams by correspondence were established in that same year), in 1956 Portugal, Mauritius and [French-speaking] Canada, in 1957 Holland and Great Britain [French-speaking team in London], in 1958 Germany, Colombia and the United States.

This unexpected expansion seems to prove that Christian couples' aspirations to join together to live out their faith better is one of those ground swells of which the history of the Church has given us so many examples. Only yesterday, I heard of such an example: one of our French couples, who had settled in California for a time, had spoken about retreats for married couples to people around them; twenty-five couples were willing to give it a try and came back full of enthusiasm from such a retreat. And since I am on the subject of America, I must not fail to mention the important movements for couples in Argentina, Uruguay and the United States. Based on an outlook that is rather different from ours, they are working admirably for the development of Christian married life. Valuable bonds of friendship have been forged between them and us.

Father Caffarel Speaks To Us

A unified international leadership

The upsurge of Teams of Our Lady overseas gave rise to a new problem. Should we create an independent national leadership in each country or contemplate a large movement with a unified leadership? This question was debated at length in the course of international meetings. Finally, we opted in favour of a single movement. This was not for convenience, since it lays heavy burdens on the Leading Team, but because it seemed to us that, if one is not constrained by overriding reasons, as applies to cultural, social or political organisations, one must aim at the greatest degree of unity. To do so is to respond to Christ's yearning that he revealed to us in his prayer on the evening of Maundy Thursday: "*That they may be one as we are one*". Besides, does not the example of the great religious orders prove that, in spirituality, there are no frontiers? You are joyfully experiencing this during these days we are spending in Rome.

For the same reason, we have mixed nationalities in teams of 8 pilgrim couples at this gathering. I know that wonderful friendships are already being forged. Is it not thrilling for Christian hearts to see all these couples holding hands across frontiers and oceans?

Having opted in favour of unity, it is essential that the Leading Team should be composed of priests and couples of different countries and that international gatherings should provide the opportunity to share experiences and discoveries. This will be brought about gradually and the necessary structures will be set up and perfected step by step.

It is no less pressing that some couples should devote themselves to the development and apostolic action of the Movement, at both the international and local level.

Need I add that, whilst being a supranational movement, the Teams of Our Lady fully intend to be subject to the Church hierarchy in each country and diocese?

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

As you know only too well, children as they grow up present new problems. The same is true of our Movement. We must expect, therefore, some new phases and new crises. Before concluding my presentation, I would like to speak to you of early warning signs of a fairly imminent fifth phase.

Father Caffarel Speaks To Us

The call to perfection

After a few years in Teams, couples arrive at a crossroad. It often corresponds with the difficult phase when couples are in their forties, which does not make things any easier. They are faced with two paths: one ascending, one descending.

- Some, having gradually reached spiritual maturity, continue to make progress. They do not always analyse what is going on inside them. In fact, the call to perfection makes itself heard at the very heart of their conscience. They discern what loving God entails, its tremendous demands and wonderful generosity, and they ask the Movement to help them to respond to this call.
- Others show signs of sclerosis, of spiritual ageing, of that lukewarm-ness that the Fathers of the desert dreaded so much.
- There are some who write themselves off, like this team member who wrote to his team: *“I consider our religious life as being adequate; I do not see any imperative need to improve it. Besides, our progress through the team has not been very significant up to now and it has proved to be very difficult to achieve. The Movement, being highly idealistic, I must say that life’s struggle has led me to give up any idealism”*.
- There are others, on the other hand, who remain – I was going to say who become ‘encrusted’ into the Movement.
 - Either they observe the rule but – and this is serious - they think that it is enough and are satisfied with themselves. For them, the Charter is a ceiling, not a springboard. In their company, one cannot help thinking of the Pharisees.
 - Or they pick and choose among the obligations of the Charter, if not among the commandments of Christ.

A priest’s anxiety concerning such couples is great. It is like that of parents who discover one day that the mental development of their little boy or girl has stopped. It is one of the most heart-rending ordeals. These couples seem likewise to be stunted in their spiritual growth (I speak of couples, but sometimes it is only one of the spouses that is affected by this condition). The outlook is bleak for such couples for it is an inescapable law that he who does not progress, regresses. Indeed, how many failures we witness!

Father Caffarel Speaks To Us

Nature of our Movement

Faced with the aspirations of some and the tendency of others to let go (the minority, fortunately), I have a feeling that our older teams are at the same decisive crossroad as were those just before the introduction of the Charter. For a choice to come clear, to see the solution, we must consider attentively the nature of our Movement. Are Teams a movement of initiation to the Christian life in marriage or a movement striving for Christian perfection? Only the answer to this question can set us on the right track.

- If Teams are a movement of initiation to the Christian life, they must only retain couples as members for a time. To remain beyond a certain limit in a movement of initiation, makes no sense: it only encourages immaturity. One does not spend one's whole life in a process of initiation. We do not want our movement to be a nursery school of eternal infants, of spiritual weaklings or an association of spiritual pensioners.
- If, on the other hand, Teams are a movement striving for perfection, a "school of perfection", as religious orders were once called, then indeed couples can consider remaining members. But it is important that, having passed the stage of initiation, couples should set their sights on evangelical perfection, that they should take up their Cross, observe the demands of love and progress ever more forward towards total self-giving.

Movement of initiation, movement striving for perfection, which must we choose? My conviction is unhesitating: Teams must be both a movement of initiation and a movement striving for perfection.

- If Teams were only a movement striving for perfection, couples would hesitate to join; or, if they did join, they would hardly know what they were committing themselves to. One must have attained a certain level of spiritual progress to aspire to Christian perfection.
- If Teams were only a movement of Christian initiation, they would very soon disappoint couples that they had led to wish for more.

Theoretically, the solution is simple: after the years of initiation, couples would either leave or set foot on the upward path. In practice, the solution is less easy, but I am convinced that, in the months and years to come, a solution will be found. What is at stake is of capital importance and so I invite you to pray earnestly for this intention.

Father Caffarel Speaks To Us

If I am definite in affirming that the Teams of Our Lady must be, not only a movement of initiation, but also a movement striving for Christian perfection, it is because, in my opinion, the Church has a pressing need today for such movements for married lay people. You know that humanity is growing at a staggering rate and that, according to demographic predictions, it will have doubled by the end of the [20th] century. You know also that priestly vocations – are not only not increasing at the same pace, but are often regressing. The cooperation of lay people in the Hierarchy's apostolate will be even more essential tomorrow than today.

But another, still more fundamental reason, leads me to think that movements of perfection for married lay people is a pressing need in the Church. It is that the holiness of Christ needs to be present today in all sectors of modern life. Our world has an imperative need of lay saints. By this I mean men and women totally dedicated to Christ, full of love, moved by his Spirit: workers, farmers, leaders of industry who are saints; artists and scientists who are saints, politicians who are saints – saints, missionaries and perhaps martyrs. We must not expect them to arise by spontaneous generation. Normally, they will only come from deeply Christian families; they will only be formed and supported by the kind of movements of perfection that I am speaking about.

I have in mind the great centuries of the history of the Church, such as the 12th century in which Christian men and women of outstanding power have worked simultaneously to deepen and renew the Religious Life: Bruno of Cologne who founded the Carthusians, Bernard of Clairvaux, Cistercian Abbot, Norbert of Xanten who founded the Premontrenian Canons and Hildegard of Bingen. I am convinced that, if we know how to pray, the Lord will cause men and women to arise who will do for the deepening and renewal of Christian married life what these giants have done for the Religious Life – men and women who will be founders of what I would call, for want of a better expression, great orders of married lay people within which will be formed those lay saints and apostles of which our world has such a pressing need.

What future might we not hope for the Church, if Christ's shining message on marriage could reach the four corners of the world, if it attracted large numbers of young couples, if it inspired an ever greater number of families in which God was loved by all and above everything?

Henri Caffarel

Prayers For March

from the Lourdes Study Topic 4

Meditation 1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Now, the boy Samuel was serving Yahweh in the presence of Eli; in those days it was rare for Yahweh to speak; visions were uncommon. One day, it happened that Eli was lying down in his room. His eyes were beginning to grow dim; he could no longer see. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in Yahweh's sanctuary, where the ark of God was, when Yahweh called, "Samuel! Samuel!". He answered, "Here I am!" and, running to Eli, he said, "Here I am, as you called me." Eli said, "I did not call. Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. And again Yahweh called, "Samuel! Samuel!" He got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, as you called me." He replied, "I did not call, my son; go back and lie down." As yet, Samuel had no knowledge of Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him. Again Yahweh called, the third time. He got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, as you called me." Eli then understood that Yahweh was calling the child, and he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if someone calls say, 'Speak, Yahweh; for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Yahweh then came and stood by, calling as he had done before, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, Yahweh; for your servant is listening."

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 139: 1-4, 6-10

Yahweh, you examine me and know me

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1.
Yahweh, you examine me and know me,
you know when I sit, and when I rise,
you understand my thoughts from afar.
You watch when I walk or lie down,
you know every detail of my conduct.</p> <p>2.
A word is not yet on my tongue
before you, Yahweh, know all about it.
Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,
a height to which I cannot attain.</p> | <p>3.
Where shall I go to escape your spirit?
Where shall I flee from your presence?
If I scale the heavens you are there,
if I lie flat in Sheol, there you are</p> <p>4.
If I speed away on the wings of the dawn,
if I dwell beyond the ocean,
even there your hand will be guiding me,
your right hand holding me fast.</p> |
|---|---|

Concluding Prayer

Father, may we, like Samuel, come to recognise your voice and listen to your call. We thank you for your strong right hand supporting us, as we strive to carry out your calling. **Amen**

Study Topic - March

Individual Vocation “My Name is Written in Heaven”

The Lord asks us : “ Who do you say I am ? “ We can not answer in a conscious and committed way if we do not ask ourselves : “Who am I ? What am I searching for ? What do I want ? “ To build one’s personality, takes a whole life, for it is only at the end of the journey that we will have fully accomplished God’s design for each one of us.

Then alone will we be able to recognize our names which have been written in heaven since the first day of creation.

Building our Identity

Who am I ? Do I really know myself deep inside ? Such are the questions we ask ourselves along the roads of our life, in particular in times and circumstances of terrible ordeals, when the way we react, the way in which we behave and the very core of our being are called into question, when plans and expectations we had for the future run into obstacles or failures.

Such questions are not new. In ancient Greece, on the front of a temple, one could read: “Discover who you are”, an official request to understand one’s own identity. As we grow older, in our most critical moments, these questions surface again, the answer is never established for good. Over time, we build our identity influenced by events and the people we meet, and our joys and sufferings.

At our birth, we are but a promise to be fulfilled, something all in the making. In our early childhood, we are granted the gifts of love and affection from those close to us, starting with our parents. Cuddles, warmth, food, attentive answers to our basic needs are crucial in laying the foundation of our identity. The pattern continues through teenage years, youth and throughout life, until the very end : we are always in need of love to maintain our balance.

All we have to do is to welcome this gift of love. God is always there in our life through those who greet us, forgive us, lend us a hand, listen to us. “*No one has ever seen God.*” It is only in the men and women we meet that He makes Himself present among us and nurtures our identity.

To Be Named By Him

The greatest temptation is to refuse to accept love and companionship; to have that individualism that boasts that one needs to depend on no one else to live - to say “That is how I am. I won’t change my mind nor the way I behave.” To refuse to let someone else,

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someone who loves us, lend us a hand, that might change us and move us in a different direction. We are not alone, even Peter said to Jesus when he washed his disciples' feet "*Never at any time will you wash my feet!*" Jesus replied, "*If I do not wash your feet, you will be no longer my disciple.*" (Jn 13, 8)

We will live in happiness when we are deeply grateful for the gifts God sends us in those who love us; when we know all the graces that God has granted us. Further, we can not consider the gifts we received as our own treasure, our own possessions. We are called ourselves to become gift for others, as they have been and are for us.

For Us, All Things Are Gifts

Our personality did not come into being at our birth. At that moment, it was just the start of a journey. Our goal is to succeed one day. On our way, God keeps on being a gift to us, in the events of our life. He is to us a caress in the hands of those who love us, who hug us, who hold us up, who share our sorrow, who listen to us, who always call on us, in their kinfolk voices and manners, to have confidence in what life has to offer.

If on our journey through life we have received and shared the gifts of love and life, making room for love and losing everything that is not useful and which could be an obstacle to meeting God, we will end up by achieving a mature identity. The name "child of God" is the identity to which every man or woman is called. Such an identity will mean intimacy with God, an exclusive and unique love relationship for each of us.

"To those who win ... I will give a white stone on which is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it." (Rev 2, 17)

The road to human maturity, in search of one's identity, can then be a thrilling adventure, in which we are mostly asked to let ourselves be loved, to accept the gifts of others who are passing us on God's gift, or better still, who are giving God as gift itself. We can be the temple of the living God. *"Whoever loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him."*(Jn 14, 23)

Questions for our Sit Down

Think about our individual progress in order to name the gifts we received from those who, in our lives, were most meaningful by their presence ; and ask ourselves what were the most important changes that occurred for us and for which we are grateful :



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- Q *I think of the persons and meaningful encounters that were important in my life. What did they bring me ? What treasures did they leave me with ? What changes did they mean for me ?*
- Q *What am I grateful for ?*
- Q *What gifts and positive strengths do I discover in myself today ?*
- Q *Am I aware that the gifts I received from others are now made available ?*
- Q *Looking at a snapshot of one of our first meetings as a couple, what do we see that has changed in the way each of us make others welcome ?*

Questions for the Team meeting



Share some of the thoughts from your sit-down and consider some of the following:

- Q *Taking into account the progress we have made in achieving our identity, what are the bad habits or manners, the fears that we still see in our lives ?*
- Q *What do we think we have to change in ourselves in order to grow and progress as children of God ?*
- Q *What aid can we offer each other to advance in a spiritual way ? What help may we offer each other ?*

Notes

Additional Study Material - extracts from writers on the month's topic
- can be found on the Teams of Our Lady Website

Prayers For April

from the Lourdes Study Topic 5

Meditation 1 Matthew 19: 4-6

He answered, "Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning *made them male and female* and that he said: '*This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh.*' They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide."

As the theme of this meeting is the vocation of marriage, we suggest that team couples renew their marriage vows using the words below, suggested by William Barclay, in place of the responsorial psalm.

Couples say in turn :- I Promise to Continue to Love and Cherish You (*Insert Christian Name of Partner*), For Better For Worse, For Richer For Poorer, in Sickness And in Health, Till Death Us Do Part.

Prayer (all say together) :-

O God, I thank you that you have given us another year of life together. I thank you for the love which grows more precious, and for the bonds which grow more close every day. I thank you for the happiness we have known together; for the experiences of sunshine and of shadow through which we have come.

I ask your forgiveness for any disloyalty on my part; for any times when I was difficult to live with; for any selfishness and inconsiderateness; for any lack of sympathy which spoiled, even for a moment, the perfect relationship which marriage should be.

Spare us to each other to go on walking the way of life together, and grant that for us It may be true that the best is yet to be. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.
Amen

The Call To Become A Couple

We all have a vocation. The call and the answer of the sacramental “I Do” during the marriage service is also a call to a lifelong vocation to be lived out day by day.

Love is a great force that leads us to create and to build relationships; conjugal love is THE relationship above all others, it is focussed on reciprocity and a lifelong union.

Awareness Of The Married Vocation

The Call To Be A Person

No man is an island: life is the result of a call to be. It is not through our own will that we have come into the world as unique and irreplaceable human beings; we have not asked to be born. After living for nine months in the womb in a state of total well being, with all our needs fulfilled without having to ask, we are born into a complete union with our mother, attached by an umbilical cord which leaves our identity in abeyance, while we are waiting to become a person in our own right.

Those who fail to establish good relationships from birth, primarily with their mothers but also with their fathers and the others in the family, may be unsure of their identity, and continually have to ask for “permission to live”. They tend to get into relationships that do not allow them to have a free and autonomous life. For such people, building an identity and establishing adult relationships is much harder.

Conversely, those who experience love are able to develop their own identity. Young people with their own well-balanced *identity*, can accept *otherness*, and recognise *relationships* as sources of blessings in life – they understand that meeting with others leads to a fulfilled life. In marriage we can complement each other and provide what we are missing. Our spouse can be for us a strong, significant and effective image of the *totally Other who is God*.

In this crucial phase of early adult life we come to a mature understanding of our vocation, and the call to the encounter with the other becomes clearer. *Vocation* is the choice of a life in search of God and of service to the community. We should accord the same importance to choosing our life partner.

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The Call To Become A Couple

Love is a great force which takes us out of ourselves. *Falling in love* is a time of emotional intensity; it creates a dynamism which drives out selfishness. The discovery of the other becomes an adventure which leads us to wish to become a couple. This first phase of love is succeeded by a calmer phase leading, hopefully, to a stable and faithful *union*.

The first type of love (*Philia*, or *friendship*), is the first form of relationship outside of the family, a form of knowledge and exploration of the mystery of the other. Like all the stages of love, it is destined to last a lifetime, and to become a sharing of interests

The second, *Eros*, the physical attraction towards the other, is a very powerful, energising force in the relationship, which should be exclusive to the married couple. *Eros* is intrinsically good if it is *used in the context of marriage* leading towards *communion*. It becomes immoral if it is used outside the marriage. Even within marriage it can be destructive if wrongly directed.

If as individuals we have learnt to choose, to be discerning, to challenge ourselves, to educate ourselves and to set goals, we must also base our relationship as a couple on a *joint plan*, a plan which is based on our own particular talents, which is open to new life, both in the shape of our own children, and also to the life of our community. This joint plan must be kept continually under review, in the light of the challenges that life brings. We should aim to make our plan a small part of God's mysterious plan for mankind.

The Foundations Of The Conjugal Relationship

In marriage God speaks to us through the other. It is this that makes marriage a sacrament, an outward sign, full of the meaning of the existence of a Love which is the source and origin of all human love.

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Questions for our Sit Down



- Q My identity has its roots in childhood relationships. How did I experience the love which has given me “permission to live” ? What are the dark and bright sides of my identity and how are they influenced by my family of origin ?
- Q In the search for my partner, did I receive a call to otherness, a path towards a vocation ? To what extent were we conscious of answering a call when we got married ?
- Q What threatens the continuing development of our vocation as a couple ? Are we able to be for the other, the image of the Other ? Are we able to show the other, the face of God?
- Q Conjugal relationship should allow for sharing and unselfishness, yet also give space for being an individual. Conjugal spirituality implies that we go beyond our individual plans and that we place ourselves with confidence in the love of God. What roles do sharing and unselfishness play in our own experience?

Questions for the Team meeting



- Q How have team discussions helped us to become conscious of our married vocation?
- Q Has team life modified or enriched our relationship ?
- Q In the social and parish circle in which we live, what is being done to foster the vocation of marriage, and to help engaged couples plan their relationship as a union in the Lord and to commit themselves to the harmonious development of their relationship ? Could or should anything more be done ?

Prayers For May

from the Lourdes Study Topic 6

Meditation Acts 18: 1-4, 18-21, 24-26

After this Paul left Athens and went on to Corinth, where he met a Jew named Aquila whose family came from Pontus. He and his wife Priscilla had recently left Italy because an edict of Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Paul went to visit them, and when he found they were tentmakers, of the same trade as himself, he lodged with them and they worked together. Every Sabbath he used to hold debates in the synagogues, trying to convert Jews as well as Greeks.

After staying on for some time, Paul took leave of the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had his hair cut off, because of a vow he had made. When they reached Ephesus, he left them, but first he went alone to the synagogue to debate with the Jews. They asked him to stay longer, but he declined, though when he took his leave he said, "I will come back another time, God willing." Then he sailed from Ephesus.

An Alexandrian Jew named Apollos now arrived in Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, with a sound knowledge of the Scriptures, and yet, though he had been given instruction in the Way of the Lord, and preached with spiritual fervour and was accurate in all the details he taught about Jesus, he had experienced only the baptism of John. He began to teach fearlessly in the synagogue and, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they attached themselves to him and gave him more instruction about the way.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 15

Yahweh, who can dwell on your holy mountain?

1. Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent,
who can dwell on your holy mountain ?
Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly,
who speaks the truth from the heart.
2. who does not wrong a comrade,
who casts no discredit on a neighbour,
who looks with scorn on the vile
but honours those who fear Yahweh.
3. who stands by an oath at any cost,
who asks no interest on loans,
who takes no bribe to harm the innocent.
No one who so acts can ever be shaken.

Concluding Prayer

Dear Lord, we give thanks, as Paul did, for couples who stand up to be counted, for your sake. We pray that we can offer the same hospitality as they did in time of need, and that we are not afraid to speak of you and your love. Send your spirit to support us as we live out our vocation as married couples. **Amen**

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Our Individual Answer & Our Answer As A Couple

Our faith is founded on Love, and Love is only true if it embraces people of all cultures and all religions. Sometimes our zeal as believers leads us to restrict our love to our brothers and sisters in the faith. This is wrong. The

Lord was clear: he came to save all human beings.

We must therefore live our faith in an open and universal spirit. We must be able to broaden our horizons and to recognise the value of "otherness" and so see the face of Christ in everyone.

Marriage, An Ongoing Sacrament

The desire to live together in an exclusive and faithful relationship grows from a couple's love. Christian couples have the joy of knowing that their marriage is a sacrament, a sign, having a real connection with the eternal covenant between God and his people. Too often though, couples place more importance on the wedding ceremony, with its important vows, than on the on-going daily sacrament of marriage.

Other special events or public celebrations can be meaningful in the life of a couple : wedding anniversaries, baptisms of children, liturgical celebrations with the renewal of wedding vows. But the liturgy of a couple's life and of their marriage is a more secular liturgy, more domestic than religious, public or festive liturgies. The sacrament of marriage is lived out when –

- a couple invites friends to dinner and shares their meal with them,
- couples work together in society or church witnessing to the joys of marriage,
- tired spouses sit up by the bed of their children,
- spouses listen to each other, are open to each other, reveal their truest self to each other, and share their life in communion and in the physical harmony of their bodies.

The altar of this sacrament is not abstract and metaphorical; rather it is the kitchen table around which the family is gathered together, the bed in the room where the spouses celebrate their love.

Ongoing Training

As marriage is an ongoing sacrament throughout the couple's life, marriage preparation offered to engaged couples is insufficient. Church pastoral practice pays more attention to the celebration of sacraments than to ongoing training. Movements such as the

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Teams of Our Lady are precious in the help they provide to spouses, offering to accompany them with progressive and demanding guidance and support with the benefit of a small welcoming community.

The Fruitfulness Of A Couple

Training is not an end in itself ; it is the fruitfulness of the results which is important. When one speaks of a couple's fruitfulness, one thinks, first of all, of their *biological capacity* to procreate children. To beget offspring would seem to be an obvious and natural occurrence in the life of a couple. Until the start of the 20th century, life expectancy was so short that life as couple was the same as procreating and educating children, to the extent that one would think that it was the only purpose of being together. Now that life expectancy has become far greater, it has become more obvious that conjugal life involves different stages, all tied together in a process of *building a vital and permanent relationship*, a communion that is the life goal of the couple and that shines forth and gives life in a range of fruitfulness - not only by the procreation of children, but also by generous *openness* of the family through *adoption* or sponsorship; by tactful and constant *support* to old aged and dependant parents; by the couple being active in society and in the Church, able to listen and enter into dialogue, achieve enriching sharing experiences and choose the common good. The couple does not extinguish individual purposes, rather the couple establishes common goals. Each couple, according to its background and particular life circumstances, will be able to establish its own unique **fruitfulness**.

Fruitfulness - A Gift To Pass On

Being conscious that we are a small component of creation makes us aware that life does not in fact begin with ourselves ; all we can do is pass life on. What is expected of a couple is not to be prolific, but rather to become a fruitful soil. It is God and his Word that are fruitful (Is 55, 10-11) but the Word will only achieve its fruitfulness and bear abundant fruit when it falls on good soil (Lk 8, 5-8.11-15). So it is with the couple : it is the love of God, the love that unites the spouses that is fruitful. The world is in dire and pressing need of fruitful couples. We must feel compelled to become a good soil and to receive with open arms the gifts that life bestows upon us. We are asked in an ever more demanding way to receive these gifts unconditionally, accepting the most exciting challenges, taking advantage of yet unknown possibilities for relationships, communion, prosperity and peace, and at the same time facing up to the most frightening dangers that jeopardize our very presence on the planet.

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Couples As Ministers

Between the couple and the church community, there should be a **reciprocal relationship**. The community must bear witness to the faith it has in the couple ; the couple must share the gifts it has with the community and, in its midst, grow in their particular charisms. Married lay persons have a particular mission to play. The couple's part in witnessing the faith and evangelising may include support to religious who have chosen *celibacy for the Kingdom*, by offering them the warmth of family links and enriching sharing experiences. More than this, the couple has its own evangelising mission, in which it enters with its own charisms, in line with the tradition launched by the first Christian couples (Ac 18, 1-3.11.18-21.24-28).

The couple can fulfill this mission by being witnesses of the values they hold, by hospitality, mercy and consideration for difference. Revisiting our experience in the light of God's Word, conceiving a theology of the couple grounded in the everyday life as a couple, living our married life as a sacramental vocation, answering God's calling with a constant "Yes" to his love that invites to always explore new horizons: those are ways to fulfill our vocation as a couple.

Questions for our Sit Down



- Q We live our marriage as an “ongoing sacrament” In responding to God’s call for lifelong witness, do we show others that our human love is the sign of God’s Love ?

- Q When we got married, did we establish our “fruitfulness purpose” ? What measure of fruitfulness do we consider we have achieved ? At our present stage of life, to what kind of fruitfulness do we feel we are called to ?

- Q What have the Teams of Our Lady brought us to help us to find an answer and support our conjugal vocation ?

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Questions for the Team meeting



Share the answers from your sit-down and then consider the following:

- ❑ What do we expect of the Teams of Our Lady at the present stage of our life as a couple and as a team ?
- ❑ While being faithful to the founding Teams of Our Lady charisms, in what way should Teams evolve to respond to the needs of modern day couples ?
- ❑ What ministerial duties would we be able to take on ? Does our team help us to practise discernment ? Does it encourage us to be available for service in Teams or the wider community ?

Notes

Additional Study Material - extracts from writers on the month's topic
- can be found on the Teams of Our Lady Website

notice board

Lent 2006

Silent Retreat

Come and relax in a peaceful and prayerful atmosphere and let the presence of God "work" on you.

**Friday 30th March
to**

**Sunday 2nd April 2006
St Peter's Grange,
Prinknash Abbey**

"Only the experience of silence and of prayer offers the appropriate setting in which the truest, the most faithful and the most coherent knowledge of the mystery of Christ can mature and develop"

Pope John Paul II

**The retreat will be given by a
monk from the abbey**

**For further information & application phone:
Harry & Clotilde Meigh**

Literature Stockist

John Goodwill,



16th - 21st September 2006

Come and join us!

Already 30 couples and 4 spiritual counsellors from our region have booked their places at the International Gathering in Lourdes. This is fantastic news. For those who are still thinking of going, the time for registration has been extended until the end of May.

Contact: Tom & Maureen Hoban

Team Prayer

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exults in God my saviour;
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,
for the Almighty has done great things for me.
Holy is His name, and His mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear Him.
He has shown the power of His arm,
He has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.
The hungry He has filled with good things, the rich He sent empty away.
He has come to the help of Israel His servant, mindful of His mercy
- according to the promise He made to our ancestors,
of His mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.

Our Lady of the Home, pray for us.

final thought or two
while we work for the boss . . .
. . . the boss works for us