



Equipes Notre-Dame
Oceania Super Region

The Oceania Edition of 'Vocation and Mission'

*Study Topic for
Teams in Oceania
2019*



A copy of the original document *Vocation and Mission at the dawn of the third Millennium* is available on the Teams Oceania website <http://www.teamsoceania.com.au>.

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Contents

Introduction	3
Section 1	
Return to the source — vocation and mission	4
Vocation	4
Mission	4
Action	5
Questions for discussion	6
Section 2	
Taking into account the needs and values of our times: a changing world challenges the Teams of Our Lady	8
Questions for discussion	10
Section 3	
Envisaging the future towards which we want the movement to progress. What real challenges can the movement respond to and how?	12
To discern and to welcome	12
To discern and to accompany	14
Practising the art of accompaniment	14
Conclusion	18
Questions for discussion	18



Vocation and Mission

at the dawn of the third millennium

Introduction

The changes that are taking place in our world today reinforce the urgency of discerning and facing the signs of the times with hope and boldness. The Teams movement throughout the world and gathered for the 12th International Gathering at Fatima does not turn away from this challenge.

In 1988, during the 6th International Gathering in Lourdes, the International Responsible Team (ERI) wanted to analyse “the urgent needs” of the couples at that time. *The Second Wind* resulted. It aimed to suggest ways of encouraging the creativity of team members and avoid the movement running out of steam.

After thirty years, married and family life have not stopped evolving. The environment in which couples live today no longer has a lot in common with that of 1947, the date of our Charter, or 1988. Even so, the fundamental question asked by Father Caffarel in 1939 remains: “How to love as Christ loves?”

We live in a materialistic and secular world. Christian couples of course experience the richness of marriage through their church and sacramental life. But they can no longer be satisfied to be witnesses to the value of this traditionally religious model. Society no longer accepts a system of pre-established truths. So our apostolic mission as baptised people united in the sacrament of marriage calls us to go along a different path. We have to demonstrate and justify by our actions how the values of Christian marriage make sense for everyone.

Our experience of the Christian faith is a gift. In seeking to share it we are not called to impose our own morality on society. The challenge today is to find new ways to demonstrate, especially to young people, that the couple and the family are not a source of restriction. On the contrary, they are a source of inner freedom and openness, a path to happiness and a way to God.

Throughout his life, Father Caffarel never stopped repeating that for a movement to survive it had to evolve. For him, a living movement is a movement that reinvents itself daily, thanks to the action of each of its members. It is why, at the dawn of the third millennium, the ERI wants to express its thoughts on the future of the movement.

Father Caffarel’s Chantilly talk, given in 1987 at a meeting of European regional couples, has guided us in shaping this document. Father Caffarel, with his prophetic mind, had already foreseen the new situations that were to face the movement. He foresaw the great transformations that were taking place in the world and the Church. He announced three principles to observe when facing change and asked one question “What mission does the sacrament of marriage bestow on the couple?”

These principles are as follows:

1. *Go back to the source. Because sometimes the source, which I will call the founding charism, can become blocked.*
2. *Take into account the needs and values of the times in which we live.*
3. *Consider what direction to encourage the movement to take-always in line with the founding charism.*

He stated that remaining true to the founding charism of the movement is paramount. But one must not confuse “being faithful with being rigid”.

Firstly, in this document, we go back therefore to the source. We’ll pick out those unchanging elements of vocation and the mission related to the founding charism to guide us to meet flexibly the challenges of our time.

The second section seeks to emphasise the essential traits of the “changing times” in which we live in, both negative and positive.

In the third section, various ways forward will be suggested. They can be tried out on the ground with the support of the movement. In this way Teams can be a creative force in the Church regarding spiritual conjugality.

Vocation and Mission at the dawn of the third millennium is a communal Teams response to the exhortation of Pope Francis “for a new chapter of evangelisation”. (*Evangelii Gaudium* 1)

1. *Return to the source*

Vocation and Mission

1-1 Vocation

The word vocation comes from the Latin verb “vocare” which means “to call”. Father Caffarel in an article “Marriage, the great sacrament” in his magazine *L'Anneau d'Or* (‘The Golden Ring’) explains the call for couples united by the sacrament of marriage. The Christian couple, he says, is “elected” or “called” by God. Baptism consecrates the individual. The sacrament of marriage is the sign that God consecrates the call of the Christian couple. It’s a symbol of the relationship between God and the Church and between God and the world.

God is the source of love. God’s love pours into the human love of the couple. They can thus show the world that God loves and that that is why God sent God’s Son into the world. This transforms married love. The Christian couple, thus invited into the Kingdom of God, is invited to become a cell of the Church, a domestic Church. Because “following God” is demanding.

The path to holiness, which the couple chooses to follow on the day of their marriage, continues all their life. It is a long pilgrimage that every day takes us nearer to God.

Through the sacrament of marriage, the grace of the Holy Spirit fills us and remains with us. We can speak of marriage as a permanent sacrament. The vocation of the couple and the family is to live a life in communion with God. And it’s accompanied by Christ’s love which unites, restores and slowly perfects the marriage — “God’s masterpiece”, as Fr Caffarel affirms. To encourage every couple, united by the sacrament of marriage, to live their conjugal and family life in Christ is clearly the basis of our movement. Spirituality and action mutually enrich each other.

Two Christians who choose to unite themselves in the sacrament of marriage engage also in a relationship with the Church. As Pope Francis wrote in *Amoris Laetitia* (2016)”: “The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since their mutual belonging is a real representation ... of the same relationship between Christ and the Church.”

1-2 Mission

As with every vocation, the call of God to the Christian couple also calls them to live for the service of God. Of course, every Christian, through their baptism and confirmation, should contribute to the growth of the Church. But the Christian couple should devote themselves to it in a specific, unique way.

There are three aspects to this mission.

The first is to make God known and to proclaim His love. As St Paul says, love urges us to announce the Good News to others and to share the spiritual riches of a life with God. Father Caffarel already saw in this mission a challenge to Christians to combat the dominant secularism of our era.

The second aspect is our responsibility as parents. Father Caffarel emphasised that God entrusts us with the task of being close to our children, and being witnesses and prophets of His love. The family is the nourishing background to our faith. This is where the children have their first contact with faith. In “Marriage, this great sacrament” Father Caffarel declares: “Listen to what Christ says to you: ‘Parents, it is with you and by you that I want to increase and form new children of our Heavenly Father.’”

The third aspect challenges us to ask ourselves what we are to do about reaching out to everyone who is waiting for the Good News of marriage.

For Father Caffarel, the Christian couple and the family must practise an apostolate of welcome and hospitality. They can also act as a bridge between the world and the Church, reaching out to people or couples who are fragile, isolated, discouraged and traumatised. The Christian home is “an extremely effective instrument of apostolic mission”.

Following indissoluble marriage as a way of life should not mean that we lose the capacity to accompany all those who are thirsting for love. The Teams movement invites us to live a path to holiness, with Jesus as our companion on the journey, allowing the graces of marriage, based on permanence and faithfulness, to flourish. Father Caffarel thought that non-believers should be able to get to know the Church by visiting the homes of Christians.

For him the mission of the Christian couple should not restrict itself to the family or just a few friends. Charity, breathed into us by Christ, should radiate widely all around us and be a sign of unity for the world. It goes much further than simple testimony and influence — there is a close interdependence between conjugal love and apostolic mission. Saint Paul spoke of the missionary married couple Aquila and Priscilla as “my assistant disciples”. (Romans 16:3) and we are called as Christian couples to follow them.

Being truly part of the Body of Christ, couples cannot content themselves with just receiving; they must be active members. Our founder strongly challenged Teams not to stay centred on themselves, enjoying the comfort of being with like-minded people and not confronting what is happening in the outside world. Hence, during a speech in Rome in 1970 about the Teams movement confronting the atheism of the modern world, he has God saying: “Couples, do you understand the great hope I place in you? You are the bearers of My reputation, of My glory, you are the great reason for hope for the universe. Because you are love.”

So, for Father Caffarel, there can be no vocation without mission. He reminds us of Christ's words: “The tree will be judged by its fruit.” And he adds emphatically: “not by its beauty, but by its fruits.... it is not about cultivating its beauty but about participating in this evolution of creation which strives towards an end.”

1-3 Action

For him, our area of mission is specifically that of marriage. Christian marriage and the family represent a path of happiness and holiness only for the minority these days. And so it's time to ask ourselves about the credibility of the message of Teams outside of the movement itself. It's time to reflect on how to produce new and adapted responses if we do not wish to alienate ourselves from our fellow human beings and cease to be apostles — that is, bearers of the message of Christ.

What Father Caffarel refutes is not action in itself but an action that is not connected to its divine source. It is this irreplaceable characteristic of the basic team that helps us to retain our strength. In fact, God, who is the origin of all love, attributes different forms of discipleship to the couple. It is from this love that the grace, given to the Christian couple, ensues and which strengthens them. So that this source does not run dry, so that our resources as followers of Christ remain fruitful, Father Caffarel invites us to “take a stand with Christ”.

It is by a living faith, nourished by the Word, prayer and reflection, that as couples we increasingly open ourselves up to a new view of the world and events. This is how we will undergo transformation and learn to better discern and act according to Christ's perspective. The words of Christ in the Gospels assist the

couple to become a community of love. It is from this that the missionary strength of the couple pours forth.

Father Caffarel expressed it very well: "Shared prayer and shared mission are like the front and back of the same coin in the community of love in the home. As with Christianity, the family weakens when it does not continually draw on the Gospel. And for the home, as for the Church, it is always by returning to the Gospel that a renewal takes place. Because it is Jesus Christ who speaks in the Gospel. And the words of Jesus Christ are the spirit and are life." God calls us to live this great love. We cannot keep silent about the way we live and it is our duty to bring others into this love.

Questions for discussion

Each Team will need to decide how many meetings they wish to devote to this discussion paper. The Oceania Team suggests that three meetings might provide adequate time to explore the issues without the risk of going over old ground by the final session.

Couples leading the discussion in their Team should feel free to use these questions as a guide. They can modify the questions to suit their Team and not feel bound to cover them all. All members of the Team should also feel comfortable about contributing their own questions that Vocation and Mission has raised for them.

Just remember: the focus is on mission!

Introduction

1. The document opens with the statement 'The changes that are taking place in our world today reinforce the urgency of discerning and facing the signs of the times with hope and boldness'. (p. 3)

What are some of the signs of the times that you see in the world today? In Australia? In the Church? In relation to marriage and family life? (See the note at the end of this document for an explanation of the term 'signs of the times'.)

2. 'After thirty years, married and family life have not stopped evolving. The environment in which couples live today no longer has a lot in common with that of 1947, the date of our Charter.' (p. 3)

What are some of the ways that marriage and family life have 'evolved' in your lifetimes?

3. Fr Caffarel's fundamental question was 'How to love as Christ loves?' (p. 3). Perhaps today this might be expressed as 'What would Jesus do?'

To what extent is your own approach to life and marriage shaped by this question?

Section one

4. Church leaders have often compared Christian marriage to the relationship between Christ and the Church. There is a recent example of it in the quote from Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*: 'The sacrament [of marriage] is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since their mutual belonging is a real representation ... of the same relationship between Christ and the Church.' (p. 4)

Do you find this type of language and imagery helpful? To what extent do you see your marital relationship as reflecting the 'relationship between Christ and the Church'?

5. 'The Christian couple ... is invited to become a cell of the Church, a domestic Church.' (p. 4)

As a couple, do you see yourselves as 'a cell of the Church'? What about as a 'domestic Church'? What might such images contribute to your understanding of marriage?

6. 'The path to holiness, which the couple chooses to follow on the day of their marriage, continues all their life. It is a long pilgrimage that every day takes us nearer to God.' (p. 4)

Do you agree? Does this statement resonate with your own journey?

7. Fr Caffarel urged Christian couples to adopt a three-fold mission:

To announce the Good News to all, especially in order to combat the dominant secularism of our era.

To be witnesses and prophets of God's love to their children.

To practise hospitality and welcome, especially by reaching out to people or couples who are fragile, isolated, discouraged and traumatised. (p. 4)

What do you think about this? Do you see your marriage in these or similar terms? Don't be too modest — you probably do a good deal of this even without realising it in your daily life.

8. 'The Teams movement invites us to live a path to holiness, with Jesus as our companion on the journey, allowing the graces of marriage, based on permanence and faithfulness, to flourish. (p.5)

Although you might put it in different words, to what extent would you say Teams has helped you as a couple to do this?

Note for Introduction, Question 1. 'The signs of the times'

What is meant by the expression the signs of the times? The expression received prominence in the writings of Pope John XXIII in statements such as 'the moment has come to discern the signs of the times, to seize the opportunity and to look far ahead'. He generally used it in the sense of signs that augur well for the fate of the Church and humanity — in other words, positive signs of the presence of God in the world. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* picked up the term and used it as follows:

The Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel... We must therefore recognise and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics (n. 4).

2. Taking into account the needs and values of our times

A changing world challenges the Teams movement

We are not just in a time of change. We're also in a change of the times. We are witnessing the arrival of a new culture that, although often based on our own Christian values, seems to distance itself from them and question them.

Today's society does not seem able to adapt to long-established truths and customs. On the contrary, it challenges our norms and seeks justification and coherent answers from us.

Our world is still far from the Christian ideal of integral human development and universal respect for creation. Global economic and technological progress in recent decades has been accompanied by aberrations and imbalances. And these have ultimately affected families in both the developed and the poorest countries. So we live in a world of contradictions and discontinuity, in which the future is not clear to see. It's exactly for this reason that we need to act — because we can change things.

It's therefore important that the Church confronts the challenges of this changing world. It should do so with hope, audacity and joy. And it should acknowledge that the world is full of hurt and frustration but also opportunity and possibility. The Teams movement accepts enthusiastically the call to evangelise by the power of the Holy Spirit. But if we want to be intelligible apostles, if we want to have our message heard by others, we must seek spiritual wisdom. We need to know where we're coming from as Christians.

Economics

We are immersed in a culture of globalised production, consumerism and the information revolution. The opportunities to create work and wealth anywhere on the planet are accompanied by competitiveness between states. Often social safeguards are weakened by an unlimited exploitation of the world's resources, questionable practices and corruption. Consequently a great part of humanity lives in a state of permanent tension. There has been a huge increase in migration by either choice or necessity. All these trends make it harder for us to develop stable marriages and families — even if they remain sources of richness, opportunities for hospitality and a chance to approach those on the fringes of our society.

Economic globalisation is associated with urbanisation. In Australia, we have seen that the concentration of population in cities and the general spreading of urban culture has been accompanied by a decline in rural towns. Towns are privileged places for the new evangelisation. But it requires great imagination to create attractive and meaningful opportunities for city dwellers to meet and interact.

Technology is also driving changes in the natural world, our way of life and how we communicate. The changes can improve people's well-being, their living conditions and their freedom. However, they also lead to exaggerated feelings of self-reliance and self-satisfaction.

It's a culture of efficiency and usefulness. It's easy for people to be more preoccupied with the "how" of their decisions rather than the "why". Something only has value if it is useful. There are few ethical limitations on how we manipulate nature as long as it satisfies the desires of the individual.

Society

When competitiveness and consumerism diminish ethics and push God to the sidelines, we are entering into a culture where people are reduced to their capacity to produce and to consume. Those who don't 'contribute' are not even at the bottom of society or on its periphery — they are outside of it.

Without being aware of it we have become anesthetised. We have lost much of our ability to see and help those on the periphery. This lack of help also affects old people, whose number is constantly growing, and they run the risk of being considered a burden. Their dependence is sometimes even exploited economically. For many of them loneliness becomes unbearable, even though they might have the love and support of their family as well as the spiritual fellowship of the Church and its movements.

The culture of rejection is also a culture of waste, of the “useable and disposable”, which harms nature and the quality of life. God speaks to us through the visible creation. God speaks also through what we can hear: the cries of our abandoned sister Earth, mistreated as never before, calling out for a change of direction. God has put Creation into our hands. We are therefore heirs to and responsible for how we respond as a community to the beauty and fullness of which God dreams. Surely humankind is the high point of creation. But if the Earth goes to waste, and if the quality of life of our descendants continues to deteriorate, our message of love and marriage will fall on deaf ears. People will have different priorities.

Married and family relationships

We see lots of positive changes but also great contradictions and threats to marriage and family life. Marriage is generally less valued. Social structures support the emotional and family life of people less than before. The paradoxes are numerous. On the one hand, many young people suffer from lack of opportunities for housing and struggle to cope with everyday needs. Precarious working conditions make it difficult to set up a home and a comfortable life. A family and a home are two things that go hand in hand, and yet one of these is often missing. On the other hand, this very culture of competitiveness and consumerism offers young people such opportunities that they show no interest in engaging in forming a family.

The old ways of the family characterised by authoritarianism and patriarchy have disappeared to reveal the true heart of marriage: love. However current society seems to give little value to the monogamous union between a man and a woman based on permanence and openness to life. We should add that the word “family” includes a variety of realities.

The movement towards equality between men and women has progressed decisively, though violence and unacceptable practices still persist and new forms of exploitation of the female body emerge. The feminist struggle, though legitimate, has sometimes led to extreme theories that disregard the difference between the sexes and how they complement each other. Included among these are forms of “gender theory” that propose that human sexual identity depends on the choice of the individual.

Exalting “me” is equally a sign of the times. It’s positive in encouraging the best in everyone and promoting the freedom to make the most of one’s own life. However, the absence of personal discipline and moral focus can lead to the inability to give generously of oneself. In this way, the culture of individualism intrudes bit by bit into the family circle, to its detriment. If the “me” and not the “we” becomes master, then the marriage and the family are at the service of the individual and not the other way around. A marriage and family grow together and change according to the sensitivity and desires of each person. It all takes effort and it becomes all too easy to justify lack of commitment and breakdowns in a marriage.

The cult of individualism does not encourage true love based on faithfulness. Instead, it encourages people to dispose of emotional relationships and move easily from one to another.

Crises in a couple’s relationship are dealt with superficially, impatiently and egotistically. Breakdowns result in new relationships and new unions. Each episode generates situations that are more difficult to understand and experience, especially for children.

And yet the desire for a union and a stable family remains strongly at the heart of each person. This is the need which the Church is called to meet.

Religion

The cult of individualism leads to moral relativism and the relegation of God to a person's private sphere. This impoverishes public life. Society is deprived of shared values which work for the benefit of all. There's a vacuum around support and guidance for people facing the big questions which they confront, especially ethical ones. The Church today needs to fill this gap.

The weakening of faith and religious practice also leaves families needier when faced with difficulties. Many people suffer the horror of a loneliness caused by fragile relationships and the absence of God in their lives. They can find themselves attracted to new religious "offers". Some tend towards fundamentalism and others go for a spirituality without God. These propositions often find a favourable response on the fringes of society and in the poorest areas where people suffer the greatest deprivation and live in hardship.

We need to recognise with Pope Francis that if some of our baptised people do not participate in the activities of the Church, it is due to the existence of certain structures and an unwelcoming climate in some of our parishes and communities.

Questions for discussion

1. "Today's society does seem to be able to adapt to long-established truths and customs. On the contrary, it challenges our norms and seeks justification and coherent answers from us." (p. 8)

Do you think this is true? What are some of the norms — long-established ways of doing things — that you see being challenged in today's Australian society?

2. 'The Teams movement accepts enthusiastically the call to evangelise by the power of the Holy Spirit. But if we want to be intelligible apostles, if we want to have our message heard by others, we must seek spiritual wisdom.' (p. 8)

What might it mean in concrete terms for the Teams movement and us as members to accept 'enthusiastically the call to evangelise'? Does Teams assist us in finding 'spiritual wisdom'?

3. 'If the "me" and not the "we" becomes master, then a marriage and a family are at the service of the individual and not the other way around.' (p. 9)

What sorts of things lead to the "me" rather than the "we" becoming the master of the marriage relationship? What can be done to prevent this possibility, or to correct it if it does happen?

4. 'There's a vacuum around support and guidance for people facing the big questions which they confront, especially ethical ones. The Church today needs to fill this gap.' (p. 10)

In the wake of the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, is the Church these days capable of filling this gap and taking a leading role in addressing ethical issues?

How do we as Teams couples maintain our faith and integrity in the face of revelations about the dysfunctional character of our Church?

And is the Teams movement — and individual Teams — able to step into the vacuum and offer 'support and guidance', especially on ethical questions related to marriage and family issues?

5. "We need to recognise with Pope Francis that if some of our baptised people do not participate in the activities of the Church, it is because of our structures and an unwelcoming climate in some of our parishes and communities." (p. 10)

Do you agree with this statement? As a Team, what can we do about it?

3. *Envisaging the future towards which we want the movement to progress*

What real challenges can the movement respond to and how?

Our mission and challenge are both this: to help to discover and to live the true nature/depths of human love which current culture tends to distort.

Chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia* shows the splendour of true love. Love is a crafted work that is realised in the highs and lows of everyday life. It's a place to love from morning till night, accepting and overcoming each other's imperfections. It's a reality which changes during one's life but doesn't lose its essence. It's a definitive and lasting commitment that demands and generates a union with God. Ultimately our mission is to show the path to happiness and holiness.

The Teams movement knows that God will not cease to give it the strength and the means necessary to confidently make progress with this task. As Pope Francis said in 2015 in his speech to the leaders of the movement, we have something that we need to share and must share. His was a call to turn our practices towards mission. We are called to share our strengths with others.

Of course Teams must answer the call of the Church starting from where we are. To live mission, based on our charism, involves realising it first as a couple, sharing it as a team and relying on the impetus and encouragement of the wider movement.

There is nothing new about this call to mission. Our founding charism is not only to cultivate conjugal spirituality. It also calls us to promote a missionary spirit in each member of each team. The movement won't take away the freedom or the initiative of team members. But it is there to support and encourage practical programs to nurture couples in the new situations which they encounter in contemporary society. This is the real contribution we can make to the Church and the world today: it is our strength.

How can we enhance this new spirit and new dynamic mission? Let's be inspired by the key words with which Pope Francis is constantly urging us: to discern, to welcome and to accompany.

3-1 To discern and to welcome

Welcome: this word is part of the identity of the movement expressed in the founding Charter. In his magazine article "Marriage, the great sacrament", Fr Caffarel spoke of the ministry of Christian hospitality. Hospitality contributes crucially to the life and growth of the Church. The couple or the small community that gathers in privacy, whether briefly or for a longer time, offers not only its human warmth but also its radiating love and the real presence of Christ. In this way, "the non-believer or the part believer, the unhappy, the abandoned, the sinner will come face to face with the bigger Church, will become familiar with it and turn to the sacraments and the liturgy." From the perspective of the new evangelisation, it is vital to maintain this spirit of welcome at the heart of Teams. In practising it we are not to forget that "the Lord receives into His house and not into that of his neighbour".

The International College meeting in Florianopolis in 2017 wanted to embrace warmly and practically, according to our founding charism, the words of Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*. In this way the world as well as the Church concerns the Teams movement. Because our charism is at the service of the Church.

Pope Francis promotes an “outward-looking Church”, combining a sense of action with the practice of hospitality. Fr Caffarel preached this same message years ago: whoever regards themselves as hosts does not wait for someone to come knocking at their door; they will have already invited that person in. This is the first manifestation of hospitality. Loving intuition makes it easy to know who is in need of this invitation.

In his address to Teams in Rome in 2015 Pope Francis urged us above all to practise and to live conjugal spirituality fully, constantly and perseveringly. But he reminded us that this spirituality, if it is not missionary, remains ineffectual. In Teams we receive a great deal from Christ and the Church. And so because of that the Movement feels irresistibly sent out to testify and pass on what we have received. As Father Caffarel desired, Teams have to be the “shock troops” of a Church that is leaving its comfort zone to face whatever is necessary.

This is both a call to the community and to the individual. What we are calling the New Evangelisation implies a new commitment of each and every team member. This is not a job just for qualified professionals. Knowing our limitations will keep us motivated not to remain mediocre but to continue to pursue holiness. Mission opens up a path of formation and maturity.

All this implies a new impetus and a new spirit in the expansion of the Movement. It’s important therefore, in the context of the New Evangelisation, to make known the riches of Christian marriage in as many countries as possible. We know very well how the pedagogy of Teams is so important in developing a positive relationship between a man and a woman.

Internationality, cultural diversity and socio-economic differences — all these are right on our doorstep. It’s time to take down the numerous barriers to expanding the movement and spreading the Good News that accompanies it. A welcome sign of growth in Teams in Australia in recent years has been the establishment of a number of teams in Sydney made up of couples belonging to the Maronite and Melkite Catholic Churches, joining the far more numerous couples belonging to the Latin Rite.

When we look for a new couple to join our team or when we plan a Teams expansion or information event in our sector, what do we do? Do we go out and only look for those who are like us or do we consider the option of welcoming the stranger? All too often we are fishers in waters that are familiar to us and we are afraid of fishing in waters that we don’t know well.

How can we increase our capacity to welcome while respecting the charism of the movement and its Canonical Statutes? There is no easy answer. But science tells us that a healthy cell needs a strong nucleus with a porous membrane which allows exchange in certain situations. The call of the Church no longer makes it possible for Teams to live locked away in the shadows.

The Canonical Statutes include rules to be respected for the welcome of new members. These rules determine a precise formula covering full membership of the movement. At the same time the movement acts with a spirit of discernment, forgiveness, prudence and charity when faced with certain situations. It attempts to analyse with love each situation, case by case, never losing sight of its founding charism. In line with Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia*, this kind of welcome suggests a fellowship that could eventually lead to some participating in the movement without actually belonging to it. Such a response is compatible with our charism of conjugal spirituality. We acknowledge that there is some spiritual conjugality within each couple who commit to a real love and a true quest for God. Discerning how to welcome others evokes the mystery of our eternal and infinite God, who humbly reaches out to us in mercy.

3-2 To discern and to accompany

Above all Pope Francis points out the great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge to be met by practising a complete conversion to a fully Christian life and by adopting a different lifestyle.

The family is the privileged place in which to achieve this conversion. It is where life is welcomed and protected; where we cultivate our first experiences of love, of sharing and of respect for all; and where hospitality is practised. On this basis the Church stresses the need to strengthen the education of children and to overcome obstacles so as to pass on faith within the family.

The family is the ideal place for dialogue and exchanges between generations. Young people have a new sensitivity and a generous spirit. A lot of them fight admirably for a more just and more open world. They can help us to get back again on the right path to conversion and mission that the Church is showing us:

- To develop an ecological conscience which leads to a simpler, humbler and more interdependent way of life
- To overcome defensiveness or a lack of confidence and be open to going out to meet others beyond our boundaries because the Holy Spirit is also at work there.
- To promote respect for the dignity of the individual and exercise freedom ethically and responsibly, particularly in emotional and sexual relationships.

The Church recognises that Christian couples, by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, are the main agents of pastoral care within the family. It is not a matter of expounding theories or doctrines. Instead it's a case of demonstrating through experience the attraction of conjugal and family love — the kind of love which meets the deepest expectations of the human being and which is the antidote to the rampant egoism of our times.

We married Christians have the experience that love is stronger than all the agonies a couple can go through, as long as they remain united with Christ. We know very well that the couple is a work in progress that grows gradually thanks to the gifts bestowed on us by God. It is this joy and hope that we are able to pass on.

The key word is “to accompany”. Pope Francis insists on the need to practise “the art of accompaniment” on the path of progress. We in Teams are already initiated in this craft. Our practice forms us in discernment, welcome, listening, compassion, care, patience and mutual understanding. The Church calls us to accompany couples, especially in moments of great fragility. These might be:

- on the path to a firm and lasting commitment;
- during the first years of their life together;
- in moments of crisis and difficulties; and
- in the complex situations resulting from breakdowns, abandonment and lack of understanding.

3-3 Practising the art of accompaniment

Education and transmitting faith

Education is one of the biggest challenges facing families. It has become more demanding and complex because of contemporary culture and the media's huge influence. Transmitting faith once seemed self-evident but is more problematic today. In a materialistic world, where nothing is sacred and everything is put into question, the Teams movement needs to take hold of this issue and help Teams parents with the education of their children. The movement is called to provide pastoral support so that parents themselves can fulfil their educational mission.

As is already done in some places, responsible couples could try to provide some religious-based activities for children during sector days or other events. During retreats, for example, why not invite the children to follow a 'School of Prayer'? The experience can be made easier by using ever more sophisticated technology and entertainment.

Children need symbols, gestures and stories. Teenagers get into conflict regarding authority and rules. We need to encourage their own experiences of faith and to offer them attractive testimonies from our own experience. The revitalisation of Teams for the young would be a logical consequence of this attention paid to the younger ones.

Father Caffarel extolled the virtue of example. For him, missionary families not only give rise to missionary children but, in his day at least, were also the source of numerous vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

Today, when transmitting faith is more difficult for families, it is the concern of our movement, as of all communities of the Church, to help parents. Fellowship demands this of us.

Preparing for and accompanying marriage

The first mission of Teams is, of course, to radiate the Good News of marriage. For a long time now, a number of team members have worked in marriage preparation. But it's interesting to note the view of Father Caffarel in 1987. He said: "I do not think that the Teams of Our Lady should lead marriage preparation, but I do think that Teams of Our Lady should have advice centres for marriage preparation which would be references for other centres, leading on precisely from the spirituality they have discovered."

Our movement could create modules or courses informed by our experience in Teams which could be offered to young couples who have just got married. Many would like to benefit from something to help them through the first years of marriage without actually wanting to belong to the movement.

Pope Francis has expressed this need today in *Amoris Laetitia* (n.211): "Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a life-long calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together. The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centred on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties. This involves not only helping them to accept the Church's teaching and to have recourse to her valuable resources, but also offering practical programmes, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance. All this calls for a pedagogy of love, attuned to the feelings and needs of young people and capable of helping them to grow interiorly."

The Teams movement should not ignore all those young people who do not choose the commitment of marriage and prefer to live in de facto relationships. Their reasons are many. It is our responsibility, without judgement or trying to convert, to approach them to explain why, contrary to what is advocated today, Christian marriage is a path to happiness. Thanks to the ethos of Teams, it is possible to guide them not only to marriage but also to encourage in them a desire to progress further on the path of faith. Several initiatives are already under way in different countries. Each country can adapt them and enrich them according to its own situation.

Several Teams initiatives are already operating in different countries to support these couples:

- Reliance Teams are run by Teams members to support couples who are divorced and remarried

- Tandem Teams are run by Teams members to support young couples who are living together but not married)
- *Más Pareja* is a program run by Teams members providing support for Catholic couples who are not necessarily married. They can be young married couples, couples living together or divorced and remarried couples.

Each country is able to adapt them and enrich them according to its own situation.

Finally, the movement's responsible couples need to be influential at their diocesan pastoral level. It is a challenge that we are faced with if we want to flourish in the "outside" world and bear fruit.

Couples in crisis

No country is spared from what is called "the crisis of the couple". This often occurs in the first few years of life together. Is there nothing that can be done about it? If Teams think so, then they must respond to the challenge.

As "experienced married couples" surely we have a role to play in a society that currently offers a couple in difficulty nothing much more than separation or divorce? To achieve this goal, implementing long-term pastoral care seems more necessary than ever. This needs to go beyond existing approaches that should certainly still be encouraged and could be picked up elsewhere. Could Teams come forward to work with professionals to help the couple before their crisis becomes irreparable? Can't we find ways to bear witness to the beauty and durability of life together as a couple in spite of the storms that naturally trouble it?

Over time, Teams have created proposals that respond to the various circumstances in a couple's life. In all cases the movement has tried to ensure that, throughout inevitable crises, a couple's relationship remains solid, lasting and lived in the Faith.

Learning to anticipate the crisis before it becomes irreparable is surely a good basis for discernment. Teams have the expertise to be inventive and creative here. Some countries have very interesting initiatives that are worth knowing about and picked up elsewhere. Team members, therefore, could be invited to take a marriage counsellor's course in order to be more effective in helping couples in crisis. Father Caffarel had already come up with this idea in his talk in 1987: "I would like the Teams of Our Lady to have marriage counsellors, not to have a monopoly but to ensure that they act in line with the founding charism."

In certain countries responsible couples regularly organise conferences throughout the year. Whenever possible these are open to everyone on topics related to the couple and the family. In this way the movement is addressing itself to those outside of Teams and can therefore help them to find answers to questions raised by society. These can range from education, ethics and sexuality to love and how to live effectively as a couple.

This support could likewise be relayed to more remote or poorer areas thanks to the various means of communication available to us today. In the same way, the movement could create teams capable of intervening on a variety of subjects.

Couples who have formed a new relationship

We can't ignore the question of separated or divorced couples, who have formed a new relationship and who wish to have a lasting and living faith.

For many years, Popes and bishops have asked us to come to terms with this reality. Pope Francis was very clear in his 2015 address to Teams. “Therefore, it is necessary that you be able to bring your testimony and your experience to help Christian communities to discern the concrete situations of these persons, and to receive them with their wounds, and help them to walk in faith and in truth, under the gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd.”

In France, Reliance Teams are one possibility. (Run by Teams members these support couples who are divorced and remarried). But we must go further if we want as many people as possible to experience the mercy of God.

To be effective all these suggestions need the support of Spiritual Counsellors. The task of helping someone to renew their faith is the task of the counsellors. “It is impossible to dissociate the priest’s mission from the mission of Christ; it prolongs and perpetuates it throughout the centuries.” (Father Caffarel). Teams will work in this area most effectively at regional and sector levels. Depending on the circumstances, Teams can launch a process of reflection and start to experiment. They need to stay in a close relationship with their diocese, which we regard as the most significant structure for assisting with and promoting the new initiatives.

The elderly

Our movement has to adapt to the modern world without leaving aside our old people. We must take into consideration the loneliness they suffer. Initiatives will require imagination and a responsive grassroots approach to local need. It is a challenge for us all.

Marie d’Amonville, widow of Louis, both old colleagues of Father Caffarel, has suggested, wherever possible, creating a new movement linked to Teams. Called “The Life Ahead of Us”, its aim is to help older persons to live in preparation for the “great passage” as a time of grace. This is an idea that is being actively pursued by Teams in Australia.

The birth of this new movement is proof that the founding charism is always fertile and at work. So the movement at all levels needs to take time and make space for reflection and discernment if we really want to find answers to the challenges of our world.

Spiritual reflection and its dissemination

During a colloquium on Father Caffarel in Paris in 2017, Sister Fernanda Barbiero explained in her lecture on his magazine *Anneau d’Or* the key role that this publication had played in the spiritual world of its time. She concluded that “*Anneau d’Or* opened paths that are still to be explored today.” As well as acting as a link between the team members of its time, the magazine opened up perspectives which could still be expanded on and updated today.

In the time of profound change surely we need to open space for reflection and creativity around this basic subject of conjugal spirituality at the dawn of the third millennium?

Of course, the means used would not have much in common with those of *Anneau d’Or*. We would try to use all modern means of communication allowing team members to be reached directly and intimately and thus hopefully get our message out to larger audiences.

This issue could be part of the reflective and creative thinking of the leaders of the movement and, more widely, of all team members. Together we would find in it an essential part of our missionary vocation.

Conclusion

The future of the Teams movement will always be based on greater communion with others. It will only be by affirming the necessity and gift of love that we can attain this communion in the different areas of our life, at the heart of the movement and the Church. Members of Teams participate in their own way in the prophetic and priestly role of Christ in the Church and in the world.

Evangelisation is not an optional invitation but a constant duty. “Evangelisation is to acknowledge one’s position in the missionary Church.” It is to recognise the call of God.

The time has come when our movement feels able to accept and respond to the great concerns of the world. This opportunity gives us meaning and purpose. Out of our core identity as a unique movement comes our specific mission. And it’s a mission for every couple in Teams.

The movement’s mission is to shape, train and motivate couples to be messengers of the Good News in the world in which we live. We are called to proclaim the values of the Gospel at the heart of the couple and the family — the pillars of support for the bridge we have to cross.

The first step to take is to re-create and adapt our methods of formation while remaining true to our charism, so as to provide answers to the real challenges of our time.

The Teams movement can take the lead in what Pope Francis calls the “Outward going Church”, sharing in an evangelising movement of unimaginable proportions. For this reason Teams cannot limit themselves to an individualistic and inner-looking spirituality. We are called to a pastoral perspective that is essential for the transformation of the world.

If we can light up marriage and the family throughout the world with the true light of the Gospel, a new path will open. This will be a reason for hope and joy for all. Our movement should not be restricted to the strict observance of the endeavours without taking the trouble to look around and to see “what to do next”. In fact, some members, even though they respect the endeavours, sometimes lose sight of the true demands of Christian life which should be a blending of faith and works.

Father Caffarel never separated our vocation from our mission. He said that it was necessary to constantly take both aspects into account. Let’s make the words pronounced at the end of each Mass our own: “Go and serve the Lord”.

We conclude with the words of Father Caffarel: “More love in the home, more charity in the teams and more energy in our mission.”

Questions for discussion

1. The third section of the document is the longest and most challenging, and this is reflected in the number of discussion questions about it. The section emphasises the vocation and mission of the Teams movement and of the individual couples in Teams.

Do you and your spouse think of your marriage as your vocation in life? If so, can you say what you mean by that?

2. It has often been said that Teams is not a movement of action, but a movement that assists active

people to nurture their spirit and to go away refreshed and inspired to live their active lives. In this view, Teams is a sort of 'well' that offers refreshment and an opportunity to rest.

Is this the way you see Teams and does the document challenge your assumptions?

3. Pope Francis has told Teams that we have treasures that we 'need to share and must share' (p. 12). He called on us to turn our practices into mission.

What do you think are some of the main things about Teams that are worth sharing with others? What might you share about the importance of the Endeavours as a means of strengthening the life of Teams and your own spirituality of marriage?

4. 'Our founding charism is not only to cultivate conjugal spirituality. It also calls us to promote a missionary spirit in each team member' (p. 12). The document understands this missionary spirit in terms of three key words that Francis often uses: to discern, to welcome and to accompany. The document urges each Team and Team member 'to discern and to welcome'. (p. 12)

What do you think this means for your marriage and family? For your Team? Would you say your Team is a welcoming Team, or is it one that is 'locked away in the shadows'?

5. Teams practice 'forms us in discernment, welcome, listening, compassion, care, patience and mutual understanding' (p. 14). Wow! Surely all married couples — all couples — would want to belong to Teams if they knew this. But relatively few couples in Australia have chosen to join Teams in recent decades.

Why do you think this is? Are couples no longer interested in developing these qualities, or have they found other ways to do so? Has the Teams movement failed in its mission?

What do you think Teams as a movement, and your Team, can do to promote this Good News of Teams among couples who are not members?

6. The document identifies a number of ways that Teams might practise 'the art of accompaniment' (p. 14). These include accompanying young couples preparing for marriage, and those who, for the moment at least, have chosen not to marry, couples in crisis, and couples who are divorced and separated and those who have formed new relationships.

Are these things that only the movement as a whole can do, or can they be done by individual Teams and couples? How might an individual Team take on one or more of these tasks? Has your Team had any experience in any of these areas?

7. In Father Caffarel's vision, 'Teams have to be the "shock troops" of a Church that is leaving its comfort zone to face whatever is necessary' (p. 13). The idea of the Church leaving its comfort zone to face whatever is necessary is probably very different for Australian Catholics today compared to what it was for Fr Caffarel.

Is 'shock troops' a relevant image for Teams in Australia today?

8. In several places, the document talks about the responsibilities of parenthood. Thus, for Fr Caffarel, 'missionary families not only give rise to missionary children but, in his day at least, were also the origin of numerous vocations to the priesthood and religious life' (p. 15). The document also says that the movement should help Teams parents with the education of their children.

What do you think about this emphasis in the document? Is this part of your understanding of the role of teams? What sort of impact do you think your membership of Teams has had on the upbringing of your children? And what about on your grandchildren, if you have any?

9. 'Teams should not ignore all those young people who do not choose the commitment of marriage and prefer to live in de facto relationships. Their reasons are many. It is our responsibility, without judgement or trying to convert, to approach them to explain why, contrary to what is advocated today, Christian marriage is a path to happiness.' (p. 15)

This is a reality for many Teams members today. Having lived out the sacrament of marriage in our own lives, many of us have children who do not consider themselves part of the Church community and who may be living with their partners but choosing not to get married.

How do we deal with this reality? Is there a role for Teams here in supporting couples who experience this? Is it something that we need to be concerned about?

In what ways, if any, has the document challenged you to re-think your understanding of vocation and mission in your marriage?