



Equipes Notre-Dame



Just over a year has passed since we received a phone call from Colombia, from Edgardo and Clarita Bernal, the responsible couple for ERI. We, who had already become relaxed, thinking that the cycle of services that the Movement had requested of us had now come to an end, would have never expected to be taken into consideration for another service, let alone for a service in the International Responsible Team. But as often happens, the Lord shows us that His ways are not our ways, and so, after much reflection, prayer and dialogue, we have once again made ourselves available to give what little we can give.

We are a couple who, like many others, are busy with our children (we have four children aged between 15 and 24), at work, with elderly parents and serving in the parish. Just like so many other people, it seems that there is never enough time to do all the things that we want to do. We are always on the run against deadlines. Despite this, the Lord has made Himself known and knocked on our door, in the face of our friends Edgardo and Clarita. And so here we are, after a year of service as Secretaries of the ERI and the International Movement.

An energetic year, which has enriched us a lot, during which we have gradually understood our role, tasks, duties, the people, and especially the beauty of our Movement.

This year we were experienced first of all the practice of collegiality within the ERI; the couples who live with us this adventure of service. In particular, we immediately established a deep and important relationship with Clarita and Edgardo, with whom we really share many thoughts and work requirements. It is incredible to realize anew that the fact that we live in Italy and they in Colombia is not a reason for difference or difficulty in our understanding, but that what we have in common is much more than what makes us different. We are certainly facilitated by the means of communication that are available to us, which reduce distances to zero. In recent months, in fact, we have been in constant contact, with the frequent sharing of events in our lives, whether personal, family-related, professional or in matters of the service to Teams, something that would probably have been unthinkable a few years ago.

Our experience has of course been not only with Edgardo and Clarita, but also with all the couples of the ERI team and with Father Ricardo. It was very stimulating to meet these couples coming from different countries and to share with them moments of prayer, of exchange, of verification, of conviviality. We can say that we have new friends, with whom the journey began only recently but with whom we feel in deep communion, despite our differences, indeed enriching ourselves precisely

because of our differences! Our teamwork in ERI is not very different from the teamwork in any of our base teams, with the sharing, prayer, living in communion; this is enriching and makes us a small Church going forward.

Our role as Secretaries has required us to address different aspects of service not only within the Movement, of which we increasingly appreciate the wide and rich horizons. We must deal with various aspects of the organisation, contacts inside and outside of Teams, the finances, the collection and cataloguing of documents prepared by the other members of the ERI. Ours is a multifaceted role that must master juggling and involves care and indeed quite a bit of flexibility.

Among other things, our service involves working with the Secretariat based in Paris, where we often go to work alongside the two full-time assistants who deal with all administrative matters and who support us, often providing valuable assistance to our limited knowledge of certain aspects of management.

In addition, in collaboration with Edgardo and Clarita and the ERI team, we are responsible, in our capacity as treasurers, for the Association of Friends of Father Caffarel.

Probably you all know about the Association of the Friends of Father Caffarel, which deals mainly with all the activities related to the cause of canonization of the founder of our Movement, along with the dissemination of his works and his thoughts on the Christian couple and the importance of prayer, so that they are known and appreciated not only by the members of Teams but also by all Christians.

Perhaps not more widely known is the fact that, through the desire of Father Caffarel himself, since May 1965 the Teams of Our Lady have also owned the property in Paris where our Movement is based, acquired by the Dominican Fathers and managed for all the Teams members of the world by a real estate company called Maison des Equipes. One of the duties as secretaries is to represent the Teams members, together with other members of the ERI, within this real estate company, in order to obtain best value and safeguard the assets of all the Teams members.

All this might seem like a kind of job, a bit different from what our service to Teams of Our Lady had been like before, but we can confirm that in this case also we are asked to take a special care in the issues we face and to put ourselves humbly "at the service" of Teams. We are certainly at the service of our fellow ERI teammates, together with whom we are at the service of all members of the teams across the world. It is a joint responsibility, which we carry out together, sharing thoughts, concerns, strategies and sometimes difficult choices. Together, as the ERI, we have the great responsibility to take care of what has been placed in our charge and to guarantee to give voice to the whole Movement.

In this journey that we recently began, we have also had very rich occasions of encounter, first when we went to Lebanon in April for the ERI meeting. Following the seasons as in the northern hemisphere, there are three ERI meetings during the year. One takes place in Paris, in autumn, the next two in spring and then early summer and are both itinerant, as we believe it is important to meet the team members in their own home, especially those who are living situations of great

difficulty, to share moments of formation and prayer. Also, this is a task of ERI, to act as a bridge between the different realities across our Movement.

This is why the ERI chose Lebanon, where couples from Syria, Jordan and the Arab Gulf were able to meet us and share some beautiful moments with us. Elsewhere you will find a complete account of what we have experienced, but what we would like to stress is how important it was for us to have a personal encounter with so many couples and priests who opened their hearts and lives to us, to share moments of prayer, conviviality and testimony. In their eyes we could clearly perceive the happiness of meeting the couples of the ERI because they represented the closeness of all the team members of the world, together with the pleasure and richness of welcoming and being welcomed, with all the fraternity and familiarity that sharing a common path gives.

To meet and get to know those who live daily in very difficult situations, in war zones, such as the couples of Syria, or where being Christian is not as commonplace, as the couples of the Arab Gulf, and despite this brought us smiles, happiness, benefits and even personal gifts, was a sign of what unites us and goes beyond any difference of place or language. It is the proximity of the Spirit that in Jesus makes us united, as a community and as a Church that goes forward.

Other opportunities of encounter were our visits to Rome, to the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life, where we have established an excellent relationship of mutual appreciation, from which may arise opportunities for collaboration, as enrichment for our Movement and beyond. We also had meetings at the Secretariat of State of the Vatican, where we went to ask for an audience with Pope Francis for the Meeting of the Regional Responsible Couples of the entire world, which will take place in Rome in 2021, and we met the Substitute of the Secretary, Msgr. Peña Parra, who received us with great simplicity and cordiality in a very amicable spirit.

We feel slightly privileged in this, because these have really been occasions of encounter on a personal and human level with people of great value and faith. Once again, service turns out to bring much more to us than what we are able to give.

Ahead of us, on the agenda for July, there is Valencia, with the International College, a time of formation and encounter with the couples in charge of the Super Regions of the Attached Regions. This will be a first for the two of us, but we already know that it will be an experience of fraternity and significant growth.

A year has gone by and we still have a long way to go. May the Lord guide us in our choices so that they may be an expression of His will. We put our trust in Mary, certain that the support and prayer of the team members will be what helps us and helps all the ERI members to follow the right path, knowing that at times we may make mistakes, yet trying to be truly at service with humility, love, desire for good and creativity.

Giovanni & Paola Cecchini