

## **EQUIPES NOTRE-DAME (TEAMS OF OUR LADY)**

**Elisabetta and Filippo Barberis Organista<sup>♦</sup>**

### **1. Who We Are**

The Teams of our Lady is an international catholic movement for married couples. We are offering a way of life and mutual support among couples – a means to be happy as a couple and as a family, and a special way of living the gospel.

The essential objectives of the Team members are the following: the wish to meaningfully live their Christian marriage and deepen their faith with the help of a team. To this end they have a number of proven means: conjugal and family prayer; regular dialogue in the presence of God as a couple; monthly team meeting to pray and share together; a personal rule of life; and a spiritual retreat.

### **2. Rationale for the Existence of 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 spirituality of the married. 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 it is composed of couples who believe in the ideal of Christian marriage and who want:

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- 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 fulfill 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 professional/occupational 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, and
- 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”.

### **3. 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).

### **4. Why “Team”?**

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

### **5. 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.

### **6. The Endeavours for the Couple**

*Personal prayer, meditation:* This is a time to discern God's plan for us through personal prayer.

*Listening to the Word of God:* Reading each day a passage from the Bible, especially the Gospel, meditating on it in silence and receiving it as the living word of God.

*Conjugal and (if possible) family prayer:* Praying together as a couple. It binds couples together on a common journey and a shared plan. Such prayer, when it includes the whole family, can become a means of training and of passing on the faith.

*The "Sit Down":* A commitment that each couple tries to have at least once a month. The husband and wife arrange a special time together to have a dialogue, in the Lord's presence, about the practical and spiritual issues that are important to them in their everyday lives as a couple and a family.

## **7. A Way of Living the Gospel for the Couple**

*The Rule of Life:* Every team member chooses a rule of life which will help him/her to journey spiritually and to grow in faith. Each rule is personal. It can be lived and shared as a couple and in the team. The rule of life is a resolution relating to an action or an attitude, which will help the team member to take a practical step in the life of faith.

*The Annual Retreat:* Each couple should, once a year, attend a retreat, if possible with their own team. This can take place in silence if preferred. The retreat will usually be structured around a theme, led by a preacher or guide. It generally takes place in a religious environment for a weekend or sometimes a week.

## **8. Fr Caffarel, the Founder**

Henri Caffarel was born on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1903 in Lyon. He was ordained in Paris on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1930. On 18<sup>th</sup> September 1996, he died in Troussures (diocese of Beauvais) where he is buried. Henri Caffarel responded to the appeal of couples who wanted to live to the full their sacrament of marriage: "The demands of sanctity must be your concern. To respond to them, you have a sacrament which is yours, the sacrament of marriage."

## **9. 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 25<sup>th</sup> February 1939, these four

couples met with Father Caffarel and thus the first team of the Movement was born.

The number of Groups increased and an organization 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 8<sup>th</sup> December 1947 in the church of Saint Augustine in Paris.

The means set out in the Charter are demanding. "The Endeavours," particularly "the sit-down," are characteristic of the daily life of couples. "Having grasped the spirit of the Teams, you will have no trouble in accepting their discipline," says Father Caffarel. A couple living according to the Gospel, such is "the way to holiness."

## **10. 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 Felin, Archbishop of Paris. 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. On 18<sup>th</sup> April 1984, Cardinal Pironio, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, signed on the feast of Easter 1992, the decree recognizing the Teams of Our Lady as an Association of the Faithful, and giving approval of its statutes, in accordance with the new code of canon law. The confirmation of recognition, by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2002, recognizes the Teams of Our Lady as a Private International Association of the Faithful, and approves its statutes; it emphasizes the apostolic impact of the movement and describes its aims.

## **11. The Teams of Our Lady in the World**

The Teams of Our Lady grew rapidly in France, Belgium and Switzerland. Then it crossed the language barriers and the oceans: Brazil, Luxembourg (1950), Mauritius, Senegal (1953), Spain, Canada, Portugal (1955), Great Britain (1956), Germany, the United States of America (1958), Austria, Italy (1959), Australia, Columbia (1961), Madagascar, Vietnam (1962), Lebanon, Ireland (1963), Japan, French-speaking Africa (1968), India (1969), Syria (1970), Ecuador (1983), Poland (2001), etc. The expansion of Teams of Our Lady beyond France faced the movement with two options: either to become a federation of national movements, or to be a single

international movement. After reflection, the second option was adopted.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010, there were 10758 teams in the world representing around 55787 couples and 121584 members. At the moment, the movement is expanding greatly in Africa and in Latin America. Teams of Our Lady are established in five continents and in around fifty countries.

## **12. Organization of the Teams of Our Lady**

A team cannot live in isolation. The Teams of Our Lady has put in place an organization 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 organized in the Sector or at Regional, Super-Regional and International levels,
- 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 organization and animation of the Movement, and
- 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.

**The Team:** A team is composed of five to seven couples and a priest spiritual counsellor. They all join the Movement of their own accord. It is not an ordinary human community: it meets “in the name of Christ.” The couples help each other to progress in the love of God, to “build themselves up in Christ” and to put their love at the service of the Kingdom.

**The Responsible Couple:** This is the couple elected each year by the team. They encourage and stimulate the prayer, efforts and actions of the other couples. Throughout the year they ensure the smooth running of team life regarding the choice of a study topic, the retreat, the annual contribution, and preparation for meetings.

**The Priest-Spiritual Counsellor:** The priest is part of a team and participates fully in its monthly meetings. His role is mainly to enlighten couples on questions which they ask on spiritual matters. The Spiritual Counsellor or chaplain helps the team recognize themselves as a community in the Church.

### **13. Levels of Responsibility and of Animation**

The Sector→The Region→The Super-Region→The Liaison Zone→The International Leading Team (ERI)→The International College.

### **14. Mission in the Society**

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.

### **15. 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. This does not mean to forget that the Movement has its own particular charisma 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.

### **16. 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, at the service of happiness and 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).

"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.