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INTRODUCTION

The Conjugal spirituality proposed by Fr Caffarel is the essence of the Movement of the Teams of Our Lady. It continually renews us through the Endeavours, in particular the Sit down and Conjugal Prayer.

Conjugal Prayer is an excellent opportunity for us to draw nearer to each other and for each of us, both as individuals and together as a couple, to draw closer to God. It allows a deeper communion between the couple.

It is an opportune time for enriching our day through the loving meeting of three persons, ourselves and Lord Trinity.

Prayer is a grace, given by God for the duration of the marriage, to enrich the couple's faith, their mutual love and their shared devotion. It helps to bring peace to the relationship whenever it is needed.

Jesus Christ is present in a special way when a couple prays together.

Other ways of praying such as the Mass, grace before meals or the rosary can also be types of shared prayer, but they cannot take the place of this form of prayer.

I. What are the origins of Conjugal Prayer?

1 – The Bible

Practical suggestions: these texts may be used to support our prayer
Holy Scripture is the origin of all Prayer

In Genesis we read, “*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.*” (Gen 1:27). Man and woman are called to reflect the image of the Holy Trinity in their relationship. Jesus calls us into this intimate relationship with the Father: “...so that all may be one. As you Father are one in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Jn 17:21) and so, united as Jesus is united to the Father, the couple bears witness to the world

In the Book of Tobit, we have an example of faithful love and of a couple praying together. “*Tobias rose from the bed and said to Sarah ‘sister let us get up and pray together and implore our Lord that He may grant us mercy and safety.’*”

So she got up and they began to pray and implore that they might be kept safe.” (Tb 8:4-5)

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read: “*Have you not read that the one who made them in the beginning made them male and female and said that for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no-one separate».* (Mt 19 :4-6) This unity of two beings becoming one flesh implies also a unity of heart and mind, nourished and strengthened by prayer.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we also read: “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them.*” (Mt 18:20).

2 - Fr Caffarel

Fr Caffarel had a prophetic insight into the importance of Conjugal Prayer. Other church organisations

encouraged family prayer, but rarely prayer specifically between husband and wife:

“Christian marriage is not simply a reciprocal gift between a man and a woman; it is also a gift from the couple to Christ. Christ is present in the couple.»
(L’Anneau d’Or 98)

“May the couple, husband and wife, renew their faith in this union which Christ makes real through His presence. May they be aware that Christ wants to praise the Father for those who place themselves at His service.” “May they together listen to Christ; in order to hear

Christ, they may begin their prayer by reading from the Bible and then meditating on it; and then, only after having listened and understood, they can speak to God spontaneously, expressing thoughts and feelings with the simplicity of a child.”

(Monthly Review of the Teams of Our Lady April 1968)

“I really want to convince you of my belief, that a couple searching for God in this worlds of ours, which no longer believes in God or in love, is a ‘theophany’, that

is a manifestation of God; just like Moses’ experience in the desert when he saw the bush, which was blazing, but not being consumed by the flames.”(Ex 3; 2)

(Fr Caffarel’s Conference - “In the Face of Atheism.” Rome, May 1970

In the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady of 1947, it says:

“Pray together with your children every day, if possible, because in this way the family worships God and this form of prayer is very powerful.”

“Each day say the prayer of the Teams of Our Lady, in union with all other couples in the movement

“30 Years On”, certain Endeavours had been refined and developed.

Personal Prayer, Conjugal Prayer and Family Prayer were dealt with separately.

“Make time every day for a real ‘tête à tête with the Lord.”(Personal Prayer)

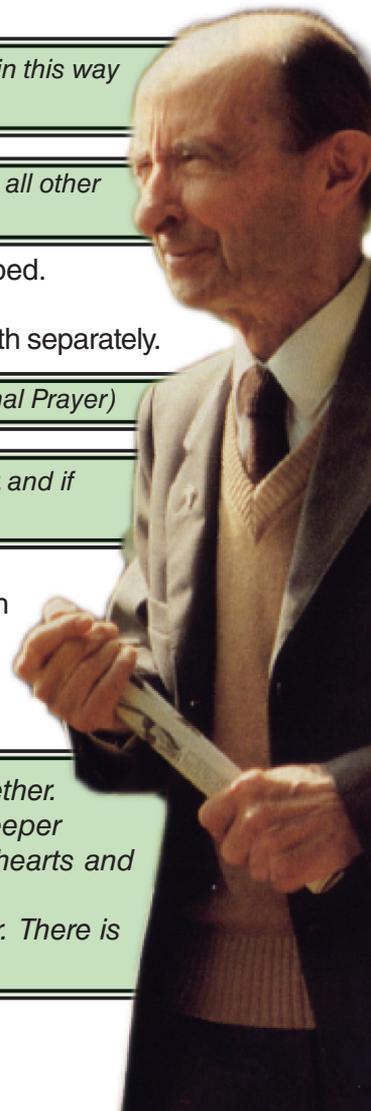
“Meet together each day, husband and wife, for conjugal prayer, and if possible, family prayer.”

Saying the Magnificat is a means of being in communion with other Team members worldwide

In the **“Guide to the Teams of Our Lady”** we read:

“Christ is present in a special way when a couple prays together. They not only renew their ‘yes’ to God, but also achieve a deeper union with each other, which springs solely from the union of hearts and souls in the sacrament of marriage.”

“When we pray together we are forming a community of prayer. There is no better foundation for our marriage and our family.”



Finally, Teams couples themselves are the best witnesses of the importance of conjugal prayer. Teams'

members have observed that conjugal prayer creates a stronger bond than the other Endeavours.

Testimony: *"It nourishes our personal prayer and meditation on the Word of God, both of which can also be integral parts of our conjugal prayer. It begins our sit down which may often end by choosing a rule of life, and so it becomes the very centre of our Endeavours."*

And Fr Caffarel concludes:

*"If all Christian couples were convinced of the importance of conjugal prayer; if conjugal prayer was alive in every couple, there would be a great growth of joy, love and grace in the world."
(L'Anneau d'Or, 98.)*

3 - Saint John-Paul II

Saint John-Paul II invited Christian couples, together with their children, to pray: "Walk with Christ! It is He who leads you to discover the nobility of the commitment

you have made. It is He, Jesus Christ, who can create through you much more than you could possibly imagine." (Prayer – The Spirituality of the Pope).



II. Why Conjugal Prayer?

1 - Because the couple forms a Christian community

Conjugal prayer encourages a life of participation in the church. It demonstrates that marriage is a sign and symbol of the love of God for mankind and of Christ for His church. Conjugal prayer culminates in the Mass which contains and expresses all forms of prayer

Conjugal prayer allows the couple to

be united with the Father in the name of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. As members of the Teams of Our Lady, we are especially drawn to Mary, the Mother of God. «**All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as His brothers.**» (Acts 1:14).

2 - Because we are Christians

In prayer, the couple recognises their dependence on God. Together they seek the face of God and offer themselves to Him with confidence.

They acknowledge that marriage and its fruits are only truly achievable through Christ, thus their prayer is a conscious act of humility before God.

"The need for, and the importance of, conjugal prayer can only be understood within the context of the sacrament of marriage."

(Fr Caffarel: L'Anneau d'Or 98).

3 – To enlighten each couple's life

"In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion."

(Eph. 6:18)

It allows us to see our own lives from God's perspective. It provides the light by which we can discern God's will in all circumstances.

of each moment, is one of **the secrets of the Kingdom** of God revealed to the "little ones", to those who serve Christ, to the poor in the Beatitudes.

It promotes **closeness** between us in all our concerns.

Praying together enables us to live the **gift of prophecy**. The Lord may speak to one of us through the other, even if this is not always apparent.

Praying for the events of each day and

4 - To introduce the sit down

It allows us to **invite the Lord** to share with us, in a very real way, at these special moments in our life as a couple; opening us up to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the Gospels and to God's will.

We offer prayers of **blessing, praise** and **thanks** to the Lord for all His gifts, especially for the love between us.

5 – For intercession

Our Lady is the patron of the Teams of Our Lady, so we ask for her help. She intercedes for us with her son Jesus Christ.

Offering our petitions together strengthens our prayer: ***“Again I tell you truly, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”*** (Mt 18:19).

Conjugal prayer can also be a means of **praying for others**. We can intercede for our family, our friends, our neighbours, for the whole church and the world. ***“Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”*** (Phil 2:4). The first Christian communities lived this kind of sharing in a very real way. (Acts 12:5. 20:36. 21:5. 2 Cor 9:14).

6 – To ask for forgiveness

We pray together for our weaknesses and our sinful tendencies. We all need God's forgiveness to be cleansed of our

sins, to be reconciled with each other and with other people.

7 – To Praise God

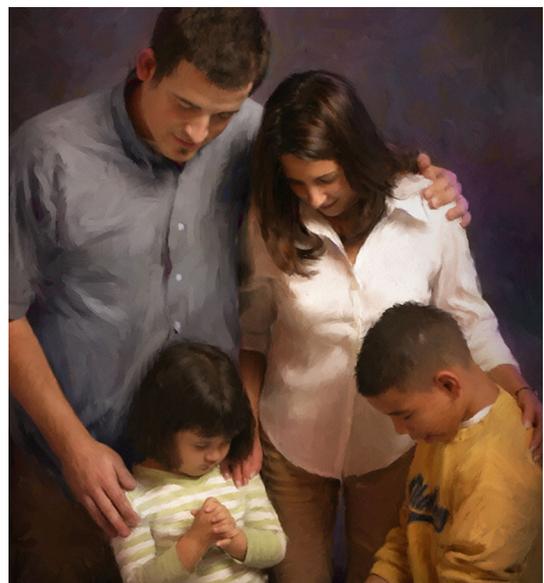
“Worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone.” (Mt 4:10)

Through praising God, we celebrate His greatness.

God is first and foremost and we express our love for Him through our prayer of praise, which itself depends on Him, on His fidelity to us and on His love.

It is not so much a matter of what we might receive, but rather of simply being present, silently and attentively offering ourselves to God.

Thus we return to the very source of our married love.



8 - To give thanks

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess 5:18)

In giving thanks we acknowledge all that God does for us as a couple, in the good times as well as in the bad.

We praise God for all that he reveals to us when we pray.

9 - Family prayer

Fr Caffarel wrote “Conjugal Prayer blossoms into family prayer”
(L’Anneau d’Or 98)

Conjugal prayer has its **own special place** in the spirituality of the couple, but not to the exclusion of personal prayer (quiet time) or family prayer

Conjugal prayer and family prayer **en-ergise** each other. Parents give an example to their children of how to pray.

The Christian family is the first place where children learn how to pray.

Family prayer encourages the **spiritual growth** of its members and strengthens family bonds.



III. How do we pray as a couple?

Each couple is unique and has its own characteristics, which is why there is **no rigid rule** concerning conjugal prayer. What is most important is not the way in which it is done but the desire to pray together.

1 - Make an appointment

Arrange a time in the day when you can pray together (eg when you get up or go to bed)

If you wait for a suitable time it will never come.



Testimony: *“When we go out at night, we pray before leaving, in anticipation of tiredness when we return”*

It is Christ who can teach us how to pray as a couple. It is up to us to humbly ask for His help in learning how to pray.

2 – Regularity and perseverance

Conjugal prayer is a form of liturgy which requires effort: the appointment has to be regularly scheduled .

lops in the couple’s life as they grow as a couple.

Conjugal prayer is built up gradually and gently, step by step in love. It deve-

To achieve a deep union with God, perseverance is very important. Even though it is difficult at first, this effort will bring many graces..

Testimony: *“We pray at night before going to bed by saying Compline together. This sets our conjugal prayer in the tradition of the universal prayer of the church, less dependent on our personal weaknesses. However, it doesn’t take the place of our quiet time or personal prayer.”*

Prayer is not about our being experts. . . the practice of prayer is a work of God, a gift of God. But it is also a human work. We must co-operate by our perseverance. It is then, a science, with its own laws and techniques. It is also an art, like painting or playing the piano. And as in all art we cannot limit ourselves just to the theory alone, we have to learn through practice.

(Fr Caffarel at Troussures – Listening to the Word of God, notes from Alvaro and Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer)

3- Preparation

We need a plan, which may vary according to our daily commitments. Each spouse may take it in turn to prepare the prayer time or the one who is more enthusiastic may take the initiative; the other will follow, at first out of love and then from conviction.

We need to choose a suitable place. In the house, or the garden, sometimes in the car...

We place ourselves in the presence of God, beginning with the sign of the cross followed by a moment of silence perhaps in front of a crucifix, picture, statue or candle to indicate the presence of Christ.

In the booklet "The Body and Prayer" Fr Caffarel explains the importance of bodily posture in order to pray well. (eg in



a comfortable position, kneeling or sitting upright feet on the floor).

("The Body and Prayer," Fr Caffarel, Editions Feu Nouveau 1985).

4- Before all else we seek forgiveness

Fr Caffarel tells us :

"At the time of prayer may all discord cease and may peace be re-established. May husband and wife renew their faith in the covenant which Christ has made with them."
(L'Anneau d'Or 98)

Begin by making peace with each other saying aloud "Lamb of God..." or "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us..." then offer a sign of peace.

"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go; first be

reconciled to your brother or sister then come and offer your gift."(Mt 5:23-24.)

There is a strong connection between the sit down and conjugal prayer. Sometimes the sit down may need to come before conjugal prayer, because we need to forgive each other and be reconciled. At other times it will be our prayer which prepares us for a sit down.

5- Beginning our prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit to help us: ***"You who are present deep in my heart."*** Fr Caffarel prays. Invite the Mother of God to intercede for us.

Give thanks to God for all his gifts. Praise Him for His marvellous deeds.

The Word of the Lord is the Lord Himself. **“In the beginning was the Word.”** (John 1:1)

We can begin by listening to Christ through reading a Gospel text, then meditating on it in silence.

Starting this way helps us to be receptive to whatever God wants to say to us, at this particular moment in our lives, either together or individually.

6- Listening to Christ together

Fr Caffarel suggests that listening to the Word of God is an indispensable part of all prayer and especially conjugal prayer. This can be done in several ways: silently or aloud, using one of the day's readings, choosing your own Bible text and sharing thoughts on the text.

7- Different ways of praying

There are as many ways of doing conjugal prayer as there are couples: shared silence, the Teams prayer, an Our Father, special intentions, a chaplet, a Bible reading, adoration, giving thanks, a prayer of praise, a prayer of intercession for others, especially for our children and for our own relationship...

*Agreeing to alternate ways of praying so that conjugal prayer becomes a time of true intimacy, both with each other and with the Lord.

*Pray to Mary: Our Lady is our Mother and knows well all the concerns of our hearts. She can intercede with her son on our behalf, just as she did at the wedding feast of Cana.

*Allowing each other enough time so that each can express themselves before God and to each other.

*Praying the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), or a chaplet or the rosary.

*Respecting the need for silence to be able to hear God speaking: sharing quiet time.

*Saying a “mantra” repeating a word or phrase - (Jesus-Christ, peace, joy, Ma-ra-na-tha) - can help in overcoming distractions,

*Renewing the “Yes” in our marriage each day.

*Allowing each other freedom of expression as a true brother and sister in Christ.

Testimony: *“...for us, praying together takes the form of an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Magnificat each evening. We have tried unsuccessfully to add another prayer or to share Quiet Time ... but they will come one day.”*

Testimony: *“On going to bed we just say the Magnificat but each morning we read together the daily Mass readings”*

A widower's testimony: *"Since my wife's death all my prayers are made in union with her. It is superfluous to say they are much improved ... Now that my wife is close to the Lord, my personal prayer and conjugal prayer have merged ... I thank Him for our 6 children ... At last I can submit to the Lord, and to Mary and to my wife, all my problems and difficulties and ask for their help and enlightenment."*

When you are separated geographically, pray at the same time if at all possible, so as to be united in prayer. If this is the case, modern technology can help – 'phone, Skype, Facetime etc.

8 - Shared intentions

An essential part of conjugal prayer

We must offer everything to God, even our most intimate thoughts, and be ready to hear with love and peace, all that our spouse presents to God and to our relationship.

We can include in this prayer our plans, successes, failures, fears, joys and hopes on a personal, family, professional and spiritual level.

As Teams members let us not forget to pray for Fr Caffarel.

We need to move beyond ourselves to include the concerns of our Team, the

Sector and the whole Movement, as well as our parish, diocese, the Pope and the whole church.



9 - A concrete example of how to start conjugal prayer

To begin praying together a couple might say the Magnificat, perhaps alternating the verses or read the Gospel of the day, or even both.

After some time they might add the "Our Father" for the intentions of their family, their Team or the church.

It can be helpful if each takes it in turn to lead the prayer.

Next, they could add the "Glory Be" as a prayer of praise.

After some time, when praying together has become easier, the couple could enrich their prayer by saying the liturgy

of the hours from the breviary or other prayers of the church. There are many

other helpful publications available (eg "Magnificat" or prayers "on-line")

10 - Family prayer

Ideally a husband and wife will not live their spirituality in isolation. They will pass it on to their children through the example of their faith and their love of Christ.

As with conjugal prayer, family prayer is community prayer. It takes account of the spiritual unity of the family, of the love which unites its members to each other and to God.

St John-Paul II said: ***"These family is the basic cell of the church"***

Family prayer can be strengthened by using the Church's liturgy at specific times such as Christmas, Lent or Easter.

Children need to be encouraged to join in according to their ages, and family prayer must be adapted to take account of this. If older children no longer take part, the others can pray for them.

Blessed Mother Teresa said ***"Pass on the habit of prayer to your family and to your children. Teach them to pray, for a child who prays is a happy child and a family that prays is a united family."***



IV. The difficulties of conjugal prayer

1 - Lack of willpower

In his book “Présence à Dieu”, Fr Caffarel writes “What is the essence of prayer? It is the will to pray. To want to pray is to pray”

What is relevant for personal prayer is relevant also for conjugal prayer. To begin, all that is needed is the will to pray

together. To continue we need perseverance. If one of the spouses really does not want to do it, it will not work.

The aim of prayer is not just to pray, but rather to put God at the heart of our life as a couple with confidence and faithfulness.

Testimony: *“It is not always that clear. To begin praying together, it’s not necessary for everything to be perfect. The essential thing is for us to want to be united spiritually.”*

2 - Lack of time

Testimony: *...“The content of our prayer is very poor; it is more that of two singles than of a couple united before their creator. It is not easy to find 10 minutes to offer to the Lord and we do it at the end of the day – we are making a mess of it ...”*

“You take the time to eat three times a day, yet you do not make time to pray once a day” said Fr Caffarel. *Certainly*

nourishment is essential but so is spiritual nourishment.

This, perhaps, indicates a lack of commitment to pray.

3 - Practical difficulties

- * Material preoccupations taking priority.
- * A change in routine – holidays, guests
- * Tiredness, monotonous routine



4 - Lack of togetherness

- * Being **physically apart**
- * **Different** timetables and **availability**
- * Different **temperaments**
- * **Lack of openness and willingness** to listen to the Lord and each other.

Testimony: *"...Prayer together is difficult because we express ourselves differently. We're bad at tuning in to one another – his brief and business-like style and my flowing discourses..."*

Testimony: *"...At home we have precious little spiritual harmony; my wife is ready to take off and I am dragging behind ..."*

Testimony: *"...I was suffering, being alone in practising my faith and I was losing heart because I was not succeeding in developing it. I was considering letting it all go when she asked me to continue expressing myself aloud because that was helping her. Now she is starting to participate more. This is encouraging..."*

* **Awkwardness** and **shyness**. "It would be easier to reveal our naked bodies than our hearts and souls."

***The feeling of being on "different levels" in our relationship with God;** we have different spiritualities and have come from different backgrounds.

Testimony: *"...My husband was educated by Jesuits and I, by Dominicans. Because of this we thought we couldn't have a truly united spirituality. What came about? Our children forced us to rediscover God and this time not a Dominican God nor a Jesuit God but God Himself ..."*

Fr Caffarel enlightens us on this subject: **"We have to get past these different approaches to spirituality, which arise from our different upbringings, without trying to iron them out. Different**

spiritualities, which harmonise, can be more enriching than an identical spiritual outlook between husband and wife." (L'Anneau d'Or 98)

5 - The wrong approach to prayer

If we start by praying for our own intentions, then our prayer is for us and not for God. It is better to start by praising God together, searching for His will for us.

6 - “The top 5 excuses” for not praying as a couple

The Devil loves all these...

1. **“We don’t have any time. Teams already demands enough of us, plus work, the family ... We’ll do it later on...”** and later on is never! Find the time, the place and different forms of prayer. **Never be discouraged.**
2. **“We already do family prayer. If we do conjugal prayer and personal prayer as well, we’ll be repeating ourselves.”** We don’t need to pick and choose the Endeavours, they are complementary.
3. **“Prayer is personal. I don’t feel ready to pray with my spouse.”** It is only in trying that we become more comfortable with conjugal prayer.
4. **“There is never any peace or quiet.”** Find a tranquil place where it is possible to pray together.
5. **“it’s impossible to find a moment when we are both available at the same time to pray. My husband is a morning person and I am an evening one. Think about this together so you can give priority to prayer.**

7 - Ways to overcome the difficulties

- Make prayer a priority in order to succeed. We make time for what we want to do and what matters to us.
- Co-ordinate diaries. Help each other to find time.
- Turn spare time into prayer time.
- Being different can become an advantage if we are sensitive to the differences between us and our varying priorities. If we share this during our sit down we will be enriched by our differences.
- Each couple has to search together for their own solution to their difficulties.

V. The fruits of conjugal prayer

We don't pray in order to gain something but rather to honour God. Prayer is a free gift. However Christ Himself said **"Seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will be given you"** Mt 6:33.



1- Meeting Christ and making Him part of our lives

Placing ourselves in the sight of God.

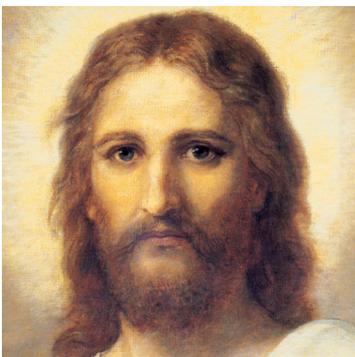
Leading us into a deeper commitment.

Enriching our own spirituality and building our conjugal spirituality.

Knowing that God is always waiting for us

Testimony: *"We thought it was necessary to know how to pray alone before praying together ; it is perhaps the very opposite for some of us."*

2 - Finding the face of God in our spouse



Not being afraid to be truthful with our spouse. Speaking out about our fears. Seeking forgiveness.

Creating a "shared soul."

Discovering our spouse's soul and spirituality. In fact **"Knowing someone truly and deeply is the first requirement for respect and genuine love."** (Fr Caffarel. L'Anneau d'Or 6).

Conjugal prayer allows us to see our spouse as a true brother or sister, someone connected to God, part of an eternal plan which is beyond us.

Testimony: *"...Prayer as a couple is one of the bases of our conjugal understanding. It allows us to smooth the sharp edges during difficult periods when we feel "obliged" to pray together. It is a grace if we have been able, gradually and without too many snags, to get into the habit of meeting each day before the Lord ..."*

3- Being at peace, in joy and well-being in our family

Conjugal prayer offers us the opportunity to forgive each other.

Conjugal prayer makes children happy because their parents are happy.

Through prayer our children become aware that we pray for them. They learn to share concern for others

Testimony: *"... It is our spiritual barometer. Each time we neglect it, the spiritual energy of us as a couple drops. When we are not in agreement and we have the courage and humility to pray together, everything falls into place (or at least everything calms down) because we recall Christ's words "if you have something against your brother ..." Mt 5:23*

4- Being open to others and to the church

Our God is a God of relationship. Prayer is entering into this relationship of love.

Because our world badly needs prayer

and especially the prayer which radiates from couples and families, "their spiritual richness touches those around them." Fr Caffarel. L'Anneau d'Or 98

Testimony: *"... it brings us so much; the union of us as a couple with God, union with each other, mutual understanding of each other, graces for our children and our friends ..."*

5- Helping us through our difficulties

Supporting each other in times of great difficulty.

Including God in our decision-making.

Creating a way of healing our married love, when we know there are so many unhappy couples and divorced couples ... even in Teams.

Creating a stronger and more united couple.

Developing the habit of regular prayer helps us to continue to pray during difficult times.

Difficulties can be seen as opportunities for progress.

Testimony: *"...Prayer helps to bring us together on many occasions. I remember particularly how we needed it when we were not in tune, when we had financial problems or problems with children or when I was ill. This spoken prayer was precious to me; I made it my own. I was able to accept the difficulties and worries more bravely; the greater our difficulties; the more effective our prayer. It was certainly the case that I learnt then, how to talk to God and how to meditate."*

6- Highlighting the sacramental nature of our marriage.

Strengthening the bonds of love between husband and wife and between them and God

Introducing the sit down and family prayer.

Receiving ongoing graces through the sacrament of marriage

Improving our open and honest dialogue.

Strengthening both communal and personal prayer.

Testimony: *“All this is not just words, it is true! But to believe it we must experience it.”*

CONCLUSION

Fr Caffarel wrote that conjugal prayer is a **way of achieving spiritual unity and unity of any other sort too, between the couple**. It is a big stimulus for our personal Christian life and **a source of spiritual richness** for us as a couple, which radiates out to others. It is the key to the treasure **which is the sacrament of marriage**.

It helps to make **peace** when it is needed.

Conjugal prayer is essential. It is the moment of our meeting with God, who is always there waiting for us.

Prayer is a **work of God**, which enables us to pray more deeply if we take the time to meet Him each day.

Conjugal prayer may be very varied. Let us **be energetic and inventive**. The most important thing is for husband and wife to pray together every day, whatever form that may take.

Do not waste time trying to judge whether prayer has been good or bad. Pray as you can, not as you can't

**Does conjugal prayer seem impossible?
Nothing is impossible to God.**

KEY WORDS



Progress Will Fidelity
Confidence Perseverance
Forgiveness Dialogue
Conversation Communion
Joy Love
Holy Spirit

