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Vocation and Mission at the dawn of the third millennium

Introduction

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

In 1988, on the occasion of the 6th International Gathering in Lourdes, the International Responsible Team (ERI) had already wanted, in a document entitled “The Second Wind”, to analyse “the urgent needs” of the couples at that time and, as a response, to suggest some ways of encouraging the creativity of team members and avoid the Movement running out of steam.

After thirty years, it is evident that the reality of married and family life had not stopped evolving and that the environment in which couples live today no longer has a lot in common with that of 1947, the date of the proclamation of the Charter, or those of “The Second Wind” of 1988, even if the fundamental question asked by Father Caffarel in 1939 remains: “How to love as Christ loves?”

In a materialistic world, marked by atheism, it seems that Christian couples, who experience the richness of marriage through their ecclesial and sacramental life, can no longer be satisfied to be

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witnesses to the value of this conjugal model. In a society which no longer accepts a system of pre-established truths, it is essential, if we do not wish to fail our apostolic mission as baptised people united in the sacrament of marriage, to demonstrate and justify by our actions how the characteristics of Christian marriage are understandable, commendable and beneficial with regard to human reason, even when this is not enlightened by faith.

Our experience of the Christian faith makes us privileged witnesses, not to impose our morals on society, but to reveal the characteristics of the success of human love on a society that disregards these morals. The challenge today is to find new ways to demonstrate, especially to young people, that the couple and the family are not a source of restriction but, on the contrary, a source of inner freedom and openness, a path to happiness and a way to God.

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

Study of the Chantilly talk, given by Father Caffarel on 3rd May 1987 on the occasion of a meeting of European regional couples, and which has since been a reference within Teams of Our Lady, has guided us in the creation of this document. Father Caffarel, with his prophetic mind, had already foreseen the new situations that were to arise at Movement level, considering the great transformations that were taking place in the world and the Church. He announced three principles to observe when facing

change with regards to the question “*What mission does the sacrament of marriage bestow on the couple?*”; these principles are as follows:

1. « *To go back to the source because, sometimes, the source can become blocked, the source which I will call the founding charism* »
2. « *To take into account the needs and values of the times in which we live* »
3. « *To consider a future.....the direction in which it is necessary to encourage the Movement to take....always in line with the founding charism* ». He stated that the notion of remaining true to the founding charism of the Movement is paramount, but one must not confuse « *being faithful with being rigid* »

Firstly, we will go back therefore to the source, as Father Caffarel requested, to pick out those unchanging elements of vocation and the mission related to the founding charism, to meet with some flexibility, the challenges of our time.

The second section of this document will endeavour to emphasise the essential traits of the “*changing times*” in which we live in, both negative and positive.

In the third section, various ways forward will be suggested; they will be able to be tried out on the ground with the help and support of the Movement, which wishes to be a motivator of both suggestions and actions, within the Church, regarding spiritual conjugality, the nucleus of its founding charism.

Vocation and Mission

This document “Vocation and Mission at the dawn of the third millennium” is the work of the communal energy established in the Teams of Our Lady to respond to the exhortation of Pope Francis addressed to the universal Church “*for a new chapter of evangelisation*”. (Evangelii Gaudium 1).

1. « Return to the Source »

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1-1 Vocation

The word vocation has as its origin the Latin verb “vocare” which means “to call”. Father Caffarel in his magazine L'Anneau d'Or No. 111-112, entitled “Marriage, the great sacrament”, makes explicit the call aimed at couples united by the sacrament of marriage. The Christian couple, he says, is “*elected*”, “*called*” by God. And just as baptism consecrates the individual, so the sacrament of marriage is the sign that God consecrates the call of the Christian couple. The sacrament of marriage is a symbol of the relationship between God and the Church, the relationship between God and the world. God is the source of love. It is God who pours his love into the human love of the couple, so that they can show the world that God loves and that is why he sent His Son into the world. This transforms married love, provided that the Christian couple, thus invited into the Kingdom of God, agree to become a cell of the Church. This transformation takes place gradually throughout the life of the couple because “*following God*” is demanding.

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

Through the sacrament of marriage, the grace of the Holy Spirit fills our beings and remains with us. As Father Louis de Raynal

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says in his book “The Good News of Marriage”: “*one can speak of marriage as a permanent sacrament.*” The vocation of the couple and the family to make of their Christian life a life in communion with God is accompanied by Christ's love which unites, restores and slowly perfects the marriage, “*God's masterpiece*”, as our founder affirms. To encourage every couple, united by the sacrament of marriage, to live their conjugal and family life in Christ is clearly the sentiment at the basis of our Movement. Spirituality and action mutually enrich each other.

Two Christians who choose to unite themselves in the sacrament of marriage engage not only in a relationship with each other, but also with the Church. Pius XII in “*Mystici Corporis*” declared: *Christ has provided in a specific way for the fundamental needs of the Church by the institution of two sacraments: marriage and holy orders*”, two complimentary sacraments “*directed towards the salvation of others*” (Catechism of the Catholic Church – 1534).

1-2 Mission

As with every vocation, the call of God to the Christian couple goes hand in hand with the duty to live for the service of God. Already, every Christian, by the fact of their baptism and by their confirmation, should contribute to the growth of the Church. But the Christian couple should devote themselves to it in a specific, unique way.

The first aspect of this apostolic mission is to make God known, to proclaim His love. According to the words of St. Paul, love, in fact, urges us to announce the Good News to others and to share the spiritual riches of a life with God. Father Caffarel already

saw in this mission a challenge to Christians to combat the atheism that is taking over our world.

The second aspect of this apostolic mission is the awareness of the parental responsibility of the couple, which Pope John XXIII evoked. Father Caffarel emphasised that God had entrusted us with the task of being close to our children, and being witnesses and prophets of His love. The family is the nourishing background to our faith. It is there where the children have their first contact with faith. In “Marriage, this great sacrament” Father Caffarel declares: *“Listen to what Christ says to you: “ Parents, it is with you and by you, that I want to increase and form new children of our Heavenly Father.”* It is here that *“the new man who will change the world”* will be educated and grow. (Cardinal Pironio).

But Father Caffarel does not limit the apostolic mission of the couple to children; the third aspect must lead the married couple to ask themselves what they are to do, with regards to all those in the world, waiting for the Good News of marriage.

For Father Caffarel, the Christian couple and the family must practice an apostolic mission of welcome and hospitality and mediate between the world and the Church. They must be intermediaries on the path of the Church for people or couples who are fragile, isolated, discouraged, traumatised, and for newcomers.....He described the Christian home as “an extremely effective instrument of apostolic mission”. Suggesting that indissoluble marriage as a way of life should not mean that we lose the capacity to accompany all those who are thirsting for love. The Teams of Our Lady invite team couples to live a path to holiness, with Jesus as their companion on the journey, allowing the graces of marriage, based on permanence and faithfulness, to flourish. Father

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Henri Caffarel thought that non-believers should be able to get to know the Church by visiting the homes of Christians.

Father Caffarel clearly states that this mission of the Christian couple should not restrict itself to the family or just a few friends. To him, this charity, which is breathed into us by Christ, must radiate widely all around us and be a sign of unity for the world. It goes much further than the simple context of testimony and influence. His aims are unambiguous: "This apostolic mission is not just a witnessing and an influencing, it is also an endeavour". For him, there is a close interdependence between conjugal love and apostolic mission. Just as Saint Paul called the couple Aquila and Priscilla "my assistant disciples", it is necessary that Christ can say the same to every Christian couple. Being truly part of the Mystical Body, the couple cannot content themselves with just receiving; they must be active members. Our founder has always castigated the Teams of Our Lady so that they do not stay centred in on themselves, enjoying the comfort of being with like-minded people and not confronting what is happening in the outside world. Hence the lyrical exhortation that Father Caffarel places in the words of God, and states during his speech in Rome in 1970: *"Faced with atheism": "Couples...do you understand the great hope I place in you? You are the bearers of My reputation, of My glory, you are the great reason for hope for the universe..., because you are love."*

Contrary to what one might hear at times, these warnings reiterated by Father Caffarel demonstrate, how mission plays an essential role in his eyes because there can be no vocation without mission. In his Chantilly speech he reminds us of Christ's words: *"The tree will be judged by its fruit"* and he insists by adding *"not by its beauty, but by its fruits....it is not about cultivating its beauty but about participating in this evolution of creation which strives*

towards an end.” For him, our area of mission is more specifically that of marriage. It is why, in a world where Christian marriage and the family only represent a path of happiness and holiness for the minority, it is time to ask ourselves about the credibility of the message of the Teams of Our Lady outside of the Movement itself and to reflect on how to produce new and adapted responses if we do not wish to alienate ourselves from our fellow human beings and at the same time cease to be apostles.

1-3 Action

What Father Caffarel refutes is not action in itself but an action that is not connected to its divine source. It is this irreplaceable role of the basic team that helps us to retain our strength. In fact, God, who is the origin of all love, attributes different forms of discipleship to the couple. It is from this love that the grace, given to the Christian couple, ensues and which strengthens them. So that this source does not run dry, so that our apostolic resources remain fruitful, Father Caffarel invites us to *“take a stand with Christ”*. It is by a living faith, nourished by the Word, by prayer and by reflection that the couple permit themselves, more and more each day, to be open to a new view of the world and of events. It is in this way that the transformation of our couples will take place and help them to better discern and act according to Christ's perspective. Through the words of Christ in the Gospels the couple becomes a community of love. It is from this that the missionary strength of the couple pours forth. Father Caffarel expressed it very well, when he said: *“Shared prayer and shared mission are like the front and back of the same coin in the community of love in the home....as with Christianity, the family*

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weakens when it does not continually draw on the Gospel. And for the home, as for the Church, it is always by returning to the Gospel that a renewal takes place. Because it is Jesus Christ who speaks in the Gospel. And the words of Jesus Christ are the spirit and are life.” (Anneau d'Or No. 117-118: “Marriage, the route to God”). God calls us to live this great love; we cannot keep silent about the way we live and it is our duty to bring others into this love.

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

A changing world challenges the Teams of Our Lady

We are not just in a time of change but also in a change of the times. We are witnessing the arrival of a new cultural system that, although often based on our own Christian values, seems to distance itself from them, distort them and question their very structure.

Today's society does not seem able to adapt to preconceived truths and customs. On the contrary, in the world today it is the reality in which we live which challenges the norms, which seeks justification and coherent answers.

Our world is still far from the Christian ideal of integral human development and respect for creation that extends to all the peoples of the world. Global economic and technological progress of recent decades has been accompanied by aberrations and imbalances that have ultimately affected families in both the developed and the poorest countries.

And so we live in a world of contradictions and lack of continuity, in which the future is not clear to see. It is exactly for this reason that we need to act because we can change things.

It seems very important, therefore, that the exhortations of the Church confront, with hope, audacity and joy, the challenges of this changing world, which is full of hurt and frustration but equally

one of opportunity and possibility. The Teams of Our Lady accepts enthusiastically the ever-renewing call to evangelise by the power of the Holy Spirit and in their turn to become evangelisers. But if we want to be intelligible apostles, we must understand with spiritual wisdom, that is to say from a cultural and Christian perspective, where we are coming from.

From an economic point of view, we are immersed in the culture of globalisation of production, consumer habits and information. The opportunities to create work and wealth anywhere on the planet are accompanied by competitiveness between states and often by a decrease in social safeguards, by an unlimited exploitation of the world's resources and questionable practices as well as corruption. As a consequence of this, there is a state of permanent tension for a great part of humanity and a huge increase in migration, whether by choice or necessity. All these facts are what give rise to the difficulties of developing stability in marriage and the family, even if they are sources of richness, of opportunities for hospitality and chance to approach those on the fringes of our society.

Economic globalisation is associated with global urbanisation. The concentration of population in major towns and the general spreading of urban culture is the other side of the abandonment of rural areas and traditional values. Towns are privileged places for the new evangelisation but it requires great imagination to create attractive and meaningful opportunities for its inhabitants to meet and interact.

The current world development is likewise associated with technological progress in the fields of nature, life and communication. These are doubtlessly advances that can improve

people's well-being, their living conditions and their freedom. However, they also lead to exaggerated feelings of self-reliance and self-satisfaction which cause people to be more preoccupied with the "how" of their decisions rather than the "why". It is the culture of efficiency and usefulness: something only having value if it is useful; there are no ethical limitations in the manipulation of nature as long as it satisfies the desires of the individual.

From the social point of view, when competitiveness and consumerism hide a diminishing of ethics, and equally of God, we are entering into a *culture of rejection and lack of protection*. The human being is reduced to his capacity to produce and to consume. Those who do not contribute are not even at the bottom of society or on its periphery, they are outside of it. This style of life that excludes numerous people has developed a worldwide indifference: without being aware of it we have become anesthetised, we have lost our ability to see and help those on the periphery. This lack of help also affects old people, whose number is constantly growing, and they run the risk of being considered a burden. Their dependence is sometimes even exploited economically. For a number of them loneliness becomes unbearable, even though many of them have the love and support of their family as well as the spiritual fellowship of the Church and its movements.

The *culture of rejection* is also a *culture of waste*, of the "useable and disposable", which harms nature and the quality of life. *God speaks to man through His visible creation*, and through what we can hear; the cries of the abandoned, the cries of our sister Earth, mistreated as never before, calling out for a change of direction. God has put His Creation into the hands of the couple and

we are therefore heirs to, and responsible for how we respond as a community to, this beauty and fullness of which He dreamed. Surely man is the high point of creation, but if the Earth goes to waste and if the quality of life of our descendants continues to deteriorate, our message of love and marriage will fall on deaf ears; people will have different priorities.

From the point of view of emotional, married and family relationships, we see lots of positive changes but also great contradictions, as well as threats. General indifference generates a lack of interest in the married couple and the family. Social structures support the emotional and family life of people less than before. The paradoxes are numerous. On one hand, many young people suffer from lack of opportunities for housing and coping with everyday needs; precarious working conditions make it difficult to set up a home and a comfortable life. A family and a home are two things that go hand in hand, and yet one of these is often missing. On the other hand, this very culture of competitiveness and consumerism offers young people such opportunities that they show no interest in engaging in the formation of a family.

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

In other respects the recognition of equality between a man and a woman has progressed decisively, even though violence and

unacceptable practices still persist and new forms of exploitation of the female body come to light. The feminist fight, even though it is legitimate, sometimes leads to extreme, irrational and disturbing theories based on the disregard of the difference of the sexes or how they can complement each other and in the wish to impose in an authoritative manner what is called “gender theory”, according to which human sexual identity would depend on the choice of the individual.

The exalting of this “me” is equally a sign of the times. We can find in it positive values in the desire to encourage the best in everyone and in exercising the freedom to make the most of one's own life. However, the absence of personal discipline and of moral focus can lead to the inability to give generously of oneself. In this way, the *culture of individualism* intrudes bit by bit, and to its detriment, into the family circle. If the “me” and not the “we” becomes the master, then the marriage and the family are at the service of the individual and not the other way around. Marriage and family grow together and change according to the sensitivity and desires of each person; with this in mind it is not difficult to justify the lack of commitment and breakdowns in marriage.

The culture of individualism mentioned above does not encourage true love based on faithfulness; it has as a consequence the speed with which people dispose of emotional relationships and move easily from one to another. Crises in the couple relationship are dealt with in a superficial, impatient and egotistical way. Breakdowns result in new relationships and new unions, each time generating situations that are more difficult to comprehend and experience, especially for children, and situations, which are problematic on a Christian level.

The paradox is, that in this context, the desire for a union and a stable family remains strongly at the heart of each person; it is this that is to motivate the Church.

From the point of view of religión this individualistic culture leads to a moral relativity and the relegation of God into one's private sphere. This impoverishes public life and society, which is then deprived of objective values for the benefit of all, and neglects to support and clearly guide people facing the big questions which they are presented with, especially in terms of ethics. The Church today needs to fill this gap.

The weakening of faith and the practise of religion also leaves families more needy when faced with difficulties. Many people suffer the horror of loneliness, caused by the fragility of relationships and the absence of God in their lives. They can find themselves attracted to new religious “offers”, some tending towards fundamentalism and others proposing a spirituality without God. These false propositions often find a favourable response on the fringes of society and in the poorest areas where people suffer the greatest deprivation and live in hardship.

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

**3.« Envisaging the future.....the direction
in which we require the Movement to
progress..... »**

**What real challenges can the Movement
respond to and how?**

There is a substantial challenge and basic objective for our mission: to help to discover and to live the true nature of human love which current culture tends to distort. Chapter 4 of the Apostolic Exhortation “Amoris Laetitia” shows the splendour of true love: a crafted work that is realised in the highs and lows of everyday life, a place to love from morning till night, accepting and overcoming each others imperfections; a reality which changes during one’s life but without losing its very essence; a definitive and lasting commitment that demands and generates a union with God. Ultimately our mission is to show the path to happiness and holiness.

The Teams of Our Lady knows that the Lord will not cease to give it the strength and the means necessary to confidently make progress with this task. As Pope Francis said in 2015 in his speech to the leaders of the Movement, we have something that we need to share. It was a call to put the teachings of Teams at the service of their mission: these are our strength and what we are able to share.

Of course Teams must answer the call of the Church starting from what they are. To live mission, based on our charism, involves

realising it as a couple, sharing it as a team and relying on the impetus and encouragement of the Movement.

In this new chapter the Movement can take on its mission to the world with a clear conscience and a real awareness. In doing this, it reasserts that its founding charism is not only to cultivate conjugal spirituality but also to promote a missionary spirit in each member of each team. In this way, and without taking away the freedom or the initiative of the team members, the Movement will support and encourage, with its organisation and animation, practical programmes to support couples in the new situations they encounter in contemporary society. This is the real contribution we can make to the Church and the world today: it is our strength.

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

3-1 Discernment and Welcome

Welcome: This word is part of the identity of the Movement expressed in the founding Charter. Father Caffarel in “Marriage, the great sacrament” spoke of the ministry of Christian hospitality; a very important function that contributes to the life and growth of the Church. The couple or the small community that gathers in privacy, whether briefly or for a longer period, offers not only its human warmth but also its radiating love and the real presence of Christ. In this way, “ *the non-believer or the part believer, the unhappy, the abandoned, the sinner will come face to face with the bigger Church, will become familiar with it and turn to the*

sacraments and the liturgy.” From the perspective of the new evangelisation, it is vital to maintain this spirit of welcome at the heart of the Teams of Our Lady and to practise it without forgetting that *the Lord receives into His house and not into that of his neighbour.*

The International College meeting in Florianopolis in 2017 wanted to welcome with empathy and in a practical manner, according to the founding charism of Teams, the words that Pope Francis expressed in *Amoris Laetitia*. In this way not only the world, but also the Church concerns the Teams of Our Lady, because our charism is at its service.

The idea that an “outward-looking Church” which Pope Francis promotes, combines a sense of action with the practice of hospitality which was already acknowledged by Father Caffarel: *“whoever regards himself as a host does not wait for someone to come knocking at his door, he will have already invited that person in. This is the first manifestation of hospitality. Loving intuition makes it easy to know who is in need of this invitation.”* (Marriage, the great sacrament) In his address to the Teams of Our Lady (Rome 2015) Pope Francis urges us, most of all and with constancy and perseverance, to practise and to live fully conjugal spirituality. But he reminds us that this spirituality, if it is not missionary, remains ineffectual. In Teams we receive a great deal from Christ and the Church and because of that the Movement feels *irresistibly sent out to testify and pass on what they have received.* As Father Caffarel desired, Teams have to be the “shock troops” of a Church that is leaving its comfort zone to face whatever is necessary.

It is both a call to the community and to the individual. The New Evangelisation implies a new commitment of each and every

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team member, and not just from qualified professionals. The awareness of our limitations will be a constant motivation not to remain mediocre but to continue to pursue holiness. Mission opens up a path of formation and maturity.

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

Today internationality, cultural diversity, socio-economic differences, communities linked with other catholic rites are on our doorstep or further away from our own surroundings. It is time to take down the numerous barriers in the expansion of the Movement and in the spreading of the Good News that accompanies it. When we look for a new couple to join our team or when we plan a Teams of Our Lady expansion or information event in our sector, do we go out and only look for those who are like us or do we consider the option of welcoming the stranger. All too often we are fishermen in waters that are familiar to us and we are afraid of fishing in waters we do not know well.

How can we increase our capacity to welcome while respecting the charism of the Movement and the Canonical Statutes with which it has been endowed? There is no easy answer but we know, through science that a healthy cell needs a strong nucleus with a porous membrane which allows exchange in certain

situations. The call of the Church no longer makes it possible for Teams of Our Lady to live locked away in the shadows.

The Canonical Statutes of the Teams of Our Lady include rules to be respected for the welcome of new members. These rules determine a precise format for the notion of full membership to the Movement. At the same time the Movement acts with the spirit of discernment, of forgiveness, of prudence and of charity when faced with certain situations. It attempts to analyse with love each situation, case by case, never losing sight of its founding charism. In line with Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia*, this kind of welcome suggests a fellowship that could eventually lead to some participation in the dynamics of the Movement, without actually belonging to it. From the perspective of the Vocation and Mission of Teams, this response is compatible with our Charism of conjugal spirituality, if we acknowledge that there is some spiritual conjugality within each couple, man and woman, who commit to a real love and a true quest for God.

Discernment in the ability to welcome others evokes the mystery of our eternal and infinite God, who humbles Himself to reach out to us in mercy.

3-2 To Discern and to Accompany

Above all Pope Francis points out the great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge to be met by practising a complete conversion to a fully Christian life and by adopting a different lifestyle. The family is the privileged place in which to achieve this conversion. It is the place where life is welcomed and protected; the place where we cultivate our first experiences of love, of sharing

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and of respect for all; the place where hospitality is practised.... On this basis the Church stresses the need to strengthen the education of children and to overcome obstacles so as to pass on faith within the family.

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

- To develop an ecological conscience which leads to a simpler, more humble and more interdependent way of life.
- To overcome a lack of confidence, defensive attitudes and be open to going out to meet others beyond the boundaries of diversity because the Holy Spirit is also at work there.
- To promote the respect and dignity of the individual and to exercise freedom in an ethical and responsible manner, particularly regarding emotional and sexual relationships.

The Church recognises that *Christian couples, by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, are the main agents of pastoral care within the family.* It is not a matter of expounding theories or doctrines but by demonstrating, through experience, the attraction of conjugal and family love, which meets the deepest expectations of the human being and which is the antidote to the egoism that overruns the world today.

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

The key word is *“to accompany”*. Pope Francis insists on the need to practise *“the art of accompaniment”* on the path of progress. We, the Teams, are already initiated in this art that implies discernment, welcome, listening, compassion, care, patience, mutual understanding.... We are called by the Church to accompany, especially in moments of great fragility: the path to a firm and lasting commitment; the first years of the life of the couple: moments of crisis and difficulties: the complex situations resulting from breakdowns, abandonment and lack of understanding.

3-3 Practising « the art of accompaniment »

In the sphere of education and transmission of faith One of the basic challenges facing families is definitely that of education, which has become more demanding and complex because of the current cultural situation and the major influence of the media. The transmission of faith that once seemed self-evident is more problematic today. In a materialistic world, where nothing is sacred and everything is put into question, the Teams of Our Lady need to take hold of this issue and help Teams parents with the education of their children. They are called to collaborate, through

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adequate pastoral action, so that the parents themselves can fulfil their educational mission.

As is already done in some places, it would be useful if responsible couples tried, during sector days or other events, such as 8th December, to provide some religious-based activities for children. During retreats, for example, why not invite the children to follow a School of Prayer. The educational experience can be made easier by using ever more sophisticated technology and entertainment. Children need symbols, gestures and stories. Teenagers get into conflict regarding authority and rules. It is necessary, therefore, to encourage their own experiences of faith and to offer them shining testimonies, which are imprinted through their attractiveness alone. The revitalisation of Teams of Our Lady for the Young would be a logical consequence of this attention paid to the younger ones.

Father Caffarel extolled the virtue of example. For him, missionary families give rise not only to missionary children but would be the origin of numerous vocations. Today, when the transmission of faith is more difficult for families, it is the concern of the Teams of Our Lady, as of all communities of the Church, to help parents. The fellowship that unites demands this of us.

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. For a long time now, a number of team members have worked in Marriage Preparation but the regret expressed by Father Caffarel, during his conference in Chantilly in 1987, should be a real cause for thought. He said: *“ I do not think that the Teams of Our Lady should lead*

marriage preparation, but I do think that Teams of Our Lady should have advice centres for marriage preparation which would be references for other centres, leading on precisely from the spirituality they have discovered.”

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

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. Their reasons are many. It is our responsibility, without judgement or trying to convert, to approach them to explain why, contrary to what is advocated today, Christian marriage is the path to happiness. Thanks to the pedagogy used in Teams, it is possible

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to guide them not only to marriage but also to encourage in them a desire to progress further on the path of faith. Several experiments, such as “Tandem Teams” or “Mas Pareja” or “Community Experiences” already exist in different countries. It is enough to adapt them and enrich them according to the situation and culture in each country.

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. Certain countries have very interesting initiatives that are worth knowing about so that they can extend into as many different countries as possible. Team members, therefore, could be invited to take a marriage counsellor's course in order to be more effective in helping couples in crisis, whose separation in many cases could be avoided. Father Caffarel had already come up with this idea in his talk in Chantilly: *"I would like the Teams of Our Lady to have marriage counsellors, not to have a monopoly but to ensure that they act in line with the founding charism."*

In certain countries responsible couples regularly organise conferences throughout the year, which, whenever it is possible, are open to everyone on topics related to the couple and the family. This has two advantages: The Teams of Our Lady is addressing itself to those outside of teams and can therefore help to find answers to questions raised by society (on education, ethics, sexuality, the anthropology of love and of the couple....)

This support could likewise be relayed to more remote or underprivileged areas thanks to the various means of communication available to us today.

In the same way, the Movement could, on a different level, create teams capable of intervening on a variety of subjects.

In the sphere of couples who have formed a new relationship

Likewise, one cannot ignore the question of separated or divorced couples, who have formed a new relationship and who wish to have a lasting and living faith. For many years, Popes and Bishops have asked us to come to terms with this reality. The address of Pope Francis to the Teams of Our Lady in 2015 is very clear with regards to this. *“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.”* Reliance teams are one suggestion but we must move forward if we want as many people as possible to experience the mercy of God.

It is clear that if all these suggestions are to be effective they cannot survive on their own or be developed without the support of Spiritual Counsellors. The task of helping someone to renew their faith is the task of the counsellors *“It is impossible to dissociate the priest's mission from the mission of Christ; it prolongs and perpetuates it throughout the centuries.”*(Father Henri Caffarel). It is necessary that the Movement at sector and at regional levels, depending on the circumstances, launches reflexion groups, starts to experiment and stays in a close relationship with the diocese, which we regard as the most significant level allowing a good dissemination.

In the sphere of the elderly

Our Movement has to adapt to the modern world without leaving aside our old people. We must take into consideration the loneliness they suffer. Initiatives will require imagination and be active on the ground according to the expectations expressed. It is a challenge for us all.

Marie d'Amonville, widow of Louis, both old colleagues of Father Caffarel, suggested, wherever possible, creating a new Movement linked to the Teams of Our Lady, *"The life ahead of us"* so as to live in preparation for the "great passage" as a time of grace.

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

In the sphere of spiritual reflection and its dissemination

During the Colloquium on the thinking of Father Caffarel that took place at the College of the Bernardins in Paris in December 2017, Sister Fernanda Barbiero explained in her lecture, *"The Anneau d'Or"*, the essential role that this publication had played in the spiritual world of its time. The speaker concluded by stating that *"Anneau d'Or opened paths that are still to be explored today."* Therefore, this periodical, as well as acting as a link between the team members, opened up perspectives which could be expanded on and updated today.

Is it not necessary, in this period of profound change, to open space for reflection and creation, capable of arousing interest and conviction among our contemporaries, around this basic subject of conjugal spirituality at the dawn of the third millennium?

Of course, the means used would not have much in common with those of *"Anneau d'Or"*; it would try to use all modern means of communication allowing team members to be reached in a very direct and personal way, as well as perhaps reaching larger audiences.

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This issue could be part of the reflective and creative thinking of the leaders of the Movement and, more widely, of all team members who would find in it an essential part of their missionary vocation.

Conclusion

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

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

The time has come when the Teams of Our Lady feel able to accept and respond to the great concerns of the world giving meaning to their existence, thanks to their identity and to their specific mission that leads every couple to engage fully in this Mission.

The Mission of the Movement is to shape, train and motivate couples to be messengers of the Good News in the world in which we live, so as to proclaim the values of the Gospel at the heart of the couple and the family, the pillars of support for the bridge we have to cross, and that more and more impresses on us a commitment based on the stability of love.

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

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Teams of Our Lady can take the lead in this *“Outward going Church, according to the expression of Pope Francis, an evangelizing action of unimaginable proportions.* For this reason, the Teams of Our Lady cannot limit themselves to an individualistic spirituality but have to realise a pastoral perspective that is essential for the transformation of the world.

If, throughout the world we light up marriage and the family with the true light of the Gospel, a new path will open which will be a reason for hope and joy for all. Our Movement should not be restricted to the strict observation of the endeavours without taking the trouble to look around and to see *“what to do next”*. Some people in fact, even though they respect the endeavours, sometimes lose sight of the true demands of Christian life (Faith and Works). Father Caffarel never separated our vocation from our mission; he said it was necessary to constantly take both aspects into account. Let us make the words pronounced at the end of each mass our own: *“Go and serve the Lord”*.

In conclusion with Father Caffarel: *“More love in the home, more charity in the teams and more energy in our mission....”*

