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My dear Team members,

Our charisma and mission as a Movement are in and of themselves inexhaustible, despite the simplicity and clarity of their aim: helping couples to progress along the path of holiness. The clear and simple definition of the aim or the purpose of our Movement in the Church surely helps to discern what means are to be used to achieve the goals we set ourselves. From the beginning, we know that it involves finding a simple and practical methodology to help couples progress along the path of holiness according to their state, that is, as Christians united by the sacrament of marriage. It is a question, therefore, of a Movement of lay people consecrated by Baptism (and the other sacraments belonging to Christian initiation) and by marriage.

The sacrament of marriage, as Pope Francis reminds us, cannot be seen by us, meaning by couples, as an event that only concerns the past, that special day when couples exchanged their consent and promised to belong to each other for their whole lives. It is obvious that this is what the sacrament of marriage is: the culmination of a process crowned by the mutual “yes,” this word of fidelity that is a sign of the victory of love over time. But, while it is the crowning moment of a process of reciprocal recognition, the sacrament of marriage is also a point of departure: *“the couple (should) not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling”* (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 211) to the true adventure of love, that authentically human love that Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae vitae* (25 July 1968) talked about. Pope Francis tells us that couples need to rediscover *“the teachings of Humanae vitae”* (AL 222) because, in truth, *Humanae vitae* is a eulogy to true love, both human and Christian, to the love that is purified, raised up and transformed by the sacrament in order to be completely fulfilled in the perfection of charity. Indeed, according to *Humanae vitae*, married love, purified by the sacramental grace of marriage, is, by its very nature,

human, total, faithful, exclusive and fecund. (HV 9) What Paul VI said here had already been perceived by the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), when he said that friendship consisted in wanting the other's good for what they are and not for what they can give us. When purified by grace, here that means that the husband loves his wife because she is his wife, the very one that God had always thought of for him, and thus is a gift from God; and that the wife welcomes her husband's love because he is her husband, the very one that God had always thought of for her, so that they could both participate in the mystery of the transmission of life and give their children the names by which God will call them personally in time and in eternity. This is what Pope Francis says in a simple way, when he writes, "God allows parents to choose the name by which he himself will call their child for all eternity." (AL 166)

When we talk of the mission of couples and Christian families I believe that, in keeping with Pope Francis' thinking, we ought to understand it in this way. In other words, rediscover God's thinking for each of us and specifically for Christian couples, who wish to take seriously the meaning of their vocation and their mission, that is the "*building (of) sound and fruitful homes in accordance with God's plan.*" (A L6) Everything "*in accordance with God's plan*" is fundamental and for that we have the particular specificities of our Movement, with its Endeavours, that are so important, as you know. And in particular, married prayer and the Sit-Down. I would also add the need to forgive as a Rule of Life and would encourage frequent confession, just as Pope Francis advises. (AL 227) Remaining in a permanent state of penitence will perhaps be our condition as people who are underway on the path, but have not yet arrived at the goal, because we ought always to be attentive to small things and little attentions, so that the words of fidelity and of forgiveness, once pronounced, become concrete in our daily lives. Our mission will then be to dream up the future history that the Lord wants to write with each of us.

May the Lord be with you and protect you, by not letting you conform to the mentality of this world.

Father José Jacinto Ferreira de Farias, scj
Spiritual Counsellor to the ERI

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