

STUDY TOPIC 2020-2021

# MARRIAGE

## A SACRAMENT OF MISSION



TEAMS OF OUR LADY  
INTERNATIONAL LEADING TEAM

## Preface: "*Let us seek together*"

The thoughts of Father Caffarel, founder of the Teams of Our Lady, are comparable to a heavenly diamond mine, providing flashes of inspiration. His thoughts were polished by thousands of hours of prayer and meditation; and through the many reflections exchanged with all those married couples he journeyed with. We hope, by presenting them in this study topic, teams couples will be encouraged as they discover more of his thoughts.

### **Father Caffarel would have agreed with Pope Francis that-**

*Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples".* (Pope Francis; *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), 2013; excerpt from Paragraph 120).

Pope Francis' words on the challenges of the new evangelisation, are similar to those of Father Caffarel when he asserts that the spiritual experience opens up to the mission: "*Men who pray are like the fibres which attach the broken branch to the trunk: it will still bear flowers and fruit...*". (AO, No. 135-136, p. 137). And this missionary impulse aligns with the fruitfulness of the couple since "*God uses it to realise his great Design, it is at the service of the union of Christ and the Church*". (AO, No. 111-112, p. 327)

Father Caffarel's thoughts do not give strict guidelines on the mission of a couple, with the possible exception of encouraging hospitality, accompanying couples preparing for marriage or supporting those wounded by trials. But his concern is to energise couples through a fervent spiritual life, despite the upheavals of time. This is a constant theme.

### **The plan of the meetings**

- Meeting 1. We will introduce our topic by looking at the missionary nature of Teams.
- Meeting 2. Will consider the Trinitarian experience of the couple as an embodiment of the holiness of God.
- Meeting 3. Will explore the wide diversity of mission for couples – firstly as a couple
- Meeting 4. And as families
- Meeting 5. Offering hospitality in the home
- Meeting 6. Supporting other couples
- Meeting 7. In professional life and external commitments
- Meeting 8. This meeting considers one of Father Caffarel's most inspired messages that the bonds between spouses "*are stronger than death*".

Ultimately, if holiness is the perfection of charity, the love of the couple is more than an attitude and mutual help, it recognises the ultimate and eternal image of God, namely, Trinitarian communion. Understanding the nature of Christian mission reflects God's loving plan for humanity. For a couple it is much more than a beginning, more a fulfilment of that plan, though God's plans for others may be different.

- Meeting 9. Finally, we offer a format for a review of the study topic and the Teams year

## Topicality of the theme

So, we move forward to the writings of Father Caffarel, and a comparison of complementary texts taken from the writings of Pope Francis, together with questions which couples and teams can share.

In following this topic we may all find a number of challenges; but we should not forget that Father Caffarel's perception that Teams and couples are on a journey, on a path which calls for progressive development, one which strengthens the spiritual maturity of each couple.

Let us conclude by quoting these texts:

*"If the Teams of Our Lady are not a seedbed of men and women ready to take on courageously all their responsibilities in the Church and in society, they lose their raison d'etre" [reason for being]* (quote from Father Caffarel in Study Topic "The Mission of Love", p2) ...

*"Father Caffarel insisted with special zeal of the need of giving the word spirituality an integral sense, a complete meaning: one that cannot detach the aspects that we can initially identify as spiritual, such as prayer and interior life, our everyday life, a commitment to live our Christian being fully. In the place where we are, where we live, in our family, home, workplace, leisure activities, etc. We must have Christ as an example, and specially, serve as He would serve. This is the valid witness of life."* (The Mission of Love, p. 30)

The term "*missionary disciple*" dear to Pope Francis, thus becomes that of "*missionary couple*", that of two disciples living fully in the holiness of their marriage.

# Meeting 1: The missionary dimension of the Teams of Our Lady

"The Teams of Our Lady, a Church community, are missionary communities. And if one day they were no longer missionary, they would no longer be a church community." (HC, Les END. Their mission, 1957)

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*"Holy Spirit, Lord of light, radiance give from celestial height.  
Come thou, Father of the poor, come now with treasures that endure  
Light of all who live.  
Light immortal, light divine; fire of love, our hearts refine,  
Our inmost being fill. (Veni Sancte Spiritus, translated Edward Caswell)*

## 2. Notes for reflection

With around 2 billion Christians (of all denominations) among 7.8 billion people in the world (Wikipedia, 2020), the need of mission in the world does not diminish and calls new witnesses to the Gospel. The charism of Equipes Notre-Dame reveals a providential place for the commitment of the laity which is encouraged by Vatican II and successive Popes: the holiness of the couple. But what are the specific aspects for this mission?

To provide an example, Father Caffarel imagined five Christian community leaders taking up the challenge of evangelisation. The first chose to direct all his efforts to promoting Christianity through prayer, the sacraments and formation. The second adds the concern to bring Christianity to all aspects of civil life: home, professional, political. The third, marked by Christ's commandment "*Be one, just as my Father and I are one*", focuses efforts on the unity and fraternity of his community. The fourth understands that the life of his parishioners are dominated by secular aspects of life, which are often not considered part of faith. He invests his energy in developing Christian compassion for those who are far from the Church: for social justice, solidarity, dignity of the person, respect for the poorest. The fifth makes a crucial discovery: all human communities are woven not of individuals but of family homes. The urgency of the mission consists in bringing Christianity to couples and families, the primary cells of society and of the Church. Each person brought to Christ within his or her family circle will then bear a rich Christian fruitfulness in all the circles of human life.

## The Missionary Ethos of Equipes Notre-Dame

This then is Father Caffarel's inspiration: the family has the vocation to become the birthplace of mission. Mission aims to bring the divine into the human world, following the example of the incarnation of the Word. The charism of Teams of Our Lady participates in the sanctification of the world by encouraging a Christian ethos in the love of the couple. This life of witness shines out and calls other families across the earth to welcome and live in the presence of the Word who came among us to show the love of God and His love of mankind. Father Caffarel, in a beautiful image, compares the charism of the Teams of Our Lady to a magnifying glass which concentrates the rays of the sun to a single point. In the spirit of the Teams, it is a question of letting Christ act from within the grace of marriage and thus fostering a missionary impulse which spreads outwards towards others.

Is this an outdated or utopian idea? As soon as the Charter was promulgated in 1947, the Teams developed rapidly in Europe and then throughout the world: more than 20 countries, 10 years later, and 85 countries today. The movement has thus experienced an expansion that is exponential and universal. This perhaps unexpected fruitfulness alone shows how prophetic the founding idea of the

movement was and remains. It confirms the expectation and the international need for a deep conjugal spirituality based on prayer, whatever the culture. As true signs of the times, the couples in the teams discover that they are not passive receptacles of the grace of marriage, but that this grace transforms each family into a small Church (Ecclesiola) which then becomes the bearer of the missionary vocation for the whole Church.

Every mission is rooted in a vocation, a specific call. The international dimension of the movement is the best proof of the intrinsically missionary nature of the Teams: "*By this all will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another*". (Jn 13:35)

### **Our modern world is waiting for a new Spirituality**

The grace of the sacrament of marriage joins the couple to Christ in a trinity. It opens the love of the spouses to a Pentecostal dimension which bears fruit in "*charity, joy, peace, service, trust in others, self-control*" (cf. Gal 5:22-23). Created in the image of God, the couple not only reproduce in their lives the ways of the Creator, but make Him present and alive as their lives become a visible icon of the eternal gift of the Father to the Son, of the Son to the Father and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: the couple are filled with the Trinity and radiate this by overflowing to others in mission. Sealed by an original covenant and regenerated in Christ, the love of the spouses reveals itself as one of the privileged missions that God uses to carry out his great plan of salvation for the world. It is, as Paul says, at the service of the union of Christ and the Church.

*"A Team of Our Lady is a school of Christian life.*

*A Team of Our Lady is a laboratory of spirituality for the married Christian.*

*A Team of Our Lady is a centre for the diffusion of this same spirituality.*

*A Team of Our Lady is a testimony.*" (HC, The Goals of the Movement, 1952).

### **3. Texts for reflection**

#### **From Father Caffarel**

*But I would like you to know well, and I repeat solemnly today: if one day the Church were to tell me that the Teams of Our Lady are useless, I assure you that I would not wait 24 hours to dissolve them and to ask its members to go where they can better serve the Church.* (HC, The Teams of Our Lady. Their Mission, 1957)

#### **The Christian home participates in the apostolic function of the Church.**

*I also see in a worldwide renewal of Christian marriage, an immense help that Christ offers to his Church. At a time when the growth of the world's population is becoming dizzying [...] it is becoming urgent that witnesses to Christ be multiplied throughout the world. Precisely, if even more Christian households were to discover that they can no longer be content to be the beneficiaries of the Church's sanctifying action but must en masse give their contribution to her apostolic action, that they must be an "epiphany" of the mystery of Christ and of the Church, then, I am convinced, there would be a prodigious expansion of the Kingdom of God.*

*Finally, I see in a renewal of marriage a precious hope for those parts of the world where ecclesiastical structures are paralysed or suppressed, where worship itself is not always possible. There the Church of Christ takes refuge, concentrates if I may say so, in deeply Christian homes. And in these family-catacombs the Church lives a life, elementary no doubt, but capable of the most beautiful fruits of holiness, and she perpetuates herself there. And there Christ prepares a new springtime of his Church.*

(AO, no. 107, p. 382).

#### **Pope Francis**

*.... In the second place, I invite the couples, fortified by the meeting in Teams, to the missionary commitment. This mission, which is entrusted to them, is all the more important in as much as the*

*image of the family -- as God wills it, made up of one man and one woman in view of the good of the spouses and also of the generation and education of children -- is deformed through powerful contrary projects supported by ideological colonisations. You are certainly already missionaries by the radiation of your family life to your ambits of friendship and relations, and also others. In fact, a happy and balanced family, inhabited by the presence of God, speaks on its own of the love of God for all. However, I invite you also to commit yourselves, if it is possible, in an ever more concrete way and with ever renewed creativity, in the activities that can be organised to receive, form and support in the faith, particularly young couples, before and after their marriage.*

*I also exhort you to continue to be close to wounded families, which today are so numerous, because of the lack of work, of poverty, of a health problem, of mourning, of worry caused by a child, of the lack of balance caused by an estrangement or absence, of a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they find themselves vulnerable.*

*Finally, I cannot but encourage the couples of Équipes Notre Dame to be instruments of the mercy of Christ and of the Church towards persons whose marriage has failed. Never forget that your conjugal fidelity is a gift of God, and that mercy has been given to each one of us.....*

*(Excerpt from the Speech Pope Francis to Participants of the International Regional Couples Meeting organised by Equipes Notre-Dame; Salle Clémentine Thursday, September 10, 2015)*

### **Vocation and mission**

In this new stage, the Movement assumes, with a clear awareness, the real meaning of its mission in the Church and in the world. To this end, it reaffirms that its charism is not only to cultivate married spirituality, but also to promote a missionary spirit in every member, in every team (AO, p.20).

All this can mean a new impulse and a new spirit in the spreading of the Movement. Indeed, it is important in the framework of the new evangelization to make known, to the greatest possible number of countries, the riches of Christian marriage. We know how much the pedagogy of the Teams of Our Lady is a leaven to positively develop the relationship between man and woman (AO, p. 22).

### **4. Question for the Sit-Down**

Let us recall the priest or couple who once told us about the Teams of Our Lady and how their enthusiasm encouraged us to join the Teams (where we got to know the Teams of Our Lady in a different way). Let us remember this moment, let us praise the Lord for this gift and for those who gave it to us.

*[This proposed question for the sit-down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple which is good to ask ourselves regularly].*

### **5. The team meeting – suggested format**

#### **A- Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Share about the place of the team and of Equipes Notre-Dame in our lives.

#### **B- Time of prayer**

##### **Matthew 9:10-13: (NSRV)**

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, Jesus said, "It is not those who are well

who have need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what it means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners."

#### **Luke 14:12-14 (NSRV)**

Jesus also said to the one who had invited him: "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives, or rich neighbours; in case they may too invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you have a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you in return, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

#### **C- Sharing on an Endeavour: The Word of God**

We suggest the Team shares on the Word of God, the basis of our whole Christian life.

#### **D- Questions for discussion**

*The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:*

1. Equipes Notre-Dame spread because the first couples were amazed and enthusiastic. How do we talk about Teams?
2. How do we convince couples of the benefits of Teams?
3. Mention aspects of this text which challenge my certainties and encourage my hope.
4. Mention any aspect of the text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
5. Is there anything in this text that could be a personal rule of life?

#### **E- Liturgical prayer**

*Pope Francis: Prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (24 November 2013)*

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith:  
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own "yes"  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.*

*Filled with Christ's presence,  
you brought joy to John the Baptist,  
making him exult in the womb of his mother.  
Brimming over with joy,  
you sang of the great things done by God.  
Standing at the foot of the cross  
with unyielding faith,  
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,  
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit  
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.*

*Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,  
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life  
which triumphs over death.*

*Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,  
that the gift of unfading beauty  
may reach every man and woman.*

*Virgin of listening and contemplation,  
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,  
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,  
that she may never be closed in on herself  
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.  
Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.  
Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,  
pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia!*

**F- Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

## Meeting 2: Marriage, a path of holiness

"This apostolate of holiness is in a sense the only true one." (AO, No. 111-112, p.239)

### 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

"From Thee is every good thought and desire, every good purpose, every good effort, every good success." "Increase in me this grace of love, in spite of all my unworthiness." (from "Meditations and Devotions"; Saint John Henry Newman)

### 2. Notes for reflection

The first thing we all need to do when we set out on a journey is to know where we are going. God's ultimate aim for the world is the fullness of the glory of heaven, which is another word for the holiness to which we are called.

#### **Holy Couple – Joy of the Church, witness to the world**

This theme has been treated in depth in the previous study topic – "Holy Couple – Joy of the Church, witness to the world". Father Caffarel developed at length this idea that *"the more we sanctify ourselves as persons, as a couple and as a team.... the more fruitful we will become for the Church and for the world"*. As he explains: *"In our Teams, Christ is at work, it is true, to sanctify us, .... because if we are not sanctified, He will not be able to act through us. To be sanctified means to have given way to Christ, and therefore to allow Him to act. Not to be sanctified means to be impervious to Christ, to be an instrument that He cannot use..."* He continued: *"A saint is not, above all, as many people imagine, a champion who achieves feats of virtue, spiritual feats. He is, essentially, a person seduced by God. He offers his whole life to God.* (AO, no. 111-112, p. 291).

This consecration to God is therefore not reserved for religious or priests: every Christian home is, through the sacrament of marriage, consecrated by God. If the couple agrees to this primary vocation and mission, it is then a true metamorphosis of the love of the spouses which takes place, and which extends from person to person throughout the life of the family. This source of sanctification makes the spouses true stewards of the mystery of God.

*"The Christian couple is transformed in depth in their 'conjugal being', withdrawn from the sinful world, through the grace of God, introduced into the Kingdom; the Christian home is of a completely different essence from the non-Christian home: in a word, it is a cell of the Church. And this transmutation, inaugurated on the day of the reception of the sacrament, takes place little by little throughout the existence of the couple."* (AO, No. 111-112, p.231)

#### **The link between holiness and mission: sanctified love becomes sanctifying**

The effort of prayer and the endeavours encouraged by Equipes Notre-Dame is not a kind of recipe for conjugal success, but a deep vocation and mission for Christian couples. These means are dedicated less to the service of the individual holiness of each member of the family, than to that of the communion of love and life which binds them together. Father Caffarel does not hesitate to speak of holiness. The life of the home begins to bear graces as it strives towards divine ambition. It does not matter how far the couple's spiritual progress has come: here is the end, here is the road. The ideal of Holiness is the first mission of the couple.

#### **Movement of initiation and perfection for the world**

Father Caffarel considers that Teams is a movement of initiation and a movement towards perfection. Grace is present from the moment the sacrament of marriage is instituted. The mission towards perfection is the continuing journey for Teams. The need for holiness is not only a prerequisite for the strength of the mission; it has its own purpose which goes beyond action.

*"Mystical prayer does not have to be justified by its effectiveness, much less by its effectiveness in terms of action. It is of a different order, mysterious, superior. Nevertheless, the greatest men of action in the Kingdom of God were great mystics. Nothing is therefore more false and vain than to oppose the mystics and the men of action, reserving the first the high forms of prayer, the second the apostolic undertakings."* (AO, n° 91, p. 13)

### **3. Texts for reflection**

#### **From Father Caffarel**

*Christian love is authentically human; at the same time it is supernatural: Charity, that love which comes down from the heart of God, works it from within like a powerful sap and makes it bear fruits of holiness.* (AO, no. 2-3-4, p. 9).

*I know men and women who one day decided to do something about it. They thought of their existence in terms of their Christian life, and not the other way around. Some of them have had to make profound changes in the way they organize their lives. I do not claim, moreover, that they succeeded in doing so overnight, that their programme was never upset for reasons of force majeure. But what I can tell you is that for these businessmen, these doctors, these workers, these mothers with large families - who are no less busy than you are - life has been transformed since the Eucharist, the Word of God, and prayer have found a place in their daily lives. For them I fear neither the failure of their faith nor that of their homes. They are the living.* (AO, no. 62, p. 97).

*What I think the Christian community and its members lack is vitality: no violence, no passion is left in them. From this disturbing anaemia I believe, for my part, that the reason lies in the disaffection of today's Christians for prayer, and especially for this form of prayer, head to head of man with his God, which is called prayer. Without it, the Word of God, the sacraments are in a way sealed sources, unused energies... Because Christians do not draw, through prayer, on the divine force, they become soft in action; because they do not contemplate the greatness of God, they remain pusillanimous; because they do not rise up to the Lord's thoughts, they have only a short-sighted vision of the problems of the world; because they do not connect with creative energy, they are inefficient. In a word, when Christians do not practise prayer, they remain as if fixed at an infantile stage? In all the men of prayer whose evolution I have been able to follow, I have indeed noticed an affirmation of personality, greater serenity, a vision of problems that is at once wider and more realistic, a multiplied efficiency, - in short, an increase in human and supernatural vitality. But they do not become perfect overnight, nor are they miraculously delivered from their defects and limitations. But, at last, they are **major**.* (AO, no. 25, p.3)

....

*In today's world, it should be our ambition to make Christ's holiness burst forth, which over the centuries has burst forth in the martyrs, which has burst forth in the great Doctors, which has burst forth in the Virgins, which has burst forth in the hermits, which has burst forth in the missionaries who have left everything, which has burst forth in the Apostles in every dress and every hair. The holiness of Christ in the twentieth century should burst forth in marriages. The proof of this is that when you want to put yourself under the patronage of married saints, you have a hard time finding anything other than legendary saints. It is up to you to become those saints!* (HC, Why Teams of Our Lady? Requirements and Mission, 1949)

#### **Pope Francis: Amoris Laetitia**

*72. 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, through the sacramental sign, of the same*

*relationship between Christ and the Church. The married couple are therefore a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament". Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment.*

### **Pope Francis: Gaudete et Exsultate**

19. *A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess 4:3). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.*

33. *To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world. The bishops of West Africa have observed that "we are being called in the spirit of the New Evangelization to be evangelized and to evangelize through the empowering of all you, the baptized, to take up your roles as salt of the earth and light of the world wherever you find yourselves".*

34. *Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint".*

### **Testimony of a priest, spiritual counsellor of two Teams**

About 10 years after our marriage, my wife Françoise makes a big statement to me: "*You know, if I have to die first, I know you'll become a priest and be very happy.*" The apostle heart of my wife will also want to be a prophet: Françoise would leave for the Lord 10 years later, struck down by a merciless cancer, and this year 2020 I will celebrate a beautiful jubilee: my 25 years of priesthood, with my Archbishop! "*I want my joy to be in you and to be perfect.*" Yes, what a joy to consecrate in my humble hands the body of Christ which my holy Françoise adores in heaven!

### **Testimony of a team member**

I was baptized at birth. I did not receive a religious education, unlike my wife. We were married before the Lord. For Suzanne, it was a sacrament. For me, it was a way of showing her my love. Later, Suzanne encouraged me to attend a family session at Paray-le-Monial. Spending our holidays mixing with a crowd of zealous Catholics...poor old me! Suzanne urged me: "You don't have to do anything, come and see."

I signed up for a theme on fathers. An elderly gentleman first started to make us laugh before saying something so new to me that I burst into tears a few minutes later. He was simply talking about love, about the love of fathers for their sons, about the difficulties that fathers have in expressing that love. The need for it too. He expressed in simple words the power of God's love. I was overwhelmed. This gentleman was Father Sonet. He echoed the difficulties I was having in my relationship with my eldest son.

My wife (again!) told me about Teams of Our Lady. Why not! But still, I felt shy. "Listen, let's go there once... and we'll see". That only reassured me slightly! I discovered a young and dynamic team with a priest who understood my background. I was reassured: I wasn't being judged! Shortly afterwards, our second son questioned me during the preparation of his first communion. "And why, Dad, wouldn't you do it too?" Of course, all the team members immediately supported me. A year of monthly Sunday meetings, rich in sharing, teaching, and particularly fraternal Masses. I was

impressed by the vibrant faith of some of the catechumens, who had struggled through life. I remember the years when I would come forward, arms folded, for the Sunday blessing. The astonished looks of the parishioners and sometimes also of the priests, considering my age (45 years old). I had time to approach, slowly, gently, the mystery of communion, and to desire it deeply, and to decide if I was happy to receive communion. Today, the Eucharist allows me to be connected, every Sunday, to this love of God. The same love whose discovery had moved me. To draw from it allows me to move forward with Suzanne.

#### **4. Question for the Sit-Down**

How do we witness to the Love of God?

[This proposed question for the sit-down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple which is good to ask ourselves regularly].

#### **5. The team meeting – suggested format**

##### **A. Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, such as those that have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Share what has been for us a sign of God's presence during this month.

##### **B. Time for prayer**

###### **Matthew 1:18-21 (NRSV)**

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

##### **C. Sharing on an Endeavour: Prayer**

We suggest the Team shares on prayer as a way to progress in holiness.

##### **D. Questions for discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. What do we understand by Father Caffarel's phrase: "*A saint is not, above all, [...] a champion who achieves feats of virtue, spiritual feats? A saint is, essentially, someone seduced by God, who offers their whole life to God*"?
2. How is our marriage a "church cell"?
3. Mention aspects of this text which challenges my certainties and encourages my hope.
4. Mention any aspect of the text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
5. Is there anything in this text that could be a personal rule of life?

##### **E. Liturgical prayer**

Pope Francis: Extract from the prayer to the Holy Family at the Angelus on the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth; 29 December 2013

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate  
the splendour of true love,*

*to you we turn with trust.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic Churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again  
experience violence, rejection and division:  
may all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
graciously hear our prayer.*

**F. Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 3: Mission as a Couple.

"If you are loyal with love, love will lead you far and high; it will discover for you an ever deeper love of God." (AO, no. 84, p.430)

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*"Flood my soul with Your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly, that my life may only be a radiance of Yours.*

*Shine through me, and be so in me, that every soul I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus!*

*Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,*

*So, to shine as to be a light to others; The light, O Jesus will be all from You; none of it will be mine;*

*It will be you, shining on others through me. (original words by Saint John Henry Newman in his "Meditations and Devotions")*

## 2. Notes for reflection

The first few years of marriage were described by Denise Cottrell Boyce in this way : *"The bride and groom hold hands and with great delight jump off a cliff together, trusting that they will be lifted upwards on the breath of the Holy Spirit. It's thrilling. It's irresistible when you find your soulmate."* (from "For better, for worse", The Tablet, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2020.) The enthusiasm of young love and the practical challenges of setting up home can be accompanied by a reduction in spiritual aspects and Church attendance. The busyness overtakes the couple and they do not perceive how their lives call for a spiritual dimension and a road towards holiness. But Catholic theology teaches that the spouses are ministers of their own marriage. This is true not only of the church celebration but throughout the rest of life. The spouses are on a mission of sanctification for each other throughout their lives.

### **This mission is a challenge**

Is it enough to love in order to allow a spouse to grow? The risk is to relate love to one's own enjoyment, which can then become its measure? This can lead to self-justified jealousy and disappointment with the other.

When Father Caffarel was asked about the challenges that confront the couple, he summed it up as follows: *"To take one's own side in not doing more for the one you love is not only a sign, but first of all, the cause of the decline of love"*. If moved by a love that is renewed each day in Christ, they will become more committed to a mission oriented towards each another.

What does Fr Caffarel advise in order to meet the challenge of sanctifying the spouse?

### **The means of achieving this mission for the spouse**

For Father Caffarel, the reciprocal mission of the spouses requires an attitude of mutual assistance imbued with charity that unfolds in three dimensions: to see as God sees, to advise one's spouse, and to faithfully support them in their efforts.

God's gaze is creative: by looking, He creates. The loving gaze of the spouses must seek to pierce the shell of appearance and to join in love. First of all, to love is to know. The total love of the spouse calls for one to unite with the gaze of God, who looks at each person in the promise of the glory He offers them in Heaven.

Letting yourself be known, by revealing yourself to your spouse, is part of the mission of the gaze that builds confidence and consoles. This path requires overcoming the fear of the gaze of others, to reveal one's frailties. To forgive authentically is about joining in the depth and goodness of the other, looking beyond the actions that hurt.

Each spouse, enriched by shared charisms, helps the other on the road to holiness. Of course, it is not a question of copying each other, but about balancing each other, supporting each other, and encouraging each other to flourish. Living together gives the spouses a firm up-to-date knowledge that no outside guide can ever match.

*"Victory is mine if I never tire of giving. A double victory moreover: by relentlessly pursuing the blossoming of the being I love I am advancing unfailingly towards my own perfection."* (AO, 27-28, 193)

### **The stages of the journey of the couple's mission – relationship, love, communion**

The commandment of love is the great Gospel principle of Holiness: we will be judged on love. Of course, it is impossible to love everyone with the same total and effective gift of life.

Love of the spouse is a fundamental mission for the baptized in response to the new commandment "love one another".

In summing up this mutual accompaniment, Father Caffarel sees three distinct stages.

- The first stage is learning Christ's teachings: what is good to do, or on the contrary, what distances us from God. Couples have discovered that conjugal love does not diminish freedom but opens it up. They discover that the God who first led them to one another now trusts them to lead one another to God through the mystery of marriage.
- The second stage is the decision to love nothing more than Christ: "*Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me*" (Mt 10:37). For example, seeking to encourage the spiritual life of one's spouse, and the mutual endeavours of the Team.
- Finally, the third consists in allowing oneself to be led in everything by the love of Christ: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37).

In putting God first, the spouses realize that their communion of love goes much further than they originally envisioned. The conjugal bond is transformed into an eternal love that is capable of crossing death. The unity of holiness is realized: it is the same love that God is loved and that they love each other. This love becomes fruitful of other missions and animates them.

### **3. Texts for reflection**

#### **From Father Caffarel**

*He who separates himself from God, if he does not lose the power to love, nevertheless abandons the best of his love. On the other hand, this love grows as the love for God grows. The conjugal union is worth, in human quality and in eternity, what the union of the spouses with God is worth. [...] To deny oneself to God is to deny one's spouse one's daily bread: love. He is lying, he who pretends to value love while he despises Love. Love is only a messenger. God is its master. [...] The creature cannot fill a heart large enough to receive the Creator. This disappointment often leads to a loss of faith in love. [...] This is what we should have asked him from the start. He is a means and not the end; but the means is powerful. For the human heart, love is, indeed, the great chance. It wrenches it from itself as from the unjust hold of creatures.* (AO, no. 2-3-4, pp. 12-13)

*After having healed love, Grace, the tireless worker, constantly recreates love, daily renews its youth and uses with supreme art the joys and sorrows, the efforts and faults themselves to make it more joyful and stronger. The conjugal bond is strong, for grace is a powerful worker of union. This union is made, repaired and consolidated day by day. (AO, no. 2-3-4, p. 11).*

*In the home, even a Christian one, there are various motives and motivations: the old attraction of the sexes, the fear of loneliness, the need to love and to be loved, the desire for children - and also, of course, the desire for religious progress. However, it must be admitted that very often this desire for spiritual progress is not the first. It struggles to compete with the other desires. The great task for Christian spouses, therefore, is, first of all, to become aware that the "new commandment" concerns them, and secondly, to work to convert their conjugal love into conjugal charity. (AO, no. 125, p. 384).*

*Love doesn't speak any other language. To love is to want the full success of your loved one. Its development and human happiness no doubt. But first and above all, his religious fulfillment, without which his life will not be successful, his being will be eternally useless. True love is ambitious. True love is demanding [...] How many husbands and wives imagine that they are working for the salvation of others, when their constant recriminations, which poison their hearts and family life, are nothing but the bitter fruits of disappointment or sad repression!*

*[.....]*

*What has to be done is first of all an internal matter [...] Let this will be translated into prayer: do not forget that your prayer as a spouse draws exceptional strength and effectiveness from the sacrament of marriage. Join penance to prayer. You have not done everything for him until you have done penance.*

*Then take a lucid look at your spouse. Know their gifts, apparent or hidden like good seeds in their soul, and help to bring them out. Do not ignore their faults. But do not take your side: that would be complicity, a serious fault, of which many spouses are guilty. Again, be careful! There are some who can only see evil. There is a lucidity of selfishness, very different from this lucidity of love that I recommend to you. (AO, no. 19, pp. 2-4)*

*You must work at your mutual sanctification: not in the manner of two preachers building each other up throughout your lives with pious words, but essentially in and through the very exercise of your vocation as spouses and parents. It is not so much a question of striving to "do good" for your spouse as of helping one another, of loving one another, of loving your children and of supporting one another in the exercise of fatherhood and motherhood. (AO, no. 111-112, p. 261).*

*Agape has been described as a pure gift, rigorously disinterested. Yes, in God, in the Father in whom it has its source, it is a fullness that springs forth. On the other hand, in the Son, love is first of all a welcome to the gift of the Father, and the same is true for the children of God. (AO, no. 117-118, pp. 282-284)*

### **Pope Francis *Amoris laetitia***

*320. There comes a point where a couple's love attains the height of its freedom and becomes the basis of a healthy autonomy. This happens when each spouse realizes that the other is not his or her own, but has a much more important master, the one Lord. No one but God can presume to take over the deepest and most personal core of the loved one; he alone can be the ultimate centre of their life. At the same time, the principle of spiritual realism requires that one spouse not presume that the other can completely satisfy his or her needs. The spiritual journey of each – as Dietrich*

*Bonhoeffer nicely put it – needs to help them to a certain “disillusionment” with regard to the other, to stop expecting from that person something which is proper to the love of God alone. This demands an interior divestment. The space which each of the spouses makes exclusively for their personal relationship with God not only helps heal the hurts of life in common, but also enables the spouses to find in the love of God the deepest source of meaning in their own lives. Each day we have to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit to make this interior freedom possible.*

*134. All this occurs through a process of constant growth. The very special form of love that is marriage is called to embody what Saint Thomas Aquinas said about charity in general. “Charity”, he says, “by its very nature, has no limit to its increase, for it is a participation in that infinite charity which is the Holy Spirit... Nor on the part of the subject can its limit be fixed, because as charity grows, so too does its capacity for an even greater increase”. Saint Paul also prays: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another” (1 Th 3:12), and again, “concerning fraternal love... we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more” (1 Th 4:9-10). More and more! Marital love is not defended primarily by presenting indissolubility as a duty, or by repeating doctrine, but by helping it to grow ever stronger under the impulse of grace. A love that fails to grow is at risk. Growth can only occur if we respond to God’s grace through constant acts of love, acts of kindness that become ever more frequent, intense, generous, tender and cheerful. Husbands and wives “become conscious of their unity and experience it more deeply from day to day”. The gift of God’s love poured out upon the spouses is also a summons to constant growth in grace.*

### **Testimony**

I was recently preparing the baptism of the first child of Peter\* and Sophie\*. We got to know each other, and they told me about the preparation of their religious marriage ceremony two years earlier.

Sophie, baptized, had happily returned to the practice of her faith after a difficult adolescence. Peter is an atheist, like his whole family. Their love is touching, full of listening, delicate benevolence, and a deep respect for others in the acknowledgement of their differences.

The priest who was going to preside over their commitment opts for a blessing, which was also the wish of Sophie who did not want to impose a Mass on her in-laws. Peter admired the delicacy of his wife who, as a result, would not be able to go to Communion, just like his in-laws, who are fundamentally religious.

In her spiritual life, Sophie did not fail to explain to her husband the happiness and the benefits of her dignity as a child of God. Peter wanted to be completely open to the existence of God. He listened, understood, reflected; and loves his wife's apostle heart so much.

From then on, Peter decided to go and meet the priest: "Father, know this, one fine day I will ask for baptism. My beloved wife, a devout believer, has explained to me the life of Jesus, the love he has for me, and he, who is the way, the truth and the life. I now know that he has risen from the dead. So, I want our commitment to take place during a Mass."

"Sir, I am very moved by your approach, it is of course with joy that I will celebrate a Mass".

Under the action of the Holy Spirit, Sophie's apostle's heart has done wonders and continues to do so.

*\* First names have been changed*

## **4. Questions for the Sit-Down**

Consider when our spouse has been a spiritual support.

[The question for the sit-down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple which is good to ask ourselves regularly].

## **5. The team meeting – suggested format**

### **A- Pooling**

- Share experiences during the month which have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Share about a moment in our life when our partner allowed us to progress spiritually.

### **B- Time for prayer**

#### **1 Peter 1: 14-16 and 22-23 (NRSV)**

*Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance.*

*Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, for it is written: 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*

*Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.*

#### **Eph 5: 25-28 and 32-33 (NRSV)**

*Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives: as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

*This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.*

### **C- Sharing on an Endeavour: The Sit-Down**

We suggest the Team shares on the Sit-down.

### **D- Questions for discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. In what way am I a missionary for my spouse?
2. Consider how the Sit-Down and the Rule of Life have led us to "do more" for the one we love.
3. Mention aspects of this text which challenges my certainties and encourages my hope.
4. Mention aspects of the Text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
5. Is there anything in this text that could be a personal rule of life to me?

### **E- Liturgical prayer**

I salute you, Joseph, you whom divine grace has filled,  
the Saviour has rested in your arms and grown before your eyes,  
you are blessed among all men, and Jesus,  
the divine Child of your virginal wife is blessed.  
Saint Joseph, given for father to the Son of God,  
pray for us in our family concerns,  
of health and work, until our last days,  
and deign to rescue us at the hour of our death. Amen.

### **F- Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 4: Mission as a Family

"You will only effectively help them to become true followers of Christ if you love them in Christ's way." (AO, No. 48, p. 411).

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*"Let us pray to the Holy Spirit, the source of the divine treasures; he bestows wisdom, fear, common sense; to him praise and glory, power and honour".* (Anavathmi of the Holy Spirit)

## 2. Notes for reflection

One mother illustrated the role of the parent in the education of young people with an interesting analogy: that of the perpetual passenger in a car driven by her child where she watches helplessly as her child drives without sufficient care and without regard to the highway code, with no means of intervention other than making a few comments or to cover her eyes in the hope that "it will pass"!

Father Caffarel understood these challenges: *"When the children come, in their turn, they bring an immense wealth, but they also demand a formidable examination. Formidable but necessary, because our journey towards holiness is made up of death and resurrection, of self-denial and growth in charity. Children, that burden which cannot be shed ... children, who make it impossible for a man and a woman to live solely for themselves."* But from this he derives enlightening and precious demands. At the Christian level, parents can happily count on a state of grace to carry out their mission as educators.

## The Mission of the Word

*"Your home will bear witness to God in an even more explicit way if it is the union of two seekers of God"* (HC, Les END face à l'athéisme, 1970)

Conjugal love often produces children, or the desire and opportunity to adopt. This gives the responsibility and opportunity to raise the children in Christian faith. Children are not only guests of their parents' love, but also witnesses to it. This assumes that the couple have first filled themselves with His Word and live by it....

The first mission of parents is therefore to bear witness: to tell what they know of God, to bear witness to their experience of salvation, carried out to the depths of their married life. What language is more universal and unimpeachable than a happy and holy married and family life? And children can surprise the parents with unexpected insights of the love of God.

## A home of prayer

We know the primacy of prayer in the thought and life of Father Caffarel. It should be the centre of family life, praying with and for the children. Children, as the object of all our care, are of course a continual source of intercession and praise: They are also the subjects. Parents reveal to them the grace of God through family prayer. "

*A family that doesn't practice family prayer reminds me of a country church where the sanctuary lamp is extinguished: would that be a sign of Christ's absence?"* This distinguishes Christian families from other families. Prayer is much more than a boring routine. It is a foundation of family life.

### **The mission of charity**

As children grow, there is the challenge and joy of them becoming friends and equals. The first step in this transformation is for parents to seek to love their children with the very love of God. Then, by building on a true dialogue of equals, the parental relationship can mature into a true friendship between parents and children in Christ.

### **The urgency of this mission**

Introducing young people to Christianity is a significant challenge. Stephen Bullivant, in a report entitled "Europe's Young Adults and Religion - Findings from the European Social Survey (2014-16) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops" (Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, St Mary's University, 2018), states that in twelve European countries, over half of young adults claim not to identify with any particular religion or denomination. In France, a quarter of young adult Catholics say that they 'never' attend religious services. In Britain, it is one in five. Not surprisingly, overall levels of prayer frequency in France and Britain are very low. In both countries, over four-fifths of all young people say that they never pray. Nevertheless, each country does possess a small proportion of nonreligious regular prayers – around 3% of whom claim to do so on at least a weekly basis, rising to around 5% with the inclusion of all those who do so at least monthly.

Whatever the debates about numbers, the challenge of evangelisation is crucial to help young people "*become adult Christians, who will respond to this call with the joyful gift of their young freedom, and who will commit themselves to the great adventure of life, determined not to let go of the values of their Master. This table of values, which so blatantly contradicts the values of the world in which they live, must be esteemed from a young age and the maxims must be inculcated in them: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple, let him take up his cross every day and follow me.'*" (AO, no. 48, p. 411).

## **3. Texts for reflection**

### **From Father Caffarel**

*The love his mother and father show him is precious for the child. More necessary, perhaps even more vital, is the love that his father and mother have for each other; their love as spouses. This love which is the source of his being remains for the child the daily bread without which he will never reach his full development. [...] Thanks to him the child, from an early age, is brought into relationship, into contact with the great mystery of the unity of Christ and the Church, which is itself the reflection and extension of the unity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. (AO, no. 111-112, pp. 197-198)*

*[Children] are not jaded. Not a key on their inner keyboard is mute; every creature, every event makes one of those notes vibrate. Every beauty makes the crystal of their soul sing. They have, indeed, besides this faculty of amazement, a power of wonder that one would believe to be unlimited. And in them, the gift of the heart follows the wonder of the heart. In fact, isn't admiration already the gift? (AO, no. 1, p.2)*

*If, on the other hand, your children see you subjecting your judgment and your life to greater than you (I mean to whomever has authority over you), if they welcome your instructions and advice with a benevolent bias, if they hear you speak deferentially to your religious and civil leaders, if your attitude to prayer is marked by adoration, and especially if all your daily reactions reveal that God's will is the motor of your life, then they will not believe they have to practice rebellion in order to practice being adults. (AO, no. 125, p. 384)*

**Pope Francis: Lumen Fidei (2013)**

53. *In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood: children learn to trust in the love of their parents. This is why it is so important that within their families, parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith. Young people in particular, who are going through a period in their lives which is so complex, rich and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith. We have all seen, during World Youth Days, the joy that young people show in their faith and their desire for an ever more solid and generous life of faith. Young people want to live life to the fullest. Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness.*

**Pope Francis: Amoris Lætitia (2016)**

18. *The Gospel goes on to remind us that children are not the property of a family but have their own lives to lead. Jesus is a model of obedience to his earthly parents, placing himself under their charge (cf. Lk 2:51), but he also shows that children's life decisions and their Christian vocation may demand a parting for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 10:34-37; Lk 9:59-62). Jesus himself, at twelve years of age, tells Mary and Joseph that he has a greater mission to accomplish apart from his earthly family (cf. Lk 2:48-50). In this way, he shows the need for other, deeper bonds even within the family: "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21). All the same, in the concern he shows for children – whom the societies of the ancient Near East viewed as subjects without particular rights and even as family property – Jesus goes so far as to present them as teachers, on account of their simple trust and spontaneity towards others. "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3-4).*

**Passing on the Faith (287 to 289)**

287. *Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today's world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace just to survive. Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour. This begins with baptism, in which, as Saint Augustine said, mothers who bring their children "cooperate in the sacred birthing". Thus, begins the journey of growth in that new life. Faith is God's gift, received in baptism, and not our own work, yet parents are the means that God uses for it to grow and develop. Hence "it is beautiful when mothers teach their little children to blow a kiss to Jesus or to Our Lady. How much love there is in that! At that moment the child's heart becomes a place of prayer". Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does "one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts" (Ps 144:4) and "fathers make known to children your faithfulness" (Is 38:19). This means that we need to ask God to act in their hearts, in places where we ourselves cannot reach. A mustard seed, small as it is, becomes a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32); this teaches us to see the disproportion between our actions and their effects. We know that we do not own the gift, but that its care is entrusted to us. Yet our creative commitment is itself an offering which enables us to cooperate with God's plan. For this reason, "couples and parents should be properly appreciated as active agents in catechesis... Family catechesis is of great assistance as an effective method in training young parents to be aware of their mission as the evangelizers of their own family".*

288. Education in the faith has to adapt to each child, since older resources and recipes do not always work. Children need symbols, actions and stories. Since adolescents usually have issues with authority and rules, it is best to encourage their own experience of faith and to provide them with attractive testimonies that win them over by their sheer beauty. Parents desirous of nurturing the faith of their children are sensitive to their patterns of growth, for they know that spiritual experience is not imposed but freely proposed. It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon. Here I would like to express my particular gratitude to all those mothers who continue to pray, like Saint Monica, for their children who have strayed from Christ.

289. The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelizing mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle. Children who grew up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves; growing up in warm and friendly families, they learn to relate to the world in this way, without giving up their faith or their convictions. We know that Jesus himself ate and drank with sinners (cf. Mk 2:16; Mt 11:19), conversed with a Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:7-26), received Nicodemus by night (cf. Jn 3:1-21), allowed his feet to be anointed by a prostitute (cf. Lk 7:36-50) and did not hesitate to lay his hands on those who were sick (cf. Mk 1:40-45; 7:33). The same was true of his apostles, who did not look down on others, or cluster together in small and elite groups, cut off from the life of their people. Although the authorities harassed them, they nonetheless enjoyed the favour "of all the people" (Acts 2:47; cf. 4:21, 33; 5:13).

316. A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God. The fraternal and communal demands of family life are an incentive to growth in openness of heart and thus to an ever fuller encounter with the Lord. The word of God tells us that "the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness" (1 Jn 2:11); such a person "abides in death" (1 Jn 3:14) and "does not know God" (1 Jn 4:8). My predecessor Benedict XVI pointed out that "closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God",<sup>370</sup> and that, in the end, love is the only light which can "constantly illuminate a world grown dim".<sup>371</sup> If only we "love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 Jn 4:12). Since "the human person has an inherent social dimension",<sup>372</sup> and "the first and basic expression of that social dimension of the person is the married couple and the family",<sup>373</sup> spirituality becomes incarnate in the communion of the family. Hence, those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union.

321 "Christian couples are, for each other, for their children and for their relatives, co-operators of grace and witnesses of the faith". God calls them to bestow life and to care for life. For this reason, the family "has always been the nearest 'hospital'". So, let us care for one another, guide and encourage one another, and experience this as a part of our family spirituality. Life as a couple is a daily sharing in God's creative work, and each person is for the other a constant challenge from the Holy Spirit. God's love is proclaimed "through the living and concrete word whereby a man and the woman express their conjugal love". The two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace. For this reason "to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone".

### **Pope Francis: Christus Vivit (2019)**

242. *Young people need to have their freedom respected, yet they also need to be accompanied. The family should be the first place of accompaniment. Youth ministry can present the ideal of life in Christ as the process of building a house on rock (cf. Mt 7:24-25). For most young people, that house, their life, will be built on marriage and married love. That is why youth ministry and the pastoral care of families should be coordinated and integrated, with the aim of ensuring a continuous and suitable accompaniment of the vocational process.*

292. *The **first kind of sensitivity** is directed to the **individual**. It is a matter of listening to someone who is sharing his very self in what he says. A sign of this willingness to listen is the time we are ready to spare for others. More than the amount of time we spend, it is about making others feel that my time is their time, that they have all the time they need to say everything they want. The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired or bored. We see an example of this kind of listening in the Lord; he walks alongside the disciples on the way to Emmaus, even though they are going in the wrong direction (cf. Lk 24:13-35). When Jesus says he plans to go farther, they realize that he has given them the gift of his time, so they decide to give him theirs by offering their hospitality. Attentive and selfless listening is a sign of our respect for others, whatever their ideas or their choices in life.*

293. *The **second kind of sensitivity** is marked by **discernment**. It tries to grasp exactly where grace or temptation is present, for sometimes the things that flit across our minds are mere temptations that can distract us from our true path. I need to ask myself what is it that the other person is trying to tell me, what they want me to realize is happening in their lives. Asking such questions helps me appreciate their thinking and the effects it has on their emotions. This kind of listening seeks to discern the salutary promptings of the good Spirit who proposes to us the Lord's truth, but also the traps laid by the evil spirit – his empty works and promises. It takes courage, warmth and tact to help others distinguish the truth from illusions or excuses.*

294. *The **third kind of sensitivity** is the ability to **perceive what is driving** the other person. This calls for a deeper kind of listening, one able to discern the direction in which that person truly wants to move. Apart from what they are feeling or thinking right now, and whatever has happened up to this point in their lives, the real issue is what they would like to be. This may demand that they look not to their own superficial wishes and desires, but rather to what is most pleasing to the Lord, to his plans for their life. And that is seen in a deeper inclination of the heart, beyond the surface level of their likes and feelings. This kind of listening seeks to discern their ultimate intention, the intention that definitively decides the meaning of their life. Jesus knows and appreciates this ultimate intention of the heart. He is always there, ready to help each of us to recognize it. We need but say to him: "Lord, save me! Have mercy on me!"*

### **Testimony of a couple**

*"You are my beloved child; you are precious in my eyes"; "...and all that is mine is yours".*

*After 34 years of marriage and four children, three of whom were adopted, these words from the parable of the prodigal son makes us think about what we wanted to pass on to our children. For us, like all parents, we want to give the best of what we have received and chosen as a couple. The task remains immense and unfinished. The best, that makes us live and move forward in life, is what we have in our hearts, first of all our life as Children of God, beloved of the Father. Very humbly, we want to pass on faith by example. Easier to write than to live daily! But we also want to transmit our way of life, our joys, our friendships, our successes. And we know that we also transmit the rest through our failures, our errors, our contradictions... In spite of everything, we have tried to sow these things*

*in the hearts of our children and we humbly count on Providence so that fruits may germinate in them.*

*We realised we had fallen short when, at the age of 16, our daughter told us: "your Jesus, I don't believe in him", or when violent words are exchanged between brothers and sisters, or when they make choices different from ours. We need to let go, to renounce control - it is a good school of life - and to welcome the way in which each one takes charge of his life in his own way. It is a joy to see that the "servant's apron" is worn with enthusiasm in different youth movements. Our mission now as parents of young adults is to always preserve the bonds that unite us, by loving them with unconditional love and by entrusting each one to the Lord and to Our Lady of Graces.*

#### **4. Questions for Sit Down**

Meditate on our relationships with children and young people and thank the Lord for the challenges of passing on our faith.

[This proposed question for the sit-down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple which is good to reflect on regularly.]

#### **5. The team meeting**

##### **A. Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, which have been significant for us.
- Share on relationships with children and young people, particularly any spiritual matters.

##### **B. Prayer time**

###### **Ephesians 6: 1-4 (NRSV)**

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and your mother - this is the first commandment with a promise: 'so that it may be well with you and you may live long on earth'. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

###### **Matthew 19:13-15 (NRSV)**

*The little children were being brought to Jesus in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And He laid his hands on them and went on his way.*

##### **C. Sharing on an Endeavour: Conjugal Prayer and Family Prayer**

We suggest sharing on conjugal and family prayer.

##### **D. Questions for discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. Share on Father Caffarel's statement "*When children come, in turn, they bring immense wealth, but they also demand a formidable examination*".
2. As children grow, there is the challenge and joy of them becoming friends and equals. As young parents, how might we prepare. As older couples how have we lived through this.
3. Mention aspects of the text which challenge my certainties and encourage my hope.
4. Mention any part of the text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
5. Is there anything in this text that could be a rule of life?

## **E- Liturgical Prayer**

**John Paul II: from a prayer to entrust young people to Our Lady, April 10, 2003**

*"Behold, your Mother!" (Jn 19: 27)*

*O Virgin Mary, Jesus on the Cross wanted to entrust us to you, not to lessen but to reaffirm his exclusive role as Saviour of the world.*

*If in the disciple John all the children of the Church were entrusted to you, the happier I am to see the young people of the world entrusted to you, O Mary.*

*To you, gentle Mother, whose protection I have always experienced, this evening I entrust them to you once again. All seek refuge and protection under your mantle.*

*You, Mother of divine grace, make them shine with the beauty of Christ!*

*The young people of this century, at the dawn of the new millennium, still live the torment that derives from sin, from hatred, from violence, from terrorism and from war. But it is also the young to whom the Church looks confidently, knowing that with the help of God's grace, they will succeed in believing and in living as Gospel witnesses in present day history.*

*O Mary, help them to respond to their vocation. Guide them to the knowledge of true love and bless their affections. Support them in times of suffering. Make them fearless heralds of Christ's greeting on Easter Day: Peace be with you! [...] Amen*

[http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/prayers/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_20030410\\_prayer-giovani.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/prayers/documents/hf_jp-ii_20030410_prayer-giovani.html)

## **F- Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 5: Hospitality in the Home

*"The Christian home exercises a function of 'mediation' between the Church and the world. As a mediator, it is the means and place of encounter between God and men." (AO, No. 104, p. 96).*

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*Come to lead the world on the way of right living.*

*Come to teach us the truth whole and entire.*

*Come, wisdom inaccessible and save us by the ways known to Thee.*

*Holy Spirit, Paraclete, come and dwell in us.*

(Part of Stanza 2; Akathistos Hymn to the Holy and Life-giving Spirit; Orthodox Liturgy; translation by Bishop Jacob Barclay, 2008)

## 2. Notes for reflection

One of Father Caffarel's most significant thoughts was the recognition that the couple has a mission of hospitality. Each family is a small church community. Many Scripture texts confirm this: "Practice hospitality eagerly" (Rom 13:13), "Practice hospitality among yourselves without recrimination" (Rm 13:13). (1 P 4:9) "Persevere in brotherly love. Do not forget hospitality" (Hb 13,1-2)

### The great human reality of hospitality

Why is it that so many traditions emphasize the importance of a welcoming home? The home has a unique symbolic weight. It is the center of all family activities: *"there we love each other, there we give life, there we rebuild our physical and moral strength, we care for the sick, we rest, we relax; we celebrate the worship of the Lord, we welcome travelers and friends."*

More than a walled space, the "home" is above all a spiritual reality that is greatly specified by the use that one makes of it: at the opening of the doors must correspond the opening of hearts. The home is to the family what the body is to the soul. Hospitality is therefore above all a spiritual disposition: by welcoming, the guest is introduced into the heart of the family and participates in its richness of communion. "True hospitality, therefore, does not consist only in sharing the bread but, better still, in the inner life of the home, its joys and sorrows, its thoughts and feelings." The welcome is less a matter of what is materially shared than of how it is given. Do we remember hospitality in poor homes where we were welcomed like princes?

### Christian hospitality

Christian hospitality infuses hospitality with another dimension. The family, a small cell of the Church, offers the guest the treasure of the spiritual riches of the home. Through charity, Christ dwells in the home. *"For where two or three are gathered in my Name, I am there among them."* (Matthew 18:20)

This beautiful image awakens our understanding of the generosity of the Christian home. Gestures of friendship envelop the guest in communion with God without them even knowing it. Christian hospitality sacramentalizes the welcome and, if the guest is willing, they are immersed in a gentle communion. The guest tastes something of God's tenderness: lived and welcomed: *"By this everyone will know you that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:35)

Finally, let us recall how Christ calls us to be hospitable *"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me ...."* (Matthew 25:35-36)

For these reasons, Father Caffarel saw hospitality as the specific apostolate of the Christian couple: *"Today, as twenty centuries ago, priests cannot do without the help of homes: the priest is Christ who goes out to meet others to address the message of the Lord to them; the home is the Church which welcomes into its bosom to protect, nourish and rejoice them, those whom the missionary word has won for God"*. (AO, No. 104, p. 99).

### **3. Texts for reflection**

#### **From Father Caffarel**

*We must therefore think that in God's plan the Christian home is a "relay" on the way to the Church: there, without knowing it, the unbeliever makes his first contact with the Church, the sinner experiences her mercy, the poor and abandoned discover her motherhood. They are not frightened by this discovery of the Church because, in the admirable expression of a friendly household: "the home is the laughing and gentle face of the Church". How many, who would never have gone directly to the liturgical community and the sacraments, are gently led there through the family community.* (AO, no. 107, p. 382).

...The life of the Mystical Body will be found in the Christian home: like the Body in which it participates, the home is both a praying community and a missionary community. (AO, 98, 132)

#### **Pope Francis Amoris Laetitia**

*324. Led by the Spirit, the family circle is not only open to life by generating it within itself, but also by going forth and spreading life by caring for others and seeking their happiness. This openness finds particular expression in hospitality,<sup>389</sup> which the word of God eloquently encourages: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb 13:2). When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is "a symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood". Social love, as a reflection of the Trinity, is what truly unifies the spiritual meaning of the family and its mission to others, for it makes present the **kerygma** in all its communal imperatives. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church.*

(Kerygma is from Greek: meaning a proclamation, message. The term has been used to describe the essential content of faith in Jesus Christ announced and transmitted to non-believers by the early Christians. The word continues to be used today to evoke the missionary proclamation of the essentials of the Christian faith.)

#### **Pope Francis Christus Vivat**

*217. In a word, to create a "home" is to create "a family". "It is to learn to feel connected to others by more than merely utilitarian and practical bonds, to be united in such a way as to feel that our life is a bit more human. To create a home is to let prophecy take flesh and make our hours and days less cold, less indifferent and anonymous. It is to create bonds by simple, everyday acts that all of us can perform. A home, as we all know, demands that everyone work together. No one can be indifferent or stand apart, since each is a stone needed to build the home. This also involves asking the Lord to grant us the grace to learn how to be patient, to forgive one another, to start over each day. How many times should I forgive and start over? Seventy times seven times, as many times as necessary. To create strong bonds requires confidence and trust nurtured daily by patience and forgiveness. And that is how the miracle takes place: we feel that here we are reborn, here we are all reborn, because we feel God's caress that enables us to dream of a more human world, and therefore of a world more divine".*

#### **Testimony of a couple**

*Welcoming the stranger... into your home... changes your life... and your outlook!*

*We live in a port city, a place of transit for many migrants who want to cross the Channel to England, where the welcome is reputed to be wonderful...*

*A woman from our neighbourhood rings our doorbell on a Saturday... "A Kosovar couple with two children, aged 2 and 4, was arrested yesterday at the ferry terminal. The home where the family has been placed until a solution is found, only takes in women and children. The father sleeps outside the door... I know you are Christians. At Mass, can't you ask for a family to take them in?" "Yes, of course, we'll ask!"*

*The following Monday... "So, did you find out?" "No one answered our call to the microphone..." "What about you?" "Ah...er...yes, actually, we ourselves...!!". "My husband is away for a few days" ...*

*I have in front of me the family, the exhausted and anxious dad, the mother with a penetrating look, and the two little ones with a questioning face, without any luggage ... I think of our family of six children, well housed, safe ... I put myself in their place ... And I say ... "Of course! Come in!". I know my husband would say the same thing. And it's true that on the phone afterwards, he told me his enthusiasm for not leaving this family in the street, whereas at home, we can huddle together to welcome!*

*It must have been for a few days... It lasted a month. We left them our bedroom and slept on the sofa in the living room. Their children played with ours. Through drawings and a lot of gestures, we understood their senseless journey, their hopes, their panic at the ferry terminal, when they were discovered in a tarpaulin-covered truck, after days and days of transit. We exchanged cooking recipes, bought ten baguettes of bread every day from our baker. We learned a few words of their language, causing a lot of laughter. We quickly understood that their way of life was quite different from ours (especially in the use of the bathtub, or the toilet...!) A few weeks after their hasty departure from the house (the police were about to evict them), they phoned us to explain, with the few words we had in common, that they were in England, with a roof over their heads, a job for the father and school for the children, constantly telling us "thank you, thank you". Our emotion was great.*

*This experience, welcomed as a family, but in a rather unexpected way, was extraordinary for us... We became aware of how lucky we were to have a "home"... Our view of the foreigner, the "migrant", whose story we never know, changed.*

#### **4. Questions for the sit-down**

Consider a time when we received or exercised hospitality and the riches received and the joy it brought us.

[This proposed question for the sit-down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple which is good to reflect on regularly.

#### **5. The team meeting – suggested format**

##### **A- Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, which have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Share on our experiences of hospitality and our thoughts on the whether such hospitality was successful.

## **B- Time of prayer**

### **1 John 3:17-20 (NRSV)**

*How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?*

*Little children let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.*

### **Genesis 18:1-5 (NRSV)**

*The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. He said: "My lord, if I have found favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, so you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on - since you have come to your servant!" They said: "Do as you have said."*

## **C- Sharing an Endeavour: the rule of life**

The rule of life allows us to reflect on all the concrete ways to open ourselves to others.

## **D- Questions for discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. Do we have the balance between "the need for intimacy" and the "desire for communion with others" about right? After considering the texts, should we adjust this balance?
2. When we receive guests, how do we establish a true fellowship.
3. Mention aspects of the text which challenge my certainties and encourage hope.
4. Mention any part of the text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
5. Is there anything in this text that could be a rule of life?

## **E- Liturgical prayer**

### **Psalm 146: 5-9 (NRSV)**

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the Lord their God,  
who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith for ever;  
who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets prisoners free;  
The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.  
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;  
The Lord loves the righteous.  
The Lord watches over the strangers;  
He upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

## **F - Final prayers**

- Prayer For the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 6: Supporting other couples

"All those men and women who aspire to human love must see a Christian home and understand that Christ came to save love, and that he has given it new greatness and splendour." (AO, no. 111-112, p. 237)

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*"Come, Holy Spirit, into my heart and sanctify it. Come, O Author of all good, and comfort me. Come, Light of the spiritual, and enlighten me. Come, Comforter of souls, and comfort me."*

## 2. Notes for reflection

We will be brief on the topic of mission towards other couples because "Vocation and Mission" (ERI Fatima 2018) has already carefully developed it, and because it belongs to the natural identity of our movement: Teams is a movement of conjugal spirituality that proposes concrete ways to progress in the home in the love of God and neighbor. The result is a specific mission which has been confirmed by the call from successive popes.

Pope Francis' address to the Teams of Our Lady in 2015 is very clear in this regard: *"I invite you also to commit yourselves, if it is possible, in an ever more concrete way and with ever renewed creativity, in the activities that can be organized to receive, form and support in the faith particularly young couples, before and after their marriage."*

Before recalling the authorized word of the movement on this subject (*Vocation and Mission*), we will explain two conditions, from the thoughts of Father Caffarel, that guarantee the quality of this mission.

### Charity between homes of Teams of Our Lady

The Founding Charter of 1947 stated that *"those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will be evangelized if they see Christian couples who truly love each other and help each other, in the search for God and in the service of their brethren. In this way, fraternal love beyond mutual aid becomes a witness."* It is not the speeches that evangelize but the testimony of authentic charity.

So, a Team must take on the challenge of truly developing fraternal love. Otherwise, the risk would be that a Team would meet *"under the guise of friendship but no longer in the name of the Lord"*. Either the Team would meet out of routine or a sense of duty, or they would agree on their purpose but refuse to live out the requirements that will lead to a true conversion towards holiness. If a couple lives up to this requirement, their mission to children and other couples will be successful. *"This is not a discourse that can worthily praise love. It is your life, Christian spouses, who are engaged in this magnificent adventure. We're looking at you, we're listening to you. Don't shy away from it. You have a testimony to bear. Christ's instruction is also addressed to your love: you will be my witness."* (AO, 2-3-4, 16)

### Realistic and dynamic preparation

Father Caffarel recalls two requirements in the accompaniment of engaged couples that apply to couples outside the movement.

*"The first task of love was to unite"*. This requires an approach that is both realistic and dynamic:

- Realistic: because in view of the fragilities of our time, we must demonstrate a "true, enlightened, positive knowledge of the human reality of love in marriage". An idealistic

message to couples or a speech to them that is “up in the clouds” could hardly help.

- Dynamic: because it must deal with the reality of “the enduring force of love”.

In order to assume the mission of accompanying a couple, there is a requirement to start with the love that unites them, revealing all its energies and potential.

### **3. Texts for reflection**

#### **Vocation and Mission ERI, 2018**

*In the sphere of preparation of marriage and its accompaniment the first mission of the Teams of Our Lady is, of course, to radiate the good news of marriage. [...] A reflection is also needed to think up and create modules or courses, inspired by our Movement, which could be offered to young couples, who have just got married, and who would like to benefit from something to help them through the first years of marriage without actually belonging to the Movement.[...] The Teams of Our Lady in the world today should not ignore all those young people who do not choose the commitment of marriage and prefer to live in what might be called an “irregular” situation. [...] Thanks to the pedagogy used in the Teams, to guide them not only to marriage but also to encourage in them a desire to progress further on the path of faith. [... ..] The involvement of the Movement’s responsible couples at the diocesan pastoral level needs to be influential. It is a challenge that we are faced with if we want our Movement to flourish in the “outside” world and bear fruit. [...]*

*In the sphere of couples in crisis, we also know that today no country is spared from what is called “the crisis of the couple” which often occurs in the first few years of life together.... Is there nothing that can be done about this crisis? If the Teams think so, then they must do something about it.*

*As “couple experts” do they not have a role to play in a society that currently offers the couple nothing but separation or divorce? To achieve this goal, the implementation of long-term pastoral care seems more necessary than ever, beyond the already existing suggestions that should be encouraged and developed wherever possible. Could they not suggest helping the couple alongside the professionals, before the crisis becomes irreparable? Isn't it possible to bear witness to the grandeur of the couple, to its riches, its beauty and its durability in spite of the storms that naturally trouble it?*

*Over time, Teams of Our Lady have created proposals that respond to the various circumstances in a couple’s life. In all cases the Teams of Our Lady have sought to ensure that, throughout inevitable crises, the union of the couple remains solid, lasting and lived in the Faith. Learning to anticipate the crisis before it becomes irreparable is surely a good basis for discernment. The Teams of Our Lady have the expertise to be inventive and creative in this area. (extracts from Pages 26-29)*

#### **From Father Caffarel**

*I do not think that the Teams of Our Lady should have taken on the management of the preparation for marriage but I think that the Teams of Our Lady should have centres for the preparation of marriage to which the other centres could have referred to profit from the spirituality which they had discovered. (HC, Chantilly Conference, 1987, translated by Harry Meigh).*

#### **The mission of love**

Father Caffarel wrote in number 73 of the review L'Anneau d'Or (January-February 1957), after a meeting at the liturgical pastoral centre of Versailles, that it was “necessary to change the way of preparing the engaged for the sacrament of marriage, by presenting them with a positive and lived

*vision of love, and not an accumulation of prohibitions and theoretical considerations. It is necessary to develop a new and up-to-date language, to have a clear knowledge of lived realities, to make a demanding proposal while responding to the concrete aspects of life, to imagine ways of accompanying couples who are beginning their life together... In fact, it is a question of abandoning what does not work and of knowing how to renew our approach to young people who envisage living together.” (p. 54)*

### **The mission of love**

On November 28, 1997, for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Teams of Our Lady, Pope John Paul II sent a letter to the leaders of the French Super Region. In this letter he spoke, among other things, of marriages in difficulty, of separated, divorced or divorced remarried people and he asked that they *"be able to meet within the Church married couples who are willing to help them"*. This request resulted in the formation of "Reliance" teams, as Nathalie and Christian Mignonat told us at the Teams International College at Swanwick in 2016. These teams are accompanied by couples belonging to the Teams of Our Lady known as an "accompanying couple" which fits in with concepts expressed at the Synod on the Family of 2015: a meeting and a "journey together" to discover the Risen Christ.

As Timothy Radcliffe had explained in at the International Gathering in Brasilia in 2012: *"You are faced with the question: What can you say to people who are cohabiting, or divorced or remarried, or gay? What can you say that is both open to the truth of their lives and yet is faithful to the Church's teaching? You will only discover if you enter into conversation. You will speak with authority if you give authority to their experience. If you listen to them, and put yourself in their shoes, feel with their skin, then perhaps the Lord will give you the right word."*

As Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* 169: *In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people's lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.*

### **Pope Francis: Audience with Regional Couples of the Teams of Our Lady, Rome, in 2015**

*Finally, I cannot but encourage the couples of the Équipes Notre Dame to be instruments of the mercy of Christ and of the Church towards persons whose marriage has failed. Never forget that your conjugal fidelity is a gift of God, and that mercy has been given to each one of us. A united and happy couple can understand better than anyone else, as from inside, the wound and the suffering caused by an abandonment, a betrayal, a failure of love. 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, to take part in an appropriate way in the life of the Church. Do not forget either the unspeakable suffering of youngsters who live these painful family situations: you can give them much.*

### **Pope Francis: Amoris lætitia**

40. *"At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture*

presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family". In some countries, many young persons "postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic". We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.

78. "The light of Christ enlightens every person (cf. Jn 1:9; *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Seeing things with the eyes of Christ inspires the Church's pastoral care for the faithful who are living together, or are only married civilly, or are divorced and remarried. Following this divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work... When a couple in an irregular union attains a noteworthy stability through a public bond – and is characterized by deep affection, responsibility towards the children and the ability to overcome trials – this can be seen as an opportunity, where possible, to lead them to celebrate the sacrament of Matrimony".

79. "When faced with difficult situations and wounded families, it is always necessary to recall this general principle: 'Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations' (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84). The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly stating the Church's teaching, pastors are to avoid judgements that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition".

184. By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God's love present in society.

206. "The complexity of today's society and the challenges faced by the family require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included. Among these, chastity proves invaluable for the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the Synod Fathers agreed on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves and by grounding marriage preparation in the process of Christian initiation by bringing out the connection between marriage, baptism and the other sacraments. The Fathers also spoke of the need for specific programmes of marriage preparation aimed at giving couples a genuine experience of participation in ecclesial life and a complete introduction to various aspects of family life".

207.. I encourage Christian communities to recognize the great benefit that they themselves receive from supporting engaged couples as they grow in love. As the Italian bishops have observed, those couples are "a valuable resource because, as they sincerely commit themselves to grow in love and self-giving, they can help renew the fabric of the whole ecclesial body. Their special form of friendship

*can prove contagious and foster the growth of friendship and fraternity in the Christian community of which they are a part". There are a number of legitimate ways to structure programmes of marriage preparation, and each local Church will discern how best to provide a suitable formation without distancing young people from the sacrament. They do not need to be taught the entire Catechism or overwhelmed with too much information. Here too, "it is not great knowledge, but rather the ability to feel and relish things interiorly that contents and satisfies the soul". Quality is more important than quantity, and priority should be given – along with a renewed proclamation of the kerygma – to an attractive and helpful presentation of information that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together "with great courage and generosity". Marriage preparation should be a kind of "initiation" to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family.*

*208. With the help of missionary families, the couple's own families and a variety of pastoral resources, ways should also be found to offer a remote preparation that, by example and good advice, can help their love to grow and mature. Discussion groups and optional talks on a variety of topics of genuine interest to young people can also prove helpful. All the same, some individual meetings remain essential, since the primary objective is to help each to learn how to love this very real person with whom he or she plans to share his or her whole life. Learning to love someone does not happen automatically, nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage. For every couple, marriage preparation begins at birth. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment. Those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents, who chose each other unconditionally and daily renew this decision. In this sense, pastoral initiatives aimed at helping married couples to grow in love and in the Gospel of the family also help their children, by preparing them for their future married life. Nor should we underestimate the pastoral value of traditional religious practices. To give just one example: I think of Saint Valentine's Day; in some countries, commercial interests are quicker to see the potential of this celebration than are we in the Church.*

*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 lifelong 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. Marriage preparation should also provide couples with the names of places, people and services to which they can turn for help when problems arise. It is also important to remind them of the availability of the sacrament of Reconciliation, which allows them to bring their sins and past mistakes, and their relationship itself, before God, and to receive in turn his merciful forgiveness and healing strength.*

*218. Another great challenge of marriage preparation is to help couples realize that marriage is not something that happens once for all. Their union is real and irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the sacrament of matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a lifelong project. Their gaze now has to be directed to the future that, with the help of God's grace, they are daily called to build. For this very reason, neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect. Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other as he or she actually is: an unfinished product, needing to grow, a work in progress. A persistently critical attitude towards one's partner is*

*a sign that marriage was not entered into as a project to be worked on together, with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity. Slowly but surely, love will then give way to constant questioning and criticism, dwelling on each other's good and bad points, issuing ultimatums and engaging in competition and self-justification. The couple then prove incapable of helping one another to build a mature union. This fact needs to be realistically presented to newly married couples from the outset, so that they can grasp that the wedding is "just the beginning". By saying "I do", they embark on a journey that requires them to overcome all obstacles standing in the way of their reaching the goal. The nuptial blessing that they receive is a grace and an incentive for this journey. They can only benefit from sitting down and talking to one another about how, concretely, they plan to achieve their goal.*

### **Testimony of a couple**

*We had been married for 10 years and had been team members of Notre-Dame for 8 years when our parish priest asked us to participate in the parish marriage preparation. We accepted and joined a team of about ten couples who were preparing about fifty couples each year. Two accompanying couples welcomed 4 to 5 couples in a parish hall (most of them were not Church goers). We were not teachers, but witnesses. We tried to help them to reflect by means of questions (personal response, then exchange as a couple, then sharing .....). We spoke about problems of communication, expectations, then the pillars of Christian marriage, and we testified to our joys and also to the difficulties we had encountered: an obstacle is not a wall against which one crashes, but a barrier we can and must clear; forgiveness being the secret of a long life together. ... Often couples who had lived together for several years testified that certain subjects had never been discussed by them. We have always appreciated the depth of these exchanges and encounters, which have allowed us to remember all that the Lord has given us through the sacrament of marriage ... and our own team.*

## **4. Questions for the Sit-Down**

Consider times when the support of your team has helped you through difficulties.

[The question proposed for the sit down should not replace any questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple, which is good to reflect on regularly].

## **5. The team meeting – suggested format**

### **A- Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, which have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Share on our experience with the couples in our family or friends, where we have had the opportunity to give them our support, or to receive support from them.

### **B- Time for prayer**

#### **Luke 10: 30 to 37 (NRSV)**

*Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

### **C- Sharing an Endeavour: The Sit-down**

The Sit-down surely is one of the most beautiful gifts for a couple. Share on your experiences.

### **D- Questions for discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. How do we support each other in our team?
2. What support do we give to marriage preparation, and the support of couples after their marriage, including when they are struggling?
3. Have we had the experience of accompanying couples who are preparing for marriage? What have we learned from it?
4. How do we deal with wounded families, and couples who do not live according to the teaching of the Church, or who are not Christians?
5. Is there anything in this text that suggests a personal rule of life to me?

### **E- Liturgical Prayer**

#### **John Paul II in Manila, World Youth Day, 1995 (extract)**

*To You, Father, who are Love and Life, and your Son, Jesus Christ, "born of a woman." and the Holy Spirit, source of divine charity; we pray that every human family becomes a true sanctuary of life and love.*

*May your grace guide the thoughts and actions of couples to the greater good of their families, of all the families in the world. That the younger generations find unwavering support in the family that makes them more and more human and make them grow in truth and love.*

*May love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, become stronger than all the weaknesses and all the crises that our families sometimes experience.*

*Finally, we ask you through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, that in all the nations of the earth the Church may fruitfully carry out her mission in the family and by the family. Amen.*

### **F - Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 7: Mission in the Outside World

"God's ultimate goal is not to create a material universe it is to form a people." (AO, No. 109, p. 3).

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*"Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the gift of Wisdom. Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the gift of Wisdom. Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the gift of Counsel."*

## 2. Notes for reflection

What about the specifics of the mission of Teams members outside the home? Of course, the family unit can never be closed in on itself: It lives in and interfaces with the world around it, as does the Church generally. "A worshipping home will always be a missionary home". The gifts received from God bear fruit for the salvation of the world. The covenant made in marriage makes a commitment to the building the Kingdom.

### Human richness and the richness of grace

A Christian family is a unique place in the world: daily life tends to obscure the treasures of formidable human and spiritual resources with which it is blessed. The most priceless of these is faithful conjugal love; it is called to diffract itself into an astonishing fruitfulness of varied loves (children, relatives, friends, etc.). The contemporary crisis of marriage further highlights its rarity and price. The mission of the spouses outside is carried by the radiance of this authentic charity: it calls for a resolute witness to the Good News on marriage but also for specific tasks.

### The ministry of the Word

Father Caffarel insisted on the service of the Word on many occasions. What does this service consist of? Acting as a disciple of Christ and giving an explicit account of the charity that drives it. Words without actions, and actions without words would both be just as much a deviation from the Gospel. The Gospel encourages us to help those who suffer and toil, to embrace immense human tasks, sometimes to the point of heroism. But this would be pure activism if it were not accompanied by a word that courageously reveals its secret and Christian motivation. What message should we bring? "Through the lay person who reveals the unfathomable riches of the heart of Christ, it is Jesus Christ himself who says: I love you". The aim of this external apostolate is therefore just as theological as its source: to bring faith, hope and charity to life in those to whom we are sent.

### Who is my neighbour?

Any missionary commitments outside the home must be made by mutual agreement of the couple and even the children if they are sufficiently grown up. External commitments could too easily be an alibi, and detract from the commitment to the primary mission, which is the holiness of the family. Where there are competing pressures from external commitments and the home, the Sit-Down is the ideal time to discuss and resolve these

## 3. Texts for reflection

### From Father Caffarel

*The Teams of Our Lady is a movement of spirituality where the couples who are members, in this age of atheism, intend to become aware of the active presence of God in themselves first of all, and then in their homes, so that their lives, following the example of Christ's life, may manifest God and his perfections. Or better still, to allow God to say and give himself.*

*Are the homes of the movement ready? Is the movement ready? As the spiritual father of the movement, I shall not flatter you, but speak to you with as much love as with demanding frankness.*

*Here, first of all, is what I think the movement can be credited with:*

- *a sincere search for God's thoughts on marriage and a willingness to live by them...*
- *the conviction that every Christian is called to holiness and that marriage is a road to holiness*
- *the concern to help each other between husband and wife on this path and to lead the children there*
- *a friendship within the team that most of the time goes beyond a simple human friendship*
- *a willingness to pass on to other homes what we have understood and what we are trying to live from the riches of Christian marriage.*

*This recognised without boasting, let us try to be no less lucid about our shortcomings. (HC, Les END face à l'athéisme, 1970).*

*The force of expansion of this charity which reigns in the home is prodigious : from concentric circle to concentric circle it overflows from the couple to extend to the whole family, to extend to the relatives, to the city, to the Church, to the whole universe. Under the victorious thrust of charity, the home becomes a missionary community.*

*But in the home, as in the Church of which it is a living cell, as in the heart of Christ, the ebb follows the flow, and first of all, community of prayer: everything flows from prayer, everything returns to prayer.*

*Prayer community and missionary community are like the front and back of the home community of love. The home - community of penance, community of faith, community of hope, community of love - is the work of the word of Christ present and alive in the Gospel. (AO, no. 117-118, p. 234).*

#### *Missionary dynamism*

*The home that is immersed in the Gospel will soon experience what St. Paul says: "The love of Christ urges me". The love of Christ urges us to proclaim the Good News to others, to share with them the spiritual riches of my life with Christ. Concern for others grows, hospitality becomes wider and warmer. And little by little all the members of the family become aware that what they do to the least ones, they do to Christ himself. (AO, no. 117-118, pp. 238-239)*

#### **Pope Francis: Amoris Lætitia; 2016**

35. *As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor it is helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them.*

201. *"This effort calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, one that is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems". Pastoral care for families "needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one's dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. This consists not merely in presenting a set of rules, but in proposing values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularized of countries". The Synod*

Fathers also “highlighted the fact that evangelization needs unambiguously to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors – such as the excessive importance given to market logic – that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be fostered with societal structures and encouragement given to lay people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields”.

### **Pope Francis: Gaudete et Exsultate; 2019**

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”*

87. This Beatitude makes us think of the many endless situations of war in our world. Yet we ourselves are often a cause of conflict or at least of misunderstanding. For example, I may hear something about someone, and I go off and repeat it. I may even embellish it the second time around and keep spreading it... And the more harm it does, the more satisfaction I seem to derive from it. The world of gossip, inhabited by negative and destructive people, does not bring peace. Such people are really the enemies of peace; in no way are they “blessed”.

88. Peacemakers truly “make” peace; they build peace and friendship in society. To those who sow peace Jesus makes this magnificent promise: “They will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). He told his disciples that, wherever they went, they were to say: “Peace to this house!” (Lk 10:5). The word of God exhorts every believer to work for peace, “along with all who call upon the Lord with a pure heart” (cf. 2 Tim 2:22), for “the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas 3:18). And if there are times in our community when we question what ought to be done, “let us pursue what makes for peace” (Rom 14:19), for unity is preferable to conflict.

### **Testimony of a couple**

Three years ago, the Youth Centre of our diocese of Sarthe called on us as a couple to found a school of formation for young missionary disciples, called the “School of the 72” (echoing our diocese of Sarthe and the sending of the 72 disciples on mission by Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Luke (10, 1). This mission was to offer to high school students (from the 1st grade upwards) and students, a meeting every 15 days to form themselves in self-knowledge, in the knowledge of God to act as daring missionaries in the Church and to a life of prayer and encounter with the Lord.

By animating these evenings with a priest and another couple, our role was to listen to these young people, to help them to know their talents in order to see how to serve the Lord, to help them grow in freedom in our world and to better understand the position of the Church on current social issues.

After these three years of service, we have learned that it is important:

- to listen to young people and not to do things for them,
- to be trained in listening skills, to accompany them between meetings,
- to help them find a balance between their boundless energy to serve and their academic and extracurricular education,
- to gather young couples to mentor them, so that they do not feel like they are just talking to their parents,
- to let them meet Christ in a life of prayer and silence, without hindering them in their musical talents,
- to train them to respond to hot topics, high school or college yard discussions.

This service to young people is a profound joy. Their energy, their sense of commitment, their questions, their thirst for understanding, their inner life... edify and challenge us in our own

*convictions and lives of faith. This has made us grow! Our youth is beautiful! Lord, make us attentive and available servants to quench their thirst!*

#### **4. Questions for Sit-Down**

How do we balance our activities in service in the outside world with our conjugal love? Give thanks for the support of our spouse in this service.

[The question proposed for the Sit-Down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple which is good to reflect on regularly].

#### **5. The team meeting – Suggested Format**

##### **A- Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Share on the joys and difficulties encountered in service in the outside world, or the reasons why we felt it preferable not to make a commitment for the moment.

##### **B- Time for prayer**

###### **Matthew 5:13-16: (NRSV)**

*"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."*

##### **C- Sharing on an Endeavour: the retreat**

Reflect on the value of retreats, and, if appropriate, make some plans for your next Team retreat.

##### **D- Questions for Discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. *"To remain silent is a betrayal of God"*. Consider this statement, and discuss where we might act, how we can prepare ourselves, train ourselves, to bring the work of the Lord to the world around us?
2. In *Amoris Laetitia*, (201), Pope Francis, says *"This effort calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, one that is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems"*. How do we respond to this when Father Caffarel invites the couple to the mission? Is there any tension between good works as an individual and as a couple?
3. Do the different stages of our life as a couple affect the opportunities and time for good works?
4. Mention aspects of this text which challenge my certainties and encourage my hope.
5. Mention any aspect of the text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
6. Is there anything in this text that could be a personal rule of life?

##### **E- Liturgical Prayer**

###### **John Paul II: Prayer to Mary (extract), Ecclesia in Asia, (to the Bishops in Asia), 6 November 1999**

*You went quickly to visit Elizabeth and help in her days of waiting; obtain for us the same spirit of zeal and service in our evangelizing task. You sang the praises of the Lord; lead us in joyful proclamation of faith in Christ our Saviour.*

*You had compassion on the needy and spoke to your Son on their behalf; teach us never to fear to speak of the world to Jesus and of Jesus to the world. You stood at the foot of the Cross as your Son breathed his last; be with us as we seek to be one in spirit and service with all who suffer. You prayed with the disciples in the Upper Room; help us to wait upon the Spirit and to go wherever he leads us. Protect the Church from all the powers that threaten her. Help her to be a true image of the Most Holy Trinity. Pray that through the Church's love and service all the peoples of Asia may come to know your Son Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, and so taste the joy of life in all its fullness. O Mary, Mother of the New Creation and Mother of Asia, pray for us, your children, now and always! Amen*

**F- Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 8: The Mission of Heaven

*"Believing in the permanence of the couple, made up of two spouses irrevocably faithful to each other, is therefore not a sentimental reverie, but a conviction of faith firmly based on divine revelation and the traditional teaching of the Church."* (HC, Compagnons d'éternité, Letter from the END, Dec. 1987, p. 13).

## 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*"Holy Spirit, grant us the gift of wisdom that will make us understand the truths of the faith, enter into their meaning and contemplate their inner harmony. Give us the love and understanding of the truths taught by the Church."*

## 2. Notes for reflection

Teams will wish to support the surviving member of a couple, when the other dies, and their continuing inclusion in the Team and the Team meeting can be a valuable support during the grieving process and beyond. Indeed, in the early days of Teams, Father Caffarel was questioned about the place of team members who were going through the ordeal of the death of their spouse. He advised against their exclusion because their impressive testimony of the permanence of conjugal charity beyond death is of immense strength for the whole team.

(Note: Additional English language resources: In this final Meeting, we discuss the end of the earthly life of the couple. Additional resources are also available: (a) old age and illness within the couple is explored in the Study Topic: "The Third Age"; (b) bereavement and the grieving process are explored in the Study Topics: "Third Age" and "A Teams response to Bereavement". (available in the References).

The Church has always recognized the possibility of remarriage following widowhood. However, in his ministry inaugurated during the Second World War, Father Caffarel supported a number of widows, who aspired to consecrate their widowhood to God in close connection with their spouse in Heaven. He developed his thinking to include the intuition that marriage culminated in some way ... in Heaven!

### Stronger than death

The couple's love, purified by forgiveness and life's trials, enlarged in charity springing from Christ, is stronger than death. Father Caffarel tells us: *"Please listen to me. But first, be silent. Collect yourself: these things I want to tell you come from the heart, a pacified heart, a loving heart, a believing heart."* As early as 1940, the testimonies of many widows he accompanied made him understand the certainty that genuine charity would continue to bind spouses separated by death. *"The truly united spouses know what an inexhaustible source of joy is their love ... they know that beyond the earthly weariness, an eternity of love awaits them, and that they will then commune with each other as never before here on earth."* This is the final step in the couple's mission. Faith and hope will pass, not charity drawn from God. The union of the sanctified spouses makes them participate in the mystery of glory of the marriage of Christ and the Church: it is inconceivable that this love will disappear if it is authentic. It is a speech by Pius XII in 1957 taken up later (in the texts below) that will validate this audacious intuition: *"Far from destroying the bonds of human and supernatural love contracted by marriage, death can perfect and strengthen them."*

## **The mission of Teams is accomplished in Heaven**

Very early on, Father Caffarel was asked about the place of team members who were grieving the death of their spouse. He advised against their exclusion, as their impressive testimony about the permanence of conjugal love beyond death is of immense strength to the whole team. The mutual aid to grow the love of spouses within the team is revealed in a new light: it is not just individual holiness at stake but the eternal destiny of the love of spouses. The comfort brought by these widows and widowers within the team, becomes a source of considerable consolation and hope for couples living and struggling in daily fidelity.

The death of a spouse is not some kind of parenthesis that ends the marriage. The one who remains continues the work of Christian growth. The acceptance of the physical death of one's spouse and their absence from daily life, opens a path of total offering for a deeper relationship with Christ: "Go, sell all your possessions...". In return, the ultimate point of the mission, mentioned in Chapter 3, is fulfilled: Christ revives the love of the spouse in a generosity that has a force of eternity.

This is how Father Caffarel's missionary commitment to consecrated widowhood is clarified: *"Yes, consecrated widowhood is indeed the completion and perfection of the sacrament of marriage... the sacrament, which has not exhausted the potentialities of grace by the death of the spouse, will produce abundant fruits of holiness, and the consecrated widow gives full credit to its sanctifying value."*

Father Caffarel developed a special mission for widows, stating that *"Yes, consecrated widowhood is indeed the completion and perfection of the sacrament of marriage...the sacrament which has not exhausted its virtues of grace by the death of the spouse will produce abundant fruits of holiness and the consecrated widow gives full credit to its sanctifying value"*.

### **3. Texts for reflection**

#### **From Father Caffarel**

*It's all over and everything's new. A survival of love and marriage is a pipe dream. As a physical union marriage is no more. As a union of hearts, mutual possession, marriage is no more. The one that God has taken away no longer belongs to the one that remains. But if the couple, through the one who remains, accept this death, then mysteriously they are saved in the sense that first of all they have reached their end: the marriage of each one in Christ. In the sense also that beyond consented death the couple reaches a new form. In Christ to whom each one was united by this death.*

*Each one finds all those who are one with Christ - and therefore very especially he and she who was the companion and providential helper on the journey towards Christ. The couple through death passed from this world into the world of God. But not without undergoing a radical metamorphosis. This new state which will be that of eternity (where in God will be recovered, transformed, the highest human values). The widow is called to live it now. (HC, But de la Cordée, 1958)*

#### **Pius XII - 16 September 1957 Rome**

*"Far from destroying the bonds of human and supernatural love contracted through marriage, death can perfect and strengthen them. No doubt, on the purely legal level and on the level of sensitive realities, the institution of marriage no longer exists. But that which constituted its soul, that which gave it strength and beauty, conjugal love with all its splendour and its vows of eternity, remains, as do the spiritual and free beings who have dedicated themselves to one another (...) The widow will remain united in spirit to her husband, who will suggest to her in God the attitudes to be taken, give her authority and discernment"*.

### **From Father Caffarel**

*His (Pius XII) teaching is clear: beyond the death of one of the spouses, the carnal bond no longer exists, nor does the judicial bond, nor does the sacrament of marriage - which, like all the sacraments, belongs to the Church of the earth. These realities disappear, just as scaffolding is removed when the building is completed. But the couple remains. If, however, conjugal love remains, the soul of the couple, which between two "spiritual and free beings" transcends the impulse and union of bodies; and, on the condition, of course, that this love is indeed a mutual gift, always present, for there is no more a fixed gift than a fixed flame. The spouses may even experience a mutual "presence", "more intimate, deeper, stronger", already in the state of widowhood. On the day of the eternal reunion, they will love each other with a perfection of love unsuspected on earth, because they will know each other completely, transparent to that God when they see each other face to face. Then the couple, having reached their perfect fulfillment, will fully realise their vocation: they will finally be a perfect praise to the Creator God who made the union of man and woman in his image, and to Christ the Saviour who not only restored them after the original sin but made them even more admirable, the image and sacrament of their union with the Church. (Compagnons d'éternité?, Letter from the END, Dec. 1987, p. 12)*

### **Pope Francis : Amoris laetitia**

*255. Ordinarily, the grieving process takes a fair amount of time, and when a pastor must accompany that process, he has to adapt to the demands of each of its stages. The entire process is filled with questions: about the reasons why the loved one had to die, about all the things that might have been done, about what a person experiences at the moment of death. With a sincere and patient process of prayer and interior liberation, peace returns. At particular times, we have to help the grieving person to realize that, after the loss of a loved one, we still have a mission to carry out, and that it does us no good to prolong the suffering, as if it were a form of tribute. Our loved ones have no need of our suffering, nor does it flatter them that we should ruin our lives. Nor is it the best expression of love to dwell on them and keep bringing up their name, because this is to be dependent on the past instead of continuing to love them now that they are elsewhere. They can no longer be physically present to us, yet for all death's power, "love is strong as death" (Song 8:6). Love involves an intuition that can enable us to hear without sounds and to see the unseen. This does not mean imagining our loved ones as they were but being able to accept them changed as they now are. The risen Jesus, when his friend Mary tried to embrace him, told her not to hold on to him (cf. Jn 20:17), in order to lead her to a different kind of encounter.*

*257. One way of maintaining fellowship with our loved ones is to pray for them. The Bible tells us that "to pray for the dead" is "holy and pious" (2 Macc 12:44-45). "Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective". The Book of Revelation portrays the martyrs interceding for those who suffer injustice on earth (cf. Rev 6:9-11), in solidarity with this world and its history. Some saints, before dying, consoled their loved ones by promising them that they would be near to help them. Saint Therese of Lisieux wished to continue doing good from heaven. Saint Dominic stated that "he would be more helpful after death... more powerful in obtaining graces". These are truly "bonds of love", because "the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the Lord is in no way interrupted... [but] reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods".*

*325. The teaching of the Master (cf. Mt 22:30) and Saint Paul (cf. 1 Cor 7:29-31) on marriage is set – and not by chance – in the context of the ultimate and definitive dimension of our human existence. We urgently need to rediscover the richness of this teaching. By heeding it, married couples will come to see the deeper meaning of their journey through life. As this Exhortation has often noted, no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the*

*ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven. Our contemplation of the fulfilment which we have yet to attain also allows us to see in proper perspective the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection, a purity of intentions and a consistency which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come. It also keeps us from judging harshly those who live in situations of frailty. All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.*

## **Testimonial**

*(Note: Original names have been changed)*

*Since that winter month when Elisabeth joined the Father seven years ago, legally both in terms of Civil Law and the Code of Canon Law, we are no longer married. Legally we have been dissolved, the sacrament has ceased to produce its effects. And yet...*

*And yet Elisabeth is still with me every day and probably more consistently than at any time during our 36 years of marriage.*

*Of course, there are the memories of the happy days. The joys and sorrows; the children and grandchildren prolong these memories. And how good it is to remember them despite the nostalgia they engender! There are also the regrets that I am no longer able to speak to her or be with her. But that's not all: you cannot live in the present and the future with your eyes only on the rear-view mirror. Elisabeth is here today as she was yesterday. I talk to her every day. I call on her. I ask her advice for my life, my commitments, my family responsibilities.*

*The place of this meeting is the Eucharist. During Mass, most often in this church where we have been parishioners for 24 years, I find her again. I know that she is with the Lord who makes himself present on the altar.*

*Since she became ill, it is to her that I owe this almost daily practice. It has become a necessary practice for me, and I try to remain faithful to it, since she is no longer there (and even though my prayers asking for healing have not been answered...). First of all, I pray that if by any chance - but I don't believe it - she was not yet in the full light of Christ, she will reach it very soon.*

*Then I entrust many people and situations to her. I ask her first of all, to protect and enlighten our children, stepchildren and grandchildren, especially those she has not known here on earth, and those who will be born soon. I also ask her to intercede before Our Lady for this or that, whether it is for the Lord to welcome her in Heaven or to guide her on earth.*

*The Communion of Saints really exists!*

*Elizabeth was the good counsellor. During her lifetime and especially in the last months of her illness, she impressed me with her lucidity, with the strength and the benevolence of the advice she gave to her family, and friends who asked her for help. She always thought first of others.*

*I did not rebel against her death (but against her illness, yes). We knew that her pilgrimage on this earth was nearing its end and that I would remain alone "in hac lacrimarum valle" (in this valley of tears [Salve Regina]): Lord, Thy will be done (at that moment it is hard to say, but...). We loved each other even more in those last few months. and it is this same love that unites us even today, for I believe that she still loves me too.*

*In the beginning I kept repeating to myself: we won't grow old together ...*

*Certainly, the unspeakable suffering of separation is there every day, but without her as my compass, I would be lost. Not only lost on earth, but perhaps lost to Heaven where I know we will find each other again, even if it is hard for me to imagine how.*

*John*

#### **4. Questions for the Sit-Down**

Have you thought that your love for each other is eternal, and can continue after death?

The question proposed for the Sit-Down should not replace the questions concerning the intimacy of our life as a couple, which is good to reflect on regularly.

#### **5. The team meeting – suggested format**

##### **A- Pooling**

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that have been significant in the life of each individual or of the couple.
- Discuss how we support, or our difficulties in supporting, the widows and widowers around us.

##### **B- Time for prayer**

##### **Ephesians 1: 3-14 (NRSV)**

*Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly place; just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the richness of his grace that he lavished upon us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance, towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

##### **C- Sharing on an Endeavour: Prayer**

Prayer helps us to become aware of the Kingdom that is already being built in our lives.

##### **D- Questions for discussion**

The couple leading the meeting can suggest questions which might best suit the Team. Here are our suggestions:

1. "To be aware of this goal, of the eternity of love": how can we take into account the eternal dimension of our love from now on?
2. "There is no growth without struggle, there is no mission without the Cross": exchange on a struggle that has allowed you to grow.
3. In helping spouses to grow in love within teams, how does our team help members to grow in love?
4. Mention aspects of this text which challenge my certainties and encourage my hope.
5. Mention any aspect of the text which I decided to follow up in more depth.
6. Is there anything in this text that could be a personal rule of life?

## **E- Liturgical Prayer**

### **Psalm 148 (NRSV)**

*Praise the Lord!*

*Praise the Lord from the heavens;*

*praise him in the heights!*

*Praise him, all his angels;*

*praise him, all his host.*

*Praise him, sun and moon;*

*praise him, all you shining stars!*

*Praise him, you highest heavens,*

*and you waters above the heavens!*

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,*

*For he commanded and they created.*

*He established them for ever and ever;*

*He fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.*

*Praise the Lord from the earth,*

*you sea monsters, and all the depths,*

*Fire and hail, snow and frost,*

*stormy wind fulfilling his command!*

*Mountains and all hills,*

*fruit trees, and all cedars!*

*Wild animals and all cattle,*

*Creeping things and flying birds!*

*Kings of the earth and all peoples,*

*Princes and all rulers of the earth!*

*Young men and women alike,*

*Old and young together!*

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,*

*For his name alone is exalted;*

*His glory is above earth and heaven.*

*He has raised up a horn for his people,*

*Praise for all his faithful,*

*For the people of Israel who are close to him.*

*Praise the Lord!*

## **F- Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Meeting 9. Review

## Objective

Our team life helps us to be missionaries by helping us in our spiritual life and in our mission to our spouse. We can only transmit what we are living authentically. The team is the support base for our mission to other team members, and for our mission around the world. This is why it is important to take stock of the vitality of our team each year.

The review meeting is a special time for sharing and mutual support. It is conducted in a climate of prayer, truth and communion. In this spirit of charity, everyone is invited to assess their personal and conjugal journey, as well as the situation of the team. We consider difficulties and joys, things that need to be reinforced, preserved or, if necessary, changed.

*"The essential thing is to seek God's will for the couple and the team, and to discern His call to live more authentically the love of agape which is the soul of every Christian community."*

Prior written preparation can help you deepen your reflection and enrich your team's assessment. All the questions raised may not be explored in depth. We suggest that you deal with those that seem most relevant to you and your team. In order to put our assessment under the Lord's gaze, we suggest that the meeting begins with prayer.

### 1. **Biblical text: Matthew 13:1-9 (NRSV)**

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables: "Listen, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on the rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears, listen!"*

#### **A Reflection on the Word of God**

*The parable of the sower speaks first of Jesus, our Redeemer, who wants to present his mission and the meaning of his presence among us using the comparison of the sower.*

*In a passage preceding this one, Saint Matthew writes: "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom....." (9:35). Jesus, therefore, sees himself as a person who is sent "to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom". When Jesus begins his public ministry, he attributes to himself a text from the prophet Isaiah which says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring the Good News to the poor ... and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:17-19). Jesus affirms that these prophetic words are fulfilled in Him: He was sent "to bring the Good News", to "proclaim a good year". The profound meaning of this "autobiographical parable" (Benedict XVI) is this: like the sower who went out to sow the seed, Jesus comes out of the house of Nazareth to sow the Good News, the joyful message of God who saves mankind, in everyone.*

*When Pope Francis speaks of an outgoing Church (Post-synodal Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 24) he is inspired by the sower who, without yielding to fatigue, travels all over the field of the world to*

*the places of its frailties and baseness, of its weaknesses and contradictions, even to the place of blasphemy against Him. The Sower never stops throwing the good seed. We have the impression that he throws his grain at random, but I believe that today we can interpret this way of sowing as a teaching of Jesus on how to be missionaries. Mission is not a question of strategies or a particular activity to be added to the fabric of our daily existence. It is above all a question of carrying a word charged with a Presence and nourished every day by an experience of fraternity, which challenges each individual, every day, with the questions "who am I," where I come from, but above all "where am I going and why? (...)"*

*The parable of this sower, who is the Lord, who sows abundantly, helps us to grow in awareness and commitment to accept the Word of God and to make it bear fruit. There are so many risks and so many situations where the Word of God does not bear fruit, not because of God's inaction -He could not be more active - but because of our distractions, our superficiality, our temptations. So the sower Jesus spreads his seed everywhere, one could say by "wasting" it, he does not spread any soil, believing that every soil is worthy of trust and attention. Thus the Church, through bishops, priests and all the faithful, must offer the Word to all and the Church must do so without skimping its efforts. This is the vocation of every Christian. We are all sowers of the Word, from the Pope to the most recently baptized. We are not all on the same level or with the same responsibilities, but we are all sowers charged with bringing the Word to the world, knowing that the Word is our life before our voice.*

*Every morning every Christian should go out from his home to earn enough to support himself materially but also spiritually, "going out to sow Christ, the grain that becomes Bread", without getting discouraged if part of the grain should fall on land that is not good [...]"*

(Source: Zenit- commentary on the readings of the 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A, July 13, 2014, Bishop Francesco Follo) Rome World News (now not available on-line)

## **2. Texts by Father Caffarel**

**The first and most characteristic apostolic responsibility** of the home is to increase the People of Worship, to ensure the continuity of the worship of the true God on earth through the exercise of this power proper to the couple, the procreative power, and through education.

**Second responsibility**, no less imperative: the "prophetic" apostolate of the couple. In the biblical sense of the word, the "prophet" is the man who speaks in the name of God. By his life, by his example, by his behaviour, the Christian couple must proclaim the doctrine of marriage.

**Third responsibility**: if the Christian home is a cell of the Church, if it is part of the Mystery of the Church, those who live there as well as those who come there must be able to find and draw from it the life of the Church.

**The fourth** aspect of the apostolic responsibility of the home: if there is an individual apostolate outside the home, [the home] is the Church community where each member of the home comes to refresh himself, to set out again with new energy.

**Fifth form** of the apostolate of the home: the apostolate of prayer, of that religious life which is the first and essential aspect of one's priestly vocation. (AO, no. 111-112, pp. 225-240)

*So, contributing to the sanctification of the home is not only sanctifying the surroundings, as I have just shown, but it is also sanctifying our tomorrows. When Christ takes hold of the home, He takes hold of the very source of life. Once it is sanctified, the river is sanctified - the river, that is, of*

tomorrow's generations. In today's home, it is the Church according to us that ascends towards life....apostolic action does not only progress in extension on the horizontal plane: reaching ever more men, but also in depth: making the divine penetrate the deepest part of the human, the most carnal, the most temporal. (AO, no. 111-112, pp. 305-321)

"At your team's review meeting, couples will not be asked to answer the question: "Are we in the movement?" (This is not an adult day-care centre), but this one: "Are we determined to commit ourselves fully to the Teams and with the help of the Teams in the mission of God's witnesses in the midst of this world that the rising tide of atheism threatens to overwhelm?" (HC, Les END face à l'athéisme, 1970).

### **3. The team meeting – suggested format**

#### **A- Reading and meditation of the Word (Mt 13:1-9)**

#### **B- Responsorial Psalm of the Mass of the day**

#### **C- Pooling**

Sharing of our news should be brief at this meeting, to allow a focus on the assessment of our team life and the theme of this study topic.

##### **1. A Review of the Team**

*A "Team" is not simply a human community. It comes together "in Christ's name" and attempts to help its members to make progress in the love of God and in the love of one's neighbour in order to answer fully the invitation of Christ. (Charter of the Teams of Our Lady; 1997 update)*

Has our team made progress in terms of listening, respecting points of view, support, encouragement? Has everyone been able to find their place, to express themselves, neither too much nor too little?

Let us identify if we are experiencing particular or difficult situations in the team, among its members.

Are our exchanges valuable and deep? If we have been hurt by one or other of the team members, have we been able to talk about it with respect for each one?

What means has our team given itself to be a better team?

##### **2. A Review of our meetings**

- How do we prepare it: in writing? With the counsellor or the spiritual guide?
- Sharing: have we been careful to prepare it before the meeting in order to be concise by relating 2 or 3 important events? Did these events nourish our prayer? Did our team benefit from them?
- How do we live the time of prayer as a team? How important is it to us?
- What place do the couples in our team give to the spiritual counsellor or accompanier?
- How does the spiritual counsellor live out his or her role as a team member?
- What links do we have with the movement? What place do we give to our liaison couple? Have we allowed ourselves to be challenged by the Letter from the ERI, the website, the newsletter or the gatherings in the sector, region, province or at the national level, to

progress in our faith? In view of all that the movement brings us, do we make an appropriate financial gift to help the movement live and develop?

## **D- A Review of Our Sharing**

Sharing, as we have seen throughout our meetings this year, is an in-depth communication on the life of the couple, centred around the Endeavours. These Endeavours are the columns or frameworks of the interior life of the couple belonging to the Teams of Our Lady, that is to say, of conjugal spirituality. In the Sharing it is therefore not enough to say whether or not the couple has observed the Endeavour, but to acknowledge some benefit to our spiritual life.

### **For the couple:**

- Did you feel that you have developed spiritually during this year?
- How did the Endeavours help you in your spiritual progress?
- Which Endeavours have been most valuable this year?

### **For the team:**

- How valuable was the Sharing during the team meeting this year?
- Did all couples contribute?
- How can the Spiritual Counsellor contribute to the growth of the team?

### **For the Movement:**

- Has the wider Movement offered training opportunities on the mystique of Endeavours and Sharing? What are they? How have you taken advantage of these and other opportunities to deepen your faith and experience the wider movement?

## **E- Review of the Study Topic**

- What has touched you the most - or has been truly beneficial for the growth of your married spirituality and missionary commitment - in each of the sections of this study theme?
- The texts of Father Caffarel, used in this study theme, were written between 50 to 70 years before Pope Francis' Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations. Do you think that Father Caffarel's thoughts are still relevant today for Christian couples? Do they represent a continuing contribution to the theology of marriage?

## **F- Our Team's plans for the coming year**

Following our exchanges, what areas of improvement do we set ourselves?

Do we wish to continue next year on the path proposed by the Teams of Our Lady?

The responsible Couple is the shepherd of the team, its mission has three dimensions: the spiritual dimension, the human dimension and openness to the movement. The team will have elected a new couple to be responsible. Does the new responsible couple have sufficient guidance from this review to discern and animate the chosen path?

## **G- Commissioning the Team Couples**

To formalise the sending on mission of the new Responsible Couple, the current responsible couple can pass on a lighted candle or other object symbolising spiritual responsibility; the counsellor or spiritual accompanier can bless the new Responsible Couple. The Spiritual Counsellor can also bless the team members, sent on mission at the start of a new Teams year.

## **H- Final Prayers**

- Prayer for the beatification of Father Caffarel
- Magnificat

# Annexes

## 1. Abbreviations and References

### AO:

L'Anneau d'Or Cahiers de spiritualité conjugale et familiale, a journal founded by Father Caffarel in 1945 and published until 1968.

These two issues were written in their entirety by Father Caffarel:

L'Anneau d'Or, special number 111-112, "Le mariage, ce grand Sacrement", May-August 1963.

L'Anneau d'Or, special no. 117-118, "Marriage, the road to God", May-August 1964.

### HC : Henri Caffarel

HC, The Teams of Our Lady facing atheism: Henri Caffarel, The Teams of Our Lady. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens, Paris, Équipes Notre-Dame, 1988.

HC, Chantilly Conference, 1987: Conference of Father Henri Caffarel at the Meeting of European Regional Leaders, Chantilly, 3 May 1987.

HC, Goal of the Cordée: Henri Caffarel, Document on the Cordée, first denomination of the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Resurrection, Institute of Consecrated Widows.

**Pope Francis:** All the Apostolic Exhortations and Encyclicals quoted in this study topic can be downloaded, in a range of different languages, from the Vatican website at <http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en.html>

**Timothy Radcliffe :** Meditations on The Good Samaritan - talks given at the International Gathering in Brasilia, July 2012 (also available as a Study Topic in the Transatlantic Region) <https://teams-transatlantic.org/>

**Vocation and Mission:** Vocation and Mission at the dawn of the third millennium, Teams of Our Lady, International Responsible Team, Fatima, 20 July 2018.

The Mission of Love: Theme of the Teams of Our Lady, 2017-2018.

Celebrating the Third Age: Study Topic prepared by the Oceania Super-Region, 2008. <http://www.teamsoceania.com.au/resources/>

Transatlantic Super-Region of END: A Teams Response to Bereavement. 2014. <https://teams-transatlantic.org/>

## 2. Prayer for the Beatification of the Servant of God, Henri Caffarel

God, our Father,

You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel, a fountain of love which bound him totally to your Son and inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.

A prophet for our time, - he revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person in the words Jesus addresses to each of us: "Come follow me".

He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of marriage, the sign of Christ's fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her. He showed that priests and couples are called to live a vocation of love.

He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, he accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer. Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.

God, our Father, through the intercession of Our Lady, we ask you to hasten the day when the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life, so that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son in accordance with their particular vocations in the Holy Spirit.

God our Father, we invoke the intercession of Father Caffarel for..... (indicate the particular favour being sought)

*Prayer approved by Monsignor Andre Vingt-Trois – Archbishop of Paris. “Nihil obstat”: 4th January 2006 – “Imprimatur”: 5th January 2006.*

*In the case of a particular favour obtained through the intercession of Father Caffarel, contact:  
The Postulator, Association of “The Friends of Father Caffarel”, 49 rue de la Glacière – F 75013 Paris,  
France*