

Sector

Paris

Movement

1938

Guide

of the

Teams Of Our
Lady

Word of God

Responsible Couple

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I INTRODUCTION

Christian couples, united by the sacrament of marriage, are called to follow Christ along the way of love, happiness and holiness. The Teams of Our Lady, a gift of the Holy Spirit, is offered to couples throughout the world, in order to help them to develop and live out their married spirituality.

a) The Beginnings

The Teams of Our Lady was born in a very simple way: In 1938, a young priest in Paris, Father Henri Caffarel, received a visit from a young woman who wished to speak to him about her spiritual life. Soon after, he met her husband. This couple then introduced him to three other couples. And so, the plan of meeting together to reflect on Christian marriage was launched. On the 25 February 1939, these four couples met with Father Caffarel and thus was born the first team of the Movement.

In 1947, *“with the war ended, the groups of couples became the fashion and multiplied”*. *Father Caffarel feared that “couples may be tempted to slacken in the euphoria of the new-found peace and the groups become merely the place for comfortable old friendships... There was a crisis... What should be done in order that the crisis facing our groups moves them forward? I sought an explanation of how holiness had never ceased to flourish in religious orders over the years, in spite of external and internal crises, and I realised that one of the essential factors of the strength and vitality was their rule. Why, I asked myself, should we not propose a rule to married Christians who wish to progress spiritually? Not a rule for monks, but a rule for married lay people”*

Vocation and Itinerary of Teams - Henri Caffarel - Rome 1959

Arising from the inspiration and reflection of Father Caffarel with the first members of 'Groups Caffarel', a common method for couples wanting to live their love more deeply in Christ was gradually developed.

The number of Groups increased and an organisation was gradually put in place. Father Caffarel and the leaders of the Movement then drew up prayerfully, a founding document which was called the “Charter of the Teams of Our Lady”. It contained the essential elements of the “Rule” of the Movement and was promulgated on the 8th of December 1947 in the church of Saint Augustine in Paris.

b) Recognition of the Teams of Our Lady

In 1960, the Movement of the Teams of Our Lady received the first official recognition of the Church via a letter from Cardinal Feltrin, Archbishop of Paris - (Appendix 2).

In 1975, the Decree of Recognition of the Teams of Our Lady as a Catholic Association was granted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Finally, in 1992, a Decree of Recognition as a “Private Association of the Faithful” was granted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity - (Appendix 3)

c) Father Caffarel

The official recognition by the Church is in some way an affirmation of the considerable work of Father Caffarel and of the couples with whom he journeyed. He died on the 18th of September 1996 at Troussures in France at the age of 93.

The couples of the Teams of Our Lady are indebted to Father Caffarel for the depth of meaning he gave to their sacrament of marriage, for making it possible for them to discover the warmth and inspiration of small Christian communities and for showing them the way of contemplation in their busy lives.

“One of the great figures given by God to his Church in the course of this century”.

Cardinal Lustiger 27/9/96

d) Signs of the times

The members of the Teams of Our Lady live in today's world. They are fully part of it and want to be the “yeast in the dough”. This is why they must constantly discern the signs of the times, in order to discover the new realities and the needs of couples today. They must also look for signs of hope in a world that seems increasingly hostile to the Christian faith and where the fundamental values of marriage and of the family are threatened.

The Teams of Our Lady bring this sign of hope to couples in the Church and in the world.

“The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that society produced by marriage and family. Hence Christians and all men who hold this community in high esteem sincerely rejoice in the various ways by which men today find help in fostering this community of love.”

Gaudium et Spes - 47

II THE CHARTER

The founding principles of the Charter were drawn up in order to preserve faithfulness to the original inspirations of the Movement and to offer the teams some firm propositions. Today we are able to judge the effects of such a decision and to appreciate how essential it was for the growth and development of the Movement.

It was with the publication of the Charter that the Movement acquired its permanent name, and the existing “Groups” were invited to accept the Charter and join the Teams of Our Lady.

The Charter, written in 1947, in the language of its time, remains the vital reference document and the corner stone of the Movement. Several modifications were made to the original document over the course of the years and the final version was published in May This date marked the end of the period when Father Caffarel was present in the Movement.

The Charter has become our common heritage. Today inspired by the same ideal of Christian marriage and using the same methods to accomplish it, thousands of couples throughout the world, speaking different languages and from different cultures, discover through their marriage the richness of a deeper love of God.

It was only a few years after the writing of the Charter that Father Caffarel, a prudent man, said: "I must acknowledge that, in the creation of Teams, there was something more than my own inspiration and that of the first couples; there was the inspiration of the Spirit".

Other complementary documents followed:

"What is a Team of Our Lady?" (1977) which redefined the ideal and methods of the Movement in an up-to-date presentation and develops the concept of the team as a community.

"The Second Wind" (1988) which has "the aim of helping teams to discover new reasons for encouragement and provide orientations to live out the inspirations of the Teams of Our Lady with the hope and vitality of a second wind" (The Second Wind). This document also deepens some aspects of the charism of the Teams of Our Lady which until then had not been put forward with the necessary clarity. In particular: self denial inspired by love, the human and Christian meaning of sexuality, and the mission of the Teams of Our Lady in the Church and in the world as a movement of couples.

By the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the renewal of the Movement carries on. Through prayer and reflection, the members of the International Leading Team and the Super-Regional Couples decided to produce a complete Guide on the Movement based on the richness of previous documents.

In his Apostolic Letter "Tertio Millennio Adveniente", Pope John Paul II recalls that

"In the history of the Church, the 'old' and the 'new' are always closely interwoven. The 'new' grows out of the 'old', and the old finds a fuller expression in the new".

Chapter 18

It was following these words of the Pope that, at the dawn of the third millennium of the Christian era, this document: **"The Guide of the Teams of Our Lady"** has been conceived and produced.

III THE REASON FOR THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

The Teams of Our Lady exist in order to help couples discover the riches of the sacrament of marriage and to live out a married spirituality. Through their example, these couples are witnesses of Christian marriage in the Church and in the world.

The Teams of Our Lady is a movement of married spirituality in the Catholic Church and is composed of couples who believe in the ideal of Christian marriage and who want:

- to remain faithful to their baptismal promises,
- to place Christ at the heart of their life,
- to base their married and family life on the Gospel,
- to seek to know better the will of God for man and woman in order to fulfil it,
- to bear witness to the love of God by their life,
- to bring the message of Christ to the world,
- to bear witness to Christian values in their social and working life,
- to give active support to the Church, to the bishops and to the clergy,
- to make their activities a collaboration with God and a service to others,
- to promote marriage and family life in society.

Because they know the difficulties of living as Christians and are aware of their weakness and the inadequacy of their efforts, these couples rely on the support of those who share their ideal and commit themselves to form a “team”.

a) The Aim of the Teams of Our Lady.

The aim of the movement is to help couples to live fully their sacrament of marriage.

“The Teams of Our Lady have as their essential aim to help couples to strive after holiness - no more, no less”.

Father Henri Caffarel.

b) Why Team?

- because the word “team” clearly expresses the spirit and unity necessary for the pursuit of a common goal,
- because they strive together and help each other, being concerned for the other members and for the progress of their spiritual and human life.

c) Why Teams of “Our Lady”?

The Movement is placed under the patronage of Our Lady because it is Mary who leads us to her Son: to Christ who is the centre of the spiritual life of team members. Through her submission to the will of God, Mary is a perfect example to couples of obedience to the Holy Spirit.

IV THE SPIRIT OF THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

a) “Come follow me”.

Christ addresses this call to all baptised Christians inviting them to be always open to his love and to bear witness to it. This call is also addressed to the Christian couple, who are called to find God at the heart of their married love. And so human love becomes an image of divine love.

b) The charism of the Teams of Our Lady.¹

The Teams of Our Lady, a movement of married spirituality, is considered as a gift of God to the Church and to the world.

c) Married spirituality.

The life of the couple, through their Christian marriage, is marked by a sacrament because of their deep commitment to one another and is thus a sign of God's grace. Married love finds its source in God's love. It is at the heart of this relationship that married spirituality is born.

Couples develop their married spirituality through seeking the presence of God and their desire to know and carry out his will in all the ordinary circumstances of life. Divine love finds its expression in human love when their daily life is filled with care and concern for each other, with support and absolute faithfulness, with understanding, and mutual respect, and with a harmony of heart and mind. When even the simplest tasks are done in love, then the Lord is present at the heart of the couple and their spirituality is a lived reality.

The married couple want to live this spirituality in the course of each day. Sometimes it is a struggle to relate lovingly to each other, mistakes are made and people are hurt but they constantly reach out to each other and it is in those moments that they encounter Christ.

“There is a married spirituality that gives direction to the life of the couple. The Teams of Our Lady give you the means to acquire it.”

Father Manuel Iceta: “Towards a Family spirituality”

d) Spirituality of the Teams of Our Lady.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives meaning to particular ways of life, the intuition that “opens” what is obscure to the human mind, and the direction that transforms life into a continual search for communion with God.

¹ The word “charism” comes from the Greek “Charisma” which means “free gift”. It has the same root as the word “charis”, “grace”. Grace is a gift of the Spirit. There are also exceptional Graces called charisms that are gifts to be used for the common good.

e) Gathered in the name of Christ.

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt 18: 20)

A team is more than a human community; it meets in Christ's name. When Christ appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, his words allowed them to understand the Scriptures and to know his message. Similarly, Christ is present during our meetings. Gathered in His name, his Spirit nourishes our faith and makes it grow.

f) Mutual Help

“Bear one another's burdens”. (Gal 6: 2)

It is normal, useful and motivating to ask the help of our friends; this is why the couples of a team help one another in material as well as in spiritual things.

They try to satisfy the four demands of brotherly love: to give, to receive and - what is more difficult - to ask and to know how to refuse.

Mutual help in marriage

Marriage is a union which is constantly evolving, from the first moment that the couples say 'I will' until the moment of return to the Father. The love of the couple will continue to deepen, if mutual support is part of their daily lives. This way, each of them will grow within the marriage, bringing to their relationship the best of their differences and complimentary qualities.

Mutual help on the path to holiness

The couples who join the Teams of Our Lady wish:

- to achieve a deeper sense of union with God,
- to seek holiness in and through their married and family life.

In order to live in greater harmony with God and to know His will, married couples need to adjust their lives to the Gospel.

Because they search together as a team, for a better understanding of the Word of God and practise it in their life, members of the Teams of Our Lady support one another on the way to the kingdom announced by Christ.

Mutual help in prayer

“I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven” (Mt 18: 19)

Comforted by this promise of the presence of Christ in their midst, the members of the Teams of Our Lady pray together, with one another and for one another, with joy and confidence. The Teams of Our Lady chose the Magnificat as their common prayer, to be said daily in union with all the members of the Movement and as a prayer of intercession for all the couples of the world.

Mutual help in deepening their faith

Just as there can be no Christian life without a living faith, there can be no living and growing faith without study or meditation. In practice, many Christians couples give up all efforts at study and meditation, either because they fail to realise their importance, or because they lack time, guidance and training. As a result, their faith remains immature and weak and their knowledge of the will of God and of the teachings of the Church remain superficial and incomplete.

Team couples try therefore to deepen their religious knowledge and pursue this goal with the other members of the team and the help of a spiritual counsellor.

Mutual help at the various stages of married life

The needs and aspirations of couples are different, according to their age and to their years of married life. What the Teams of Our Lady provide must take this into account.

In their first years of marriage, a couple searches to discover the implications of their recent exchange of vows. These young marriages need to “be born” into a supportive community.

- The Teams of Our Lady can contribute the warmth, the support and the help of an extended family.

Later in life, the ideal of married love is put to the test. Faced with the demands of the family, of working life, of job insecurity and the tensions of an increasingly materialistic society, couples need a place where they can share and take a fresh look at the events that affect them. - The understanding and the experience of the team allows the couple to share, openly and in confidence, their worries and their discoveries.

Then comes the “autumn of life”, a time which is lasting much longer than before in this return to the one to one relationship. This time together can be one of renewal and of personal growth. It can also be a time of difficulties and of major phases in life: retirement, illness, and death of the other. - It is the deepening of the Christian life of the couple in a team, which is going to enrich the last years they spend together.

g) Witness

In the Acts of the Apostles it is said of the first Christians; “the company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4: 32).

The Teams of Our Lady are convinced that other couples will feel drawn to Christ and to the sacrament of marriage, if they see Christian couples truly loving one another and helping one another in the search for God and for service to their brothers and sisters.

It is in this spirit that couples who seek an authentic meaning to their married life, will find an important source of support and encouragement in the brotherhood and mutual help of Teams.

V WHAT THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY OFFER

The Teams of Our Lady wish to help married couples live their lives more fully according to the Gospel, with the mutual support of the members of a team and the strength of the Movement as a whole.

a) A community of Christian couples

The Teams of Our Lady offer to each couple:

- a way of living as Christian couples in today's world,
- methods to help them to live as a couple according to the teachings of Christ,
- a community of couples sharing the same ideal,
- mutual help which is spiritual, human and material,
- the opportunity to study and reflect together which leads team members to deepen their faith and helps them to form their conscience,
- guidelines for life to help them to progress in the love of God and of others,
- an organisation to animate and promote the unity of the Movement throughout the world,
- a community of Christian couples united by the sacrament of marriage helped by a spiritual counsellor.

A team of Our Lady is therefore a community of couples united by the sacrament of marriage. It meets "in the name of Christ" and wants to help its members to respond better to Christ's call.

b) In communion with the Catholic Church

The Teams of Our Lady encourage its members to deepen, as a team, their love for the Church and to help each other to become active members of the People of God in communion with its pastors.

On numerous occasions they have been encouraged by the leaders of the Church to uphold the ideal of Christian marriage.

"Thank you for not leaving us alone to proclaim the beauty of love and the greatness of a united and fruitful couple. To all of you, thank you on behalf of all the pastors of the Church. Your task is important since you are, to a great extent, the credibility of the Church".

Cardinal Danneels - 40th Anniversary of the Belgium Charter

c) Team members in the living world

"Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful and conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence..."

(1 Cor 13: 4-5)

Such is the love that we try to live out thanks to the methods of the Teams of Our Lady.

Because of changes that have taken place in society, marriage is going through major upheavals. The number of marriages that fail are numerous and cause irreparable damage to the spouses and to their children.

Couples of the Teams of Our Lady try to bear witness that marriage is a source of love, happiness and holiness as well as of human fulfilment. Living in the world in accordance with the values of the Gospel, they aim to be the yeast in the dough and be present in all the activities of society.

Couples today need the witness of other married couples whose love is lasting and assured of a reasonably predictable future. Such is the characteristic of Christian marriage since the time of Jesus. The couples of the Teams of Our Lady want to be the witnesses of this love and of Christian marriage, in order to be a sign of hope for their brothers and sisters.

VI MEANS OFFERED BY THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

The Teams of Our Lady do not impose a particular spirituality on its members. It wants only to help them to commit themselves, as couples, to follow the way outlined by Christ. To that end they are offered:

- Guidelines for Life
- Endeavours,
- Team Life.

The couples making these methods part of their life, should keep in mind the following three points;

Gradual growth: the Lord takes us as he finds us; it is for each individual to want to progress, little by little, along a path of spiritual growth.

Personal growth: progress is individual and appropriate to each couple: each will have their own pace and their own way of putting into practice the suggestions of the Movement.

Action: there can be no conversion within a person or within a couple unless they translate their desire to progress into precise and well-defined actions.

A) Guidelines for life

To grow in the love of God is a lifelong undertaking; in order to help their members, the Teams of Our Lady offer the following guidelines for life:

a) To help each other to progress in their love of God

- by making a special place for prayer in their life,
- by reading the Word of God regularly and always trying to live by it,
- by constantly deepening the knowledge of their faith,
- by frequenting the sacraments, especially the Eucharist,
- by endeavouring to progress in the knowledge and practice of Christian asceticism²

b) To help each other grow in the love of one's neighbour

- by the couple truly helping each other – through listening, talking, sharing - in all areas of their life, especially in spiritual matters,
- by being always concerned with the human and Christian upbringing of their children,
- by practising generous hospitality as a couple,
- by witnessing to the love of Christ in practical ways, especially by one or several involvements in the Church and in society.

c) Orientations of the Movement suggested at International Gatherings

At the time of the International Gatherings, the Movement proposes orientations which are its priorities for the subsequent years. These 'orientations', which are defined from the observation of the realities and needs of couples, provide a common shared direction for all the members.

B) The Endeavours

To pursue a direction of spiritual and human growth involves making a logical plan and giving oneself the means to follow it faithfully.

“Experience shows that, without precise points of application, guidelines are liable to remain a dead letter”.

What is a Team of Our Lady?

The Teams of Our Lady call these 'precise points of application' : **Endeavours**.

²Asceticism : comes from a Greek word that means “to exercise” - a word evocative of the exercise one takes to keep in good health. Similarly, Christian couples in their married and family life have opportunities to practise asceticism, that is to say: “to exercise selfless love”. The specific points of endeavour are the instruments proposed by the Teams of Our Lady to encourage and nourish this exercise of selfless love.

“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable”.

(1Cor 9: 25)

The Endeavours are an essential characteristic of the Movement. They are not tasks to be accomplished, but inner attitudes that have to be awakened and absorbed in order to lead to a new way of life. They are a discipline that helps Team couples apply the Gospel in their daily life.

Being committed to these six endeavours will change the couple little by little, developing a married spirituality which will draw them closer to God, to their spouse and to others. Members freely make it an 'obligation' on themselves to strive to practise the endeavours. The decision to make the endeavours part of one's life comes from the heart and is a specific effort of will.

Through the effort that is required by each endeavour, couples become more open to the Holy Spirit who acts within them and makes them grow.

The endeavours demand, of each spouse and also of the couple, a commitment which is sometimes difficult to keep. They are not imposed on the members, it is the members who voluntarily commit themselves to the practise of them. Alone, one might be tempted to give up the effort; this is why each person calls on the help and the encouragement of their spouse and of their team.

The endeavours are an invitation to:

- listen regularly to the **“Word of God”**
- turn to God daily in silent prayer: **“personal prayer”**
- pray together daily as a couple: **“conjugal prayer”**, and if possible with the children: **“family prayer”**
- make time each month for true dialogue together: the **“sitting-down”**
- choose some specific points of personal effort: the **“rule of life”**
- make each year a **“retreat”**

a) Listening to the Word of God - to **“listen”** regularly to the Word.

“For the Word of God is living and active” (He 4: 12)

God speaks to us because he loves us. He wants to establish a relationship of love with each one of us - a person to person relationship. He speaks to make himself known to us, to reveal to us his great project of love; to communicate to us his thoughts, his will for us, to offer us his Covenant.

God speaks through Scripture, through Creation, through his interventions in human history, through his prophets, and specially through his Son, Jesus.

The regular reading of the Word allows team members, not only to know God, but especially to root themselves more deeply into the Gospel. It makes each spouse enter into direct contact with the person of Christ. This personal contact is the pillar of any spiritual life since *“ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ”*.

John Paul II

The creative Word of God remains an indispensable source of motivation and of energy for our spiritual growth, personally and as a couple, and for the building of a better world.

This is why the Teams of Our Lady invites each member to read the Word of God daily, making time to read a passage of the Bible, especially the Gospels, and meditating on it in silence in order to understand better what God is saying to us through Scripture.

b) Personal Prayer- to turn to God daily in silent prayer:

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving”.

(Col 4: 2)

We are called to make time for the Lord, for an intimate moment with Him, and to live in his presence.

Daily prayer develops in us the ability to listen to God. It means making time to be alone with God who loves us. It is a time of silent ‘heart to heart’ listening to God, of discovery and of welcoming God’s plan for us.

There are no rigid rules for praying. Each person decides what is appropriate for them in terms of when, where and how. What seems most important to develop this deep union with God is perseverance and regularity.

“Words in contemplative prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love”.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2717

c) Conjugal Prayer – to pray together daily, husband and wife, and if possible, as a family.

“I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one” (Jn 17: 23)

Christ is present in a very special way when the couple pray together. Not only do they renew their “I will” to God, but they achieve a depth of oneness which comes only from the union of hearts and minds in the sacrament of marriage.

Conjugal prayer becomes the common expression of two individual prayers and should come naturally from a life shared together. If the husband and wife each have their own style of prayer, then it is important that they try to develop a common way of praying, in order to discover and experience a new dimension to their married life. Their prayer together will be easier, more authentic and deeper when ‘Listening to the Word of God’ and ‘Contemplative Prayer’ are regularly practised by both spouses.

The Magnificat, the common prayer of the Teams of Our Lady, may be part of this daily prayer.

When there are children, it is important to set aside a special time for family prayer. The home is the first place of learning for children. It is for the parents to pass on the faith to them and to make the home a place where they feel at ease with prayer. Growing children may wish for a more personal time with God. Nevertheless, some are willing to share a time of prayer as a family - for example: before meals.

d) The “Sitting-down” - to make time each month for dialogue between the couple.

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”.

(Eph 2: 21)

The Sitting-down helps us to reveal ourselves gradually to our spouse.

It is a time for the husband and wife to speak together calmly and in truth in the presence of the Lord. This time for the couple to express their feelings and thoughts, results in better knowledge of each other and in mutual help. It is an opportunity to review the past, to analyse married and family life, to make plans for the future and to speak of the ideal that they have for their life.

The Sitting-down prevents routine setting into married life and keeps their love and their marriage, young and alive. Its value is appreciated by all the couples who practise it. They find in this coming together the opportunity to love each other more.

It is desirable to begin the Sitting-down with a time of prayer or of silence in order to become aware of the presence of God. The silence deepens the thoughts that each one has of the other, it brings them closer to God and creates an atmosphere suitable for sharing.

e) The Rule of Life - to choose some personal endeavours.

“Let every one see that you are interested only in the highest ideals”

(Rom 12: 17)

The Rule of Life consists of one or more points on which each spouse decides to concentrate their efforts, so that they can follow their chosen path of growth and respond with joy to God’s call to love.

The Rule of Life helps the spouses to adhere more personally and more concretely to God’s plan for the person and for the couple. It is one or more practical steps that one takes in order to progress along the path of spiritual and human growth. It is definitely not a case of multiplying resolutions but of reinforcing little by little, with perseverance, some of our weak points or improving some of our qualities.

As we reflect on the various aspects of our personal, married and family life as Christians, we seek the truth about ourselves so as to recognise what acts as a barrier to God’s will.

The progress of our spiritual life is not along a continuous path: we must constantly start again. That is why it is necessary to review our Rule of Life regularly.

f) The Annual Retreat - to make a retreat every year

“You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while”

(Mk 6: 31)

Team members are encouraged to make sufficient time each year for a retreat, as couples if possible, so that they can reflect on life in the presence of the Lord.

The retreat is a special time to stop, to listen and to pray. It is an opportunity to be recharged spiritually. It is also a special time for an examination of self and of one's life in general – particularly the direction of one's growth.

It is often an opportunity to improve our knowledge of the mind of God which we perceive, sometimes in a superficial and fragmentary way, when we read the Word of God and in the course of our daily life.

Couples of the Teams are encouraged to take advantage of the special atmosphere of a retreat to renew themselves. They are invited to leave their home and place of work in order to listen to God and to discern his plan for them as a couple.

C) Team Life

The team is not an end in itself; it is at the service of its members; it allows them:

- to experience special times of prayer together and of sharing;
- to help one another effectively in journeying to the Lord and bearing witness to him.

In the life of every Christian community one can distinguish three phases:

- The community turns, with Christ, to the Father to welcome his love;
- The community shares this love in Christ: "The whole group of believers were of one heart and one soul";
- The community, moved by the Spirit of Christ, sends its members to reveal this love to the World.

No couple joins a team under pressure and none is forced to remain. But those who do stay are asked to be loyal: to the other couples, to the practise of mutual support and to the formative ways of the Movement, as well being active in the Movement and remaining faithful to the Spirit.

a) The Team Meeting

The team meeting is the high point of the life of this little community.

It is a special time of sharing between the team members in an atmosphere of fraternal love. True mutual love is demanding and cannot result from a passive attitude. Sharing requires a climate of mutual trust and discretion from each member of the team.

The team meets once a month at the home of one of the couples. It is very important for all the members of the team to be present in order to promote harmony and preserve the unity of the team.

There are five parts to the meeting and sufficient time must be allotted to each:

- the meal,
- the general sharing,
- the communal prayer,
- the sharing on the endeavours,
- the exchange of views on the study topic.

This sequence may change according to the needs of the team.

- **the meal**

“They broke bread from house to house and took their meal with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Ac 2: 46)

The meeting normally begins with a meal. It is important that it should be simple. Each couple may bring a plate of food so that every one takes part and those who may have little time or modest means may feel at ease.

- **the general sharing**

“Above all, have unflinching love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins” (Pet 4: 8)

The monthly meeting is a special time of mutual help. The general sharing may begin during the meal. It is a time when couples talk about important events that have happened since the last meeting. They share the concerns of their daily life, their commitments to the Church, their joys, their hopes and their worries. It is only by listening attentively to each person in turn that true mutual love can grow. This general sharing reflects the current state of life of the team members gathered together.

- **the communal prayer**

“He told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never loose heart” (Lk 18: 1)

“Prayer is the personal dialogue with God of the individual and of the community” John Paul II - Agenda of For The Third Millennium

Prayer is an essential element of the life of each team. It is the centre and summit of the meeting and may occasionally take the form of a celebration of the Eucharist (after having asked for permission, if it is necessary).

The prayer begins by reading aloud slowly a text from Scriptures followed by a time of silence to welcome the Word of the Lord and meditate on it. Each member then expresses their thoughts on the text in the form of a shared prayer. It is God who speaks to us through the voice of our brothers and sisters. The silence after each moment of meditation is itself a prayer. In this way, we listen to the Word within and through the small “church” which the team forms.

The Team members then offer their prayers of intention so that everyone can join them, in order to give thanks, to request enlightenment, strength, forgiveness or intercession.

The time of prayer ends with a liturgical prayer, the Our Father, the Magnificat, or a hymn, etc.

• **the sharing on the endeavours**

“Let your love for each other be real and from the heart” (1 Pet 1: 22)

This sharing is a special time of spiritual mutual help. Assuming responsibility for one another in this way entails three possible elements:

- a persevering search for the will of God,
- a search for truth about oneself,
- the experience of sharing and of communion.

Each team member is invited to share their experience of the Endeavours during the past month.

The sharing on the Endeavours is not an examination of conscience, nor a statement of successes and failures, but a review of the efforts necessary to advance in one's spiritual life.

Each member of a team is at a different stage of their spiritual life and it evolves at their own pace. It is essential to accept this diversity so that everyone is free to share openly and in confidence. Each member's experience, progress or difficulties can help others to follow their own faith journey.

The sharing on the Endeavours follows the communal prayer and it benefits from the atmosphere that prayer has created.

• **the exchange of views on the study topic**

It is essential for every Christian couple to increase and deepen their knowledge of their faith. This is the function of the study topic.

The study topics are not only an intellectual activity but also a spiritual one, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It involves personal study, an exchange of views between the couple before the meeting and an exchange of views at the meeting. They give rise at the meeting to a variety of thoughts which help a deepening of faith and have an impact on the life of every member. These exchanges of views provide the opportunity for each team member to develop and form their personal conscience.

The meeting may end with the Magnificat, the prayer adopted by the Movement, which team members commit themselves to say every day in communion with the members of Teams throughout the world.

b) Team life outside of the monthly meeting

Team life is not confined to the monthly meeting. The prayer, in union with the other members of the team and for their intentions, the dialogue, the sharing and mutual help (spiritual and material) continues throughout the month, according to the arrangements of each team. It is the role of the Responsible Couple to ensure this continuation of team life.

It is important that the children of the team also benefit from the deep friendship that is a characteristic of a team of Our Lady and, though not part of the monthly meeting, they feel linked to the team as one big family.

c) The review of the year meeting

The last meeting of the team year is a review meeting. It gives the team the opportunity to reflect and review its life openly and in a Christian spirit. It looks back on its progress during the past year and prepares for the following year.

One cannot forget that the essential thing is to seek the will of God for the couple and for the team and to respond to his call to live out more authentically the agape-love which is the soul of every Christian community.

d) The commitment

Team members are called from time to time to renew their commitment to observe loyally the spirit and methods of the Movement. It takes the form of a simple ceremony which can take place in the course of a team meeting or at a Sector or Regional event.

VII ORGANISATION OF THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

A) The Spirit of the Organisation

A team cannot live in isolation. The Teams of Our Lady has put in place an organisation to provide co-ordination, animation and liaison, in order to support and serve the teams, and to maintain unity.

A team operates firstly thanks to the commitment of its members and secondly because it is helped and nourished by the Movement with which it lives in communion.

Unity is formed and maintained by the desire to progress together in faithfulness to the spirit and methods of the Teams of Our Lady.

The allegiance of members, not only to the team, but also to the Movement is expressed in the following ways:

- by saying the “Magnificat” daily in union with other members of Teams throughout the world
- by reading the “Teams Newsletter” published in the various levels of the Movement
- by taking part in events and celebrations organised in the Sector or at Regional, Super-Regional and International level
- by welcoming and offering hospitality to other members of the Teams of Our Lady when the opportunity presents itself
- by accepting to take on a responsibility or by taking part in the organisation and animation of the Movement,
- by contributing to the material needs of the Movement

It is important that members should make an annual contribution to the Movement, according to their means, in order to help it to fulfil its mission to couples. It is difficult to assess the amount to give. Nevertheless, it is suggested that members should contribute the equivalent of one day’s income. Lack of financial means must never prevent anybody’s participation in the activities of the Movement.

“They sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed”. (Act 2: 45)

B) The Team

The team is composed of four to seven couples assisted by a priest-spiritual counsellor.

The members of the Teams of Our Lady are Christians, united by their sacrament of marriage and validly married in the eyes of the Church:

- who have expressed their willingness to belong to the Movement
- who accept to take part in the communal life of the team and of the Movement
- who commit themselves to be faithful to the spirit of the Teams of Our Lady and to practise its methods
- who respect the freedom of conscience of other team members and their human and social diversity
- who seek to live in faithfulness to the Pope and to follow the teaching of the Church.

a) The Responsible Couple

Every team must elect each year a Responsible Couple. Their role is to encourage and affirm the team members' commitment to this small community, so that mutual help is effective in it and that each member feels accepted, acknowledged and loved.

The Responsible Couple should try to ensure that couples prepare well for the monthly team meeting and participate fully in it. They must keep their team members informed about the life of the Movement and encourage them to take an active part in meetings at all levels of the organisation.

b) The Priest - Spiritual Counsellor

Each team must obtain the help of a priest. He is not only a spiritual counsellor to the team, but he also fulfils his priestly role in this Church community. He *“makes Christ present as Head of the Body”*. 1971 Synod of Bishops

The presence of a priest in a team means that the teams are enriched by the two sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders.

If it is not possible for a team to obtain the help of priest-spiritual counsellor, it is the responsibility of the Sector Couple to ensure that it has a temporary spiritual counsellor in keeping with the policy of the movement.

C) Levels of Responsibility and of Animation

a) The Sector

The Sector is a community of teams that wish to journey together and help each other. It usually consists of 5 to 20 teams located within a reasonable distance of each other, small enough for communication to exist between them, but with sufficient teams to ensure good animation.

The responsibility of the sector is entrusted to a couple nominated by the Movement. As “Sector Couple” they work with the help of a Sector Team. This team is composed of a number of couples and a priest who is the Spiritual Counsellor of the Sector. The Sector Couple is called to serve by the Regional Couple for a period of three years.

The functions of the Sector Team are: spiritual animation, liaison, formation, and the organisation of events and expansion of the Movement.

b) The Region

The Region is composed of several neighbouring Sectors and provides mutual help between them. It is the centre of communication and communion between Sector Couples, members of the Sector Teams and other couples who provide services to the movement. A couple is appointed Regional Couple for four years, and are helped by a Regional Team and a Regional Spiritual Counsellor. Together they are responsible for the animation, liaison,

formation, expansion, reflection, discernment and the fostering of unity of the teams in the Region.

The Regional Couple is called to serve by the Super-Regional Couple or by the International Leading Team (ERI) in consultation with the Sector Couples of that Region.

c) The Super-Region

The Super-Region is composed either of the Regions of a country or of the Regions of neighbouring countries. Experience shows that at least 200 teams constitute a good base for the viability of a Super-Region.

The responsibility for the Super-Region is entrusted to a “Super-Regional Couple”. They call on other couples and a priest to help them in a service of reflection, discernment and animation of the Regions entrusted to them.

Together they constitute the “Super-Regional Team” and they work in a spirit of collegiality, co-responsibility and communion. The Super-Regional Couple is appointed for five years.

They fulfil their role in faithfulness to the founding charisms, vocation and mission of the Movement. They are responsible for transmitting to the teams the main orientations of the Movement and to promote its formative ways and methods. They are responsible for unity, communion, and the formation of leaders and team members in the Super-Region.

The Super-Regional Couple is a member of the International College of the Movement. They are called to serve by the International Leading Team (ERI) in consultation with the Regional Couples of the Super-Region.

In the case of some Super-Regions with very large numbers of teams, there can be an intermediate structure, called a ‘Province’, composed of several Regions. The couple responsible for a Province serves for four years.

d) The International Leading Team (ERI)

The International Leading Team have overall responsibility for the Movement. It works collegially and is composed of 5 or 6 couples and a priest who is Spiritual Counsellor for the Movement.

The members of the International Leading Team are chosen to reflect the international character of the Movement. They commit themselves to act personally and not as representatives of their own country.

The time of service for each couple of the International Leading is generally six years. They are co-responsible for the whole Movement and work in close liaison with Super-Regional Couples.

The International Leading Team chooses one of its couples to be the Leading Couple. The task of the Leading Couple is to animate and foster communion within the International Leading Team and the International College. They are the official representatives of the Movement. Their period of service is for six years.

The responsibilities and mission of the International Leading Team are as follows:

- to animate the whole Movement
- to maintain the link between the Movement and the universal Church
- to ensure faithfulness to the founding inspirations of the Movement
- to exercise long term discernment
- to ensure the unity of the Movement
- to develop the Movement and particularly its establishment in countries outside the expansion zones of Super-Regions, where it is not yet present.

e) The International College

The International College is composed of the members of the Leading team and of Super-Regional Couples. It meets for reflection and exchanges in order to discharge collegial responsibility for the international Movement. It is concerned to maintain the unity and communion of its members.

The couples responsible for the Isolated Regions and Co-ordinations (see below) are periodically invited to take part in the work of reflection of the College.

f) Special cases

- The Isolated Sector

An Isolated Sector is one that cannot be integrated nor participate in the life of a Region because of its geographical isolation. Responsibility is defined and exercised in the same way as a sector within a Region. Liaison with the Isolated Sector is provided by a member of a Regional Team, a team of Co-ordination or the International Leading Team. The responsible couple is nominated by the couple responsible for liaison.

- The Isolated Region

An Isolated Region is one that is not integrated into a Super-Region and which has an insufficient number of teams to justify the establishment of a Super-Region.

The responsibility of an Isolated Region is defined and exercised in the same way as a Region within a Super-Region.

g) Temporary intermediate structures

Where necessary and most often for geographical reasons (e.g. long distances), temporary intermediate structures may be set up to provide animation and expansion of the Movement.

- The Pre-Region and the Pre-Sector

Couples responsible for these intermediate levels have responsibilities and a length of service similar to those of Regional Couples and Sector Couples.

- Regional Co-ordination and Inter-Regional Co-ordination

The name Regional or inter-Regional Co-ordination is given to an intermediate and temporary grouping of unrelated entities dispersed in a particular geographical zone (regions, pre-regions, sectors, pre-sectors, isolated sectors or teams) and do not have a sufficient number of teams to constitute an Isolated Region or Super-Region.

The responsibility of a Regional or inter-Regional Co-ordination is entrusted, by the International Leading Team, to a couple called the “Co-ordinating Couple” who serve for a period of 4 years.

VIII SERVICES OF THE MOVEMENT

“Whoever renders service, ...renders it by the strength which God supplies” (1 Pet. 4:11)

a) Responsibility: a service

“Spiritual responsibility can only be considered as received from the Lord and cannot be usurped. That is to say, we have to remain united to the One who entrusted it to us”. Father Roger Tandonnet

Such is the spirit of responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady. In the world today ‘responsibility’ is often synonymous with strength and power. But when Christ washed the feet of his disciples, he showed us another way to exercise responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady: by putting ourselves at the service of our brothers and sisters. Responsibility in Teams is an invitation to a greater love, and all responsibilities are a call to serve.

Responsibilities in the Teams of Our Lady are exercised by couples, meaning the husband and wife together. They exercise them with the help of other couples, in a team assisted by a priest-spiritual counsellor, in a climate of co-responsibility, collegiality and communion.

To assume responsibility for a service, one must have a good knowledge of the aim of this service and of the Movement.

All responsibility is limited in time: its duration varies according to the different levels of responsibility.

The various responsibilities are explained in the booklet entitled “Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady”; a brief summary is however included in this guide of the Movement.

b) Liaison

A team does not journey on its own. Liaison is indispensable for the building up of a spirit of community and of unity, to give a sense of belonging to the Movement in faithfulness to its aims and founding charisms. It ensures communication between teams and the Movement and also between teams.

Liaison is essential at every level of responsibility and is particularly important between the Sector Couple and the teams in their Sector. The sector is the most essential community for the life of Teams.

The form of the liaison is adapted to the needs of a particular situation. It must be personal and where possible will involve meeting the team members. Liaison must be done in a spirit of prayer and friendship.

Liaison Couples make sure that the couples of the teams in their care receive the necessary support to live out their married spirituality with the help of the means offered by the Movement.

IX NEW TEAMS IN THE MOVEMENT

a) Expansion of the Movement

The Teams of Our Lady – a gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church – is entrusted to the care of its members. The responsibility for its development – to allow other couples to experience Teams – belongs to each team member.

Team members want to make known the Teams of Our Lady because they are convinced that today they can help many couples discover and follow Christ.

Nevertheless, it is the Sector that is responsible to co-ordinate and organise the expansion and information about the Teams of Our Lady. The procedures used may vary from Sector to Sector according to the local situation and to the gifts of the couples entrusted with this task.

b) Information

This particular task, is in itself a mission, to provide clearly and objectively the information about the Movement, its riches and its demands.

It is a matter of presenting what the Teams of Our Lady has to offer: its objectives, means, and methods, based on the documentation of the Movement and indicating its role today and its place in the Church.

Each Sector has to organise information in accordance with its needs.

c) Piloting

It is essential to pay a lot of attention to the creation of a new team. The team is the smallest but most important cell of the Movement. The whole Movement is dependent on its vitality.

A couple, called 'Pilot Couple', accompanies the new team for a few months. They inform the new team about the Movement by gradually transmitting its spirit, methods and formative ways. The Pilot Couple uses the literature specifically prepared for this service.

At the end of piloting, a formation week-end for new teams or a retreat is organised, to enable the new team members to deepen further their knowledge of the Movement, meet new couples and commit themselves more fully to Team life.

d) Journeying with others

Team members who have been enriched and sustained by the life of the Movement are encouraged to get involved in meeting the needs of their local community as a service to the Church.

Faced with the urgency of the task of evangelisation, the Teams of Our Lady have become aware of the necessity to give couples the opportunity either to discover the Christian faith or to resume their journey in the Church.

This has given rise to a number of initiatives to help couples, who do not belong to the Teams of Our Lady, to meet together in groups to help each other to discover how to live a committed life.

For a few months, they share their experiences and knowledge of the Christian life, of married and family life, and of community life.

At the end of the experience, a presentation of the Teams of Our Lady is made to the group, thereby offering an option to those who wish to continue to belong to a community.

X LIFE OF THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY AS A MOVEMENT

Team members are invited to integrate themselves in the life of the Movement and of its structures through voluntary and loyal collaboration.

In addition to team meetings and working meetings at various levels, other more formal and official activities are organised such as:

a) Sector, Regional, Super-Regional meetings

At least once a year, a meeting is organised in each Sector, Region or Super-Region to bring together all couples with responsibilities in the Movement. It is a time for praying together, for fostering unity and communion, for presenting orientations, for formation, for meeting the local leaders of the Movement and for obtaining information on the regional, national and international development of Teams.

b) Formation sessions

Sessions are an important time in the life of Teams. Their purpose is to transmit and deepen the couples' knowledge of the spirit and methods of the Movement. Having thus deepened their understanding of the ways of the Teams of Our Lady, couples are strengthened in their commitment. They live the life of the Movement more fully and are better able to fulfil their responsibilities.

Sessions are normally residential and last at least a week-end. These days spent immersed in the atmosphere of Teams, with couples from different teams, is a strong time of formation, of friendship and of sharing.

The programme of the session consists of times of prayer, talks, and exchanges which improve and enrich the life of participants.

An international session regularly brings together team members of different countries. This formative time is enriched by exchanges between couples of varied cultures, experiences and social backgrounds.

Holiday (vacation) sessions are a combination of formation session and holidays. They create a unique opportunity for the whole family to experience a time of shared spirituality. The programme includes activities for children and times of relaxation as a family.

c) International Gatherings

The Movement organises international gatherings at regular intervals. They are special times of prayer, exchanges and orientations for the Teams of Our Lady, in their world-wide context.

The “orientations” for all team members are given as a priority for the Movement for the following years. They are based on observations of the situation and needs of couples. These Gatherings are an important sign of the unity of spirit which binds together thousands of team members from around the world in an atmosphere of joy and of praise to God.

XI MISSION

The Teams of Our Lady is a Movement that helps its member couples to be active in the Church and in the world.

The Movement as such, at the request of the Church, can take part in its Pastoral Ministry, especially in the sphere of marriage and of the family.

A) Mission of the Movement

The Teams of Our Lady have a specific and direct mission: to help couples to live fully their sacrament of marriage.

They have, in addition, a missionary objective: to proclaim to the world, by word and by the witness of their life, the values of Christian marriage.

The Second Wind - 1988

B) Mission of Team Members

“The contemporary society has a particular need of the witness of couples who persevere in their marriage, as an eloquent Sign of our human condition and of God’s constant love (even if it is sometimes a difficult sign to display)”. John Paul II, Agenda for the Third Millennium

“If the Teams of Our Lady are not a training ground of men and women who are ready to assume courageously all their responsibilities in the Church and in society, they lose the very reason for their existence”

Father Henri Caffarel

a) Mission in the Movement

Team couples put the gifts they have received from God at the service of their own team, of their Sector and of their Region:

- by taking part in the common effort to live fully the community life and to broaden mutual help
- by giving support to those who respond to the call to serve in a position of responsibility
- by taking part in new initiatives that are launched in response to the growing aspirations of couples

“No one is allowed to remain inactive”.

John Paul II - Christis Fidelis Laici

b) Mission in the Church

Teams do not get involved, as teams, in particular joint activities. It is for each couple to discover the call to which the Lord wants them to respond.

But this fruitful freedom of individual commitments must not lead us to forget that the Movement has its own particular charism and it cannot “turn away from its fellow married men and women” and from specific calls of Bishops in the sphere of pastoral ministry to the family.

It is also important that Teams should

- be open to new social backgrounds and be concerned about the needs of their country, preferably those highlighted by local Churches” (The Second Wind - 1988)
- respond to the call of the Church for a new evangelisation based on human love and family life. Today the Church has great need of a married laity, enriched by a formation where faith and life nourish each other. Christian couples also have a missionary duty to other couples and a duty to help them. They legitimately desire to pass on to them their experience and show them that Christ is the source of all married life.

John Paul II - 50th anniversary of the Charter

c) Mission in the world

Couples are called to be the leaven of renewal, not only in the Church, but also in the world and to show by their witness that:

- marriage is at the service of love
- marriage is at the service of happiness
- marriage is at the service of holiness

“Innumerable couples will be grateful to you for the help that you bring to them; in fact, most couples today are in need of help”

Pope Paul VI to the Teams of Our Lady - 1976

To fulfil our mission, the Teams of Our Lady must always support their action with prayer:

“Isn't prayer the force that takes us out of ourselves and propels us to the service of others? It is through prayer that human means acquire their full efficacy, and it is prayer that continues to achieve when these means no longer can”.

Father Henri Caffarel

XII REFERENCES

for fuller information :

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- Gathered in the name of Christ

APPENDIX 1

The Charter 1947 - 1972

Why the Teams of Our Lady?

We live in an age of contrasts. On the one hand, divorces, adultery, free love and 'neo-malthusianism'³ are widespread; on the other hand, a growing number of couples aspire to a thoroughly Christian life. Some of these have founded the Teams of Our Lady.

- They aspire to carry out fully their baptismal commitments,
- They want to live for Christ, with Christ, through Christ,
- They give themselves to him unreservedly,
- They intend to serve him unquestioningly,
- They acknowledge him as leader and Lord of their home,
- They make his Gospel the charter of their family,
- They want their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, to be
 - a praise to God,
 - a witness to people clearly proving that Christ has saved love
 - and a reparation for the many sins committed against marriage,
- They intend to be missionaries of Christ everywhere,
- Devoted to the Church, they want to be always ready to respond to the calls of their bishop and of their priests,
- They want to be competent in their work,
- They want to turn all their activities into a collaboration in the work of God and a service to humanity.

Aware of their weakness and of the limits to their strength, if not of their good intentions,
- because they experience daily how difficult it is to live as Christians in a pagan world,
- and because they have unshakeable faith in the power of fraternal mutual help,
- they have decided to form a team.”

Teams are not nursery schools for respectable adults but 'commando squads', made up of volunteers.

No one is forced to join, nor to remain in it, but whoever belongs to it must play the game honestly.

Meaning of the word “Team”

The word 'team' preferred to any other, implies the idea of a precise objective, pursued actively and in common.

The Teams place themselves under the patronage of Our Lady. In so doing, they emphasise their will to serve her and affirm that there is no better guide to God than the Mother of God.

³ Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), an English economist, advocated population control.

SPIRIT OF THE TEAMS

Mutual help

1. There can be no Christian life without a living faith. There can be no living and growing faith without study. In practice, most married Christians give up all efforts at study and meditation, for want of knowing their importance, for want also of time, guidance and training. As a result, their faith remains weak and vulnerable; their knowledge of God's ways and of the Church's teaching superficial and fragmentary. They have little knowledge of the ways to union with God. They have but little notion of the realities of family life: marriage, love, fatherhood, the upbringing of children, etc. As a result, they have little religious vitality and a very limited range of influence. The couples of the Teams want to react against this. And so, they endeavour to deepen their religious knowledge and to discover the demands of Christ, in order to conform their life to them. It is together, as a team, that they pursue this effort.

2. It is not enough to know God and his teaching, there must be personal encounter with him. To study, one must add prayer. Just as we help one another to study in the Teams of Our Lady, so we help one another to pray. We pray with one another; we pray for one another. "Again, I say to you, that if two of you consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt. 18: 19-20). Strengthened by the Lord's promise, the couples of the Teams strive to remember the presence of Christ among them and pray together joyfully and confidently.

3. Is it not unrealistic to claim to help one's friends to lead a spiritual life, if one does not first help them to overcome their worries and difficulties? This is why the couples of the Teams of Our Lady practice mutual help generously, as much materially as spiritually, obeying Saint Paul's great precept: "Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6: 2). They try to satisfy the four demands of brotherly love: to give, to receive (more difficult than giving), to ask (even more difficult) and to know how to refuse (there can be no asking with simplicity, where there is not the simplicity to refuse a service requested, if it cannot be rendered without too much difficulty). Mutual help should provide the legitimate security that so many others expect from money.

Witness

The Acts of the Apostles (4: 32) tell us that the early Christians "were of one heart and one soul". Seeing them, the pagans were surprised: "See, how they love one another!" and admiration often led to conversion. Has brotherly love, in this twentieth century, lost the power of influence and attraction that it had in the early days of the Church?. The Teams of Our Lady think that, today as then, non-believers will be won over to Christ if they see Christian couples truly loving one another and helping one another in seeking God and in serving their brothers and sisters. And so brotherly love, going beyond mutual help, becomes a witness.

DISCIPLINE OF THE TEAMS

For the spirit of Teams to be alive and lasting, there has to be a rule. Spirit and rule, like body and soul, cannot be separated: the spirit must be the soul of the rule; the rule must support and protect the spirit. The rule must be sufficiently light not to inhibit the personality and mission of each couple, but strong enough to protect against slackness.

The Team

A team is composed of four to seven couples. One of these couples is its leader. It is important not to exceed this number, beyond which an intimate atmosphere is difficult to achieve and looses in quality”.

The monthly meeting

Friendship suffers from prolonged separation; it needs regular meetings. This is why the team meets at least once a month. Attendance at the monthly meeting is obligatory.⁴ The plan of the meeting is as follows:

A meal together

It is very desirable to begin the monthly meeting with a meal together at the home of one or other of the couples in turn (as far as possible, of course). Man has not yet invented anything better than a meal to bring people together and create bonds of friendship. Is it not at mealtime that the family comes together? Is it not the Eucharistic meal that gathers together the children of God? The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the early Christians “*broke bread from house to house and took their meal with gladness and simplicity of heart*” (Ac 2: 46).

Praying together

Praying together is the outstanding way of meeting others in depth, of acquiring a common spirit and of growing aware of the presence of Christ among his own. But it only achieves this, if it is sufficiently prolonged to help people to put aside their worries and create silence. At least a quarter of an hour is devoted to praying together before the Exchange of Views. Immediately before the prayer, the couples share their intentions. If they are to be truly adopted by all, they must be presented with sufficient details and must be seen to be close to the heart of those who express them. Then the current intentions of the great Catholic family are evoked so that they can also be prayed for (for example: persecuted Christians, a mission in difficulty, a particular apostolic venture, recruitment to the priesthood, etc.). For this prayer together to swell the hearts and make them beat to the rhythm of the Church, it will include psalms, collects and hymns from the breviary and from the missal. These are given in the Letter of the Teams of Our Lady. Another part of the prayer consists in each member expressing aloud their thoughts and feelings inspired by the passage from Scripture given in the Letter. A time of silence must also be allowed so that each member may have a more intimate and personal contact with God.

⁴ It goes without saying that, in case of serious difficulties, one can be excused from this obligation as of others.

GENERAL SHARING⁵ & SHARING ON THE OBLIGATIONS

A time must be set aside at monthly meetings (it can be during the meal) for a general sharing on matters of interest and concern affecting the family, a member's job, civic or Church involvements, successes or failures, discoveries, joys and sorrows.

After the prayer, a time is reserved to the 'sharing' on the obligations of the Charter. Each couple says quite frankly whether they have kept, during the preceding month, the obligations laid down in the Charter.

It goes without saying that there is an intimate and personal domain which it would be wrong to reveal under pretext of friendship. Members of Teams react against the unashamed openness - all too widespread today - of couples who do not hesitate to reveal to everybody the problems of their married life. Barring this one reservation, how truly in keeping with Evangelical charity it is to share in this way and to call, in all simplicity, on brotherly mutual help. How many couples are saved from mediocrity, or even from failure, the day they no longer have to struggle alone.

Exchange of views⁶

Conversations not carried out in the presence of God are liable to be superficial. Ideas are bandied about and hearts refuse to be open to truths that call for transformation. Team members endeavour to be absolutely loyal: every truth that is better grasped must become part of one's life. Exchanges of views are fruitful only if they are prepared. The spouses must reflect together on the study topic and send, a few days before the meeting, their comments in writing to the couple chosen to lead the next exchange of views. This obligation of a time of reflection together each month has proved very fruitful to them.

Mutual help in study demands that the exchange of views be prepared by all. Preparation in this case is even more necessary than for material mutual help in which people would have qualms about receiving without giving to others.

The topics for study are not left to the free choice of teams. They are provided by the Leading Team - not out of arbitrary authoritarianism - but in order to help couples to acquire as complete a concept of christian thinking as possible, and to initiate them to an authentic married and family spirituality.

The first three years are devoted to fundamental topics: love, marriage, married spirituality. After these three years, teams can choose from several series of subjects for which study outlines, questionnaires and references are provided³.

It goes without saying that teams can organise extra meetings, either for additional exchanges of views or, quite simply, to deepen friendship.

⁵ This 'General Sharing' is wider than the sharing of news. It is called 'Mise en commun' in the French text of the Charter and is a reference to Acts 4: 32: "They had everything in common"

⁶ This 'Exchange of views' is not a discussion or debate but a sharing of thoughts on the study topic.

⁷ Following Father Caffarel's conference "The Teams of Our Lady in the face of atheism", given during the 1970 Rome Gathering, study topics have been "based on the Word of God, the basis of all spiritual life".

THE OBLIGATIONS OF EACH COUPLE

Couples, as we have seen, come to Teams seeking help. This does not absolve them from making some efforts. It is to give direction and support to their efforts that the Teams ask their members to observe the following obligations.

- a) To set themselves a rule of life (the great diversity of couples does not allow the same rule to be proposed to all). Without a rule of life, the religious life of the spouses may easily be governed by the whim of the moment and become chaotic. This rule of life (it goes without saying, that each spouse has his/her own rule), consists in nothing else than determining the efforts that one intends to impose on oneself in order to respond better to the will of God.
- b) It is not a question of multiplying one's obligations but to define them in order to strengthen the will and avoid drifting. Advice and guidance of a priest are desirable in order to guard against doing too much or too little. There is no obligation to reveal to one's team the rule adopted nor the manner it is observed. It must be noted, however, that some have benefited from extending mutual help thus far.
- c) to pray together and with their children once a day, as far as possible, because the family, as such, owes worship to God and prayer together has great power.
- d) to say the prayer of the Teams of Our Lady daily, in union with all the couples of the Movement.
- e) to practice once a month the 'duty of sitting-down'. It is the occasion for each couple to review their life.
- f) to study together as a couple the topic for study and send in their comments in writing before the meeting - and to attend the meeting.
- g) to read the editorial of the Letter of the Teams
- h) to make every year a residential retreat of at least 48 hours, husband and wife together as far as possible. Only one retreat is obligatory prior to the team's commitment.
- i) to give each year - by way of contribution - the fruits of one of their working days, in order to provide for the material needs and expansion of the movement to which they owe in part their spiritual enrichment.
- j) to contact and welcome, with a fraternal heart, couples from other teams, when the occasion arises

Since May 1970⁸ each member of the Teams of Our Lady is also asked to observe the following obligations:

- to devote ten minutes a day to contemplative prayer,
- to have recourse to the Word of God with perseverance. Each member is free to determine the way he/she will do so in the course of the month,
- to study the meaning of Christian asceticism and endeavour to make it part of their Christian married life.

⁸Date of the Teams' Gathering in Rome at which Father Caffarel gave a conference entitled "The Teams of Our Lady in the face of atheism" in which he advocated these three new obligations.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEAMS

The Responsible Couple⁹

A short formula defines the role of the Responsible Couple and underlines its fundamental importance: 'they are responsible for brotherly love'. It is their responsibility to see that the team succeeds in evangelical charity and that each couple find in it the help they need.

They are strongly advised to prepare the monthly meeting with the team chaplain. It is the Responsible Couple who provide the liaison with the leaders of the Movement and, through them, with all the Teams of Our Lady. They send each month a report on the activities of their team to their 'Liaison Couple'. These reports make it possible for the Letter of the Teams to make every team benefit from the experience of other teams. It brings to light - should it occur - the slackness of a team. The Leading Team can then deal with it. Any team that does not want to play the game loyally, or cannot do so, is asked to leave the Movement. This is a necessary discipline: how many movements collapse, slowly smothered under the weight of inert members who have not been asked in time to leave. When the Responsible Couple are forced to ask a couple who do not observe the commitments of the Teams to leave, they must make them understand that, although the general interest requires their departure, the affection the team has for them is in no way changed. They will ensure that contacts and bonds of friendship with them remain close.

The Responsible Couple is chosen by the members of the team at its foundation and subsequently at the end of the team year.¹⁰ The couple who were Responsible Couple for the previous year can be chosen again. The Leading Team retain the right of veto on their appointment. The Responsible Couple will only fulfil their role well if they have recourse to prayer. This is why both spouses commit themselves to attend mass on one weekday (barring serious obstacles) and to practice ten minutes of contemplative prayer each day.

The role of the priest in the team

Each team must secure the help of a priest. No programme of work can, in truth, replace the doctrinal and spiritual contribution of a priest. He not only outlines principles, but also helps couples to seek to translate them into their life. This is a fruitful collaboration. Priest and couples learn to understand, to value and to support one another: the couples adopt the great apostolic intentions of the priest and the priest remembers at mass these couples whose efforts, struggles and desires he knows so well.

Launching of a new team

Launching a new team is a delicate matter. Too hasty a start, without the objectives and methods having been clearly stated, ends almost necessarily in failure. Careful preparation is necessary and a minimum of three meetings must be devoted to reading and explaining the Charter, under the guidance of the 'Pilot Couple'. After approximately a year, the couples of the new team are invited to commit themselves. They will then, in the presence of a representative of the Leading Team, commit themselves to observe loyally the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady, both in the spirit and letter.

⁹The expression 'Responsible Couple' has been retained in this translation because it has long been accepted 'Teams Jargon', although it is a mistranslation of the French expression 'Foyer Responsable' which means 'Couple in Charge'.

¹⁰ The team year ends with the summer holidays (vacations).

Admitting a new couple to a team

The new couple must acquaint themselves with the Charter. They will study the Charter with the help of the Responsible Couple or of another couple in the team. They will then progressively endeavour to practice the obligations. After a loyal trial of approximately a year, they will commit themselves with the team when the other couples renew their commitment. How is one to give the new couple the formation acquired by the couples of the team through the study of the basic study topics? It is for the Responsible Couple to help them to study these basic subjects, even if it means excusing them from answering the questionnaires in the topic being currently studied by the team.

The Letter of the Teams

Close contact is necessary between the Leading Team and teams generally - however distant these might be. Brotherly links between the teams themselves, based on mutual acquaintance, mutual help and prayer is no less important. The Letter of the Teams, sent to each couple, establishes and maintains a double link: vertical and horizontal. In it are to be found news of teams, reports on the most interesting experiences, the editorial (mentioned above), the texts of prayers for the monthly meeting, information, etc.

Liaison Couples, Sectors, Regions

Although very useful, the Letter of the Teams, on its own, is not sufficient to ensure that the ties between the Leading Team and teams generally are as close and fruitful as desirable. It is for the various levels of leadership in the Movement to make them so. Each team is entrusted to a Liaison Couple (each Liaison Couple looks after three to five teams). Furthermore, teams are grouped in «Sectors» and the Sectors in «Regions». Sector Couples and Regional Couples are responsible for the smooth running of the teams entrusted to them. Through frequent mutual contacts, leaders at various levels pass on the motivation they receive from the Leading Team and keep the latter informed of the desires and needs of teams. Thanks to them, the relationship between teams and the Leading Team have a note of brotherly cordiality instead of being purely administrative.

The Leading Team

The Leading Team is composed of priests and couples. It is not simply an administrative organ, but the motive force of the whole widespread body of teams. Its mission is to keep the spirit of Teams alive and its discipline strong. Its members must live close to God in prayer and close to teams through attentive friendship. For their part, members of Teams must give it support by their prayers and help it by their comments and suggestions.

Couples do not look upon their entry into the Teams of Our Lady and their acceptance of the Charter as an end, but as a starting point. The law of the christian home is love, and love has no limits - it knows no rest.

Promulgated on the feast of the Immaculate Conception 8 December 1947

P.S. The Charter of the Teams of Our Lady is not irrevocable. In order to adapt to the evolution of the Movement and of its members, it needs to be updated by the Leading Team, acting either on their own initiative or of that of Team members. No group of couples, which is not committed to the Movement, is authorised to call itself a "Team of Our Lady".

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APPENDIX 2

Cardinal Feltin writes to us

In the Church, as in civil society, every association is led one day to express its nature, its objectives and its methods in the form of Statutes. There is advantage in not doing it too soon so as not to be confined to too narrow a mould that would hinder a necessary evolution and adaptations. But one must, however, give oneself as soon as possible a framework that will guarantee that development takes place along the right lines and which will eliminate any hesitation and discussion on the distinctive character of the grouping. In the Church, new institutions are first approved by the local bishop, and thereafter by the Holy See, if the latter deems it appropriate.

As you learned from the last Monthly Letter, the Statutes of the Teams of Our Lady have just been submitted to Rome where they are being studied. They had previously been approved by His Eminence Cardinal Feltin, by a letter of great importance which you will find below. This document of capital importance defines with vigour and clarity the characteristics of our Movement. It deserves to be read and meditated upon by each one of you and studied at your team meeting. Our place in Christianity could not have been more clearly defined.

The line of conduct is very clear, it is up to each one of us to be faithful to it.

Henri Caffarel

Having witnessed the development of the TEAMS OF OUR LADY in France and in the world, and being aware of the spiritual growth of its member couples, I welcome this opportunity of expressing my thoughts to the leadership of the Movement.

As bishop of the place where it was founded, and after having studied the statutes that were submitted to me, I have pleasure in informing the Leadership of the Movement that I approve them. They are the fruit of a long experience that has shown how much an administrative framework, that is both firm and flexible, can favour the growth of charity and the radiating influence of couples.

May all members remain faithful to the original inspiration and to the characteristics of the Movement: spirituality, supra-nationality and lay leadership.

1. The Teams of Our Lady are and must remain a movement of spiritual formation.

The reason for their existence is to help their members to discover the demands and the greatness of their vocation as baptised Christians and to help them, by the statutes and structure of the Movement, to “strive towards the perfection of the Christian life in the context of their married and family life”, according to the words used by Pope John XXIII last May in his address to the thousand pilgrim-couples of the Movement.

Being a ‘school of perfection’, the Teams of Our Lady are not to be classified among movements of Catholic Action, nor among family movements. They must rightly have the ambition of being a breeding ground of militants who, in accordance with the individual vocation of each member, will take part in large numbers in the life of Catholic Action and in the good works approved by the hierarchy. They will involve themselves in their worldly occupations anxious to be Christian witnesses and to establish a social order that is in conformity with the teaching of the Church.

2. Their objective of spiritual formation justifies the ideal of supra-nationality of the Teams of Our Lady. There are no frontiers to the spiritual life and this great spiritual and supra-national fraternity of couples in a unique movement, established in more than twenty countries, is a valuable witness within Christianity as well as a great hope.

If this supra-nationality is not to be an illusion and is to remain at the level of the charity of Christ, there is need of both strong leadership and of a loyal spirit of discipline from leaders and members of the Teams, otherwise the movement would be weak in the face of the temptation that threatens all spiritual groups, to turn to active involvements. To yield to this temptation would be, for the Teams of Our Lady, a denial of the reason for their existence.

3. It is fortunate that leadership at all levels is provided by lay people.

This is truly in keeping with the promotion of the laity, so strongly favoured by the Holy See for the past thirty years. The priest who, according to the statutes, helps the Sector Couple, has the mission both to give spiritual animation and counsel to the couples and to provide a link with the bishop of the diocese. In view of the doctrinal and spiritual responsibility implied in its role, the International Leading Team has, as its leader, a priest appointed by the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris. This role has up to now been exercised by Father Caffarel, founder of the Teams of Our Lady. The approval that We grant to the Statutes provides Us with the opportunity to confirm Father Caffarel in his role and to confirm Our total approval of the spiritual and doctrinal contribution that he makes to the Teams of Our Lady, as well as for the wisdom with which he and his collaborators lead them in a spirit of absolute submission and faithfulness to the Bishops and to the Holy See which has never failed.

Approval given in Paris, on the 25th of March 1960

Signed : Maurice Cardinal FELTIN Archbishop of Paris

APPENDIX 3

Decree of Recognition

The Teams of Our Lady were created in Paris in 1938 by a number of couples who, under the guidance of Father Henri Caffarel, wished to live to the full, in marriage, their vocation as baptised Christians. However, it was the adoption of the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady on the 8th December 1947 which constituted the true foundation of the Movement. In the Charter, the couples then leading the Movement, under the guidance of Father Caffarel, affirmed their commitment.

- a) to fulfil "their baptismal vows",
- b) to give themselves to Christ "unconditionally",
- c) to "serve him without hesitation",
- d) to base their "family life on His Gospel",
- e) to see their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, give "glory to God, bear witness to others that Christ has redeemed love, and atone for the sins against the marriage bond".
- f) "They aim to be missionaries of Christ at all times and in all places.
- g) They wish to express their devotion to the Church by being always ready to respond to the requests of their clergy and bishops,

- h) They strive to be competent in their callings and in their daily work.
- i) They desire to turn all their activities into a collaboration with God in his work and in the service of others.
- j) because they are aware of their weakness and their limitations, notwithstanding their goodwill,
- k) because they experience daily how difficult it is to live up to the Christian ideal in our godless world,
- l) and because they have unflinching faith in the power of fellowship and mutual help,
- m) they have decided to form themselves into "teams".

The Teams of Our Lady have placed themselves under the patronage of Our Lady, because there is no better guide to God than the Mother Of God. They wish to be a movement of spirituality grouping couples who desire to progress towards holiness in and through their marriage by incorporating, in the life of the couple, a married spirituality with the help of a team. Over the last few years the urgent need for a renewal of family life and Christian marriage has not ceased to grow a need, prophetically perceived by Father Caffarel and the couples who founded the Movement, and which was strongly endorsed by the second Vatican Council. Hence the support of a Team, the encouragement received from couples sharing the same ideals, and the constant spiritual nourishment derived from the Movement, become more and more indispensable. Throughout its history the Teams of Our Lady, as a result of having spread to numerous countries and every continent, and thanks to the seeds of holiness maturing in the lives of its couples, has sought to respond to this need. The spiritual quality and apostolic strength of the Movement have already made an important contribution, likely to be developed still further in the future, to the renewal of marriage throughout the world.

Considering the Teams of Our Lady as a gift from God to the Church and to the world, numerous bishops have given their support to the Movement's request, submitted to the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the 19th September, 1990, to be recognised as an Association of the Faithful under private law.

Having carefully studied the draft statutes submitted for approval and received the agreement of His Holiness John Paul II during an audience given to His Eminence Cardinal Eduardo Pironio on the 26th March 1992, the Pontifical Council for the Laity recognises the Teams of Our Lady as an Association of the Faithful under private law in accordance with the provisions of canons 298-311 and 321-329, and approves its statutes ad experimentum for a period of five years. May this official recognition make even stronger the bond of fidelity to the Church and to its magisterium which has been an outstanding characteristic of the Movement from the beginning. May Mary, Mother of God and Mother of every Christian couple, continue to guide the Teams of Our Lady on the path to holiness which only Christ can give. With her, let us give thanks to God:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exults in God my saviour ;
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid".

Given at the Vatican, this 19th day of April 1992 on the feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul J. Cordes, (Vice-President)

Eduardo F. Cardinal Pironio (President)



Teams of Our Lady is an international Christian movement for married couples of all ages
Charity Reg No 1044902