



III^{ème} Rencontre Internationale des Responsables Régionaux
Roma 6-11 Septembre, September, Setembro, Septiembre, Settembre 2015

This changing world challenges END

Dear Couples and Spiritual Counsellors,

To go back to our founder and remember all the history of the International Regional Gatherings let us focus on a memory that brings us to our roots.

Let us join our thoughts, and entrust to the Lord our worries and our service commitments in Equipes Notre Dame (END), through the intercession of Father Caffarel, as he did twenty-eight years ago in Chantilly.

Let us stand for a few moments of silence for our founder.

The International Leading Team (the ERI), and we ourselves particularly, have devoted plenty of our time to the discernment of the last question Father Caffarel left us in Chantilly:

In which direction must the Movement go forward, keeping fidelity to its charism?

What we are going to say is the result of a long and profound discernment of the texts that Father Caffarel has left us and is also based on the opinions of people who either met him or are very familiar with his line of thought and who will consequently be able to help us move forward on our path.

It was a strong challenge to the ERI to find an answer to the worries which already existed in 1987, and, comparing them with those existing today, we decided to bring them here, after a careful reflection.

We decided to choose 3 points mentioned in Chantilly, and develop them according to the challenges that Teams have to face now, at the beginning of the 21st century, with no fear of the truth because ***"... truth is a guarantee of freedom"***.

Let us consider the three issues referred in Chantilly:

1. to go back to the source
2. to have in mind the needs and values of our time
3. to decide in which direction the Movement should go forward, always keeping fidelity to its charism.

Going back to the Source

Based on a sentence said by Pope Francis, we invite you all to make this journey with us:

"I invite all Christians, from any place or in any situation, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No-one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her" (EG, n°3)

In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance, or where hate and violence seem to prevail, if we want to live in accordance with the challenges God gives us, we have to re-read our history to understand our identity. This understanding leads us to try to improve, to reform ourselves and thus get closer to Christ's own identity.



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If this deep revolution doesn't start inside us with complete humility, without any prejudices, opening our heart to welcome the Lord, we won't be able to give our firm YES to the One who calls us.

To be able to give you must have received before!

Our vocation is to be a resource, but for that we have to look for the spring which feeds it.

Pope Francis, in the audience he granted to the Leaders of the Ecclesial Movements, in November 2014 told us: *"we always need to return to the sources of our charism and thus to rediscover the driving force needed to respond to today's challenges"*

It is, therefore, urgent to deepen the natural dimension of the sacrament of Matrimony, at this time when the Church has organized a Synod to find answers to today's challenges. We have to recognize and state that the sacrament we chose to unite our lives is not a burden but a gift: a challenge and a decision to enter this new period of Life with joy and courage following this permanent arrangement.

It should become a priority for each one of us to leave our own comfort zone where perhaps **someone** may remain unknown to us, despite living in our own house.

In Chantilly, Father Caffarel stated clearly that Teams of Our Lady has a vocation: *"To help couples to sanctify themselves and also to follow their mission in the Church. It is necessary to keep to these two objectives - Vocation and Mission - relentlessly"*.

The Couples of END are well rooted in a spirituality which believes in a God who listens to us, because He is neither abstract nor a God weak in immensity, but a living God, who is ours because He remains in us and when He does so, He enters our History.

Father Caffarel always said that Christianity is essentially a personal connection with Christ, and the most important thing about this connection is to live it not with a lukewarm fidelity, but as a passionate adventure: ***"All love is an adventure!"***

Now we would like you to remember the day when the adventure started, the day when we got married.

We loved each other and we learned that we had to defend our love from erosion over time, from the outside dangers and, strangely as it may seem, from our own moments of disenchantment and wilderness.

But recognizing all this didn't increase our love. The important thing was to make the miracle of falling in love again happen, of making the same choice to accept a renewed covenant, full of mercy. This covenant which commits us makes us collaborate with the mysterious means intended by God so that we may be fruitful and walk towards holiness.

With Jesus accompanying us on our way either to Bethlehem or to Jerusalem, we will not only strengthen our faith, but we'll also get better acquainted with His will.

*Oh, you who live in the depths of my heart
Let me meet you
In the depths of my heart !...*



2) To have in mind the needs and values of our times

The role of marriage in the Church cannot be associated in an abstract way with any source of graces meant for those who are sacramentally united by the bond of matrimony.

We dare say that *we are just a Christian community, searching in the world as many other people also search*. As Pope Francis says, we are part of a sick community, where men and women are more and more islands of loneliness, waiting for a solution to their lives in this ocean of indifference.

What happens today is that the sacrament has irrevocably lost its worth in terms of importance and respect and this may be considered a real transformation. But the wish of a man and a woman to give themselves to each other to form a community for life still corresponds to the needs deeply written in the heart of man. That's why the main mission and challenge of a Christian couple should be to spread an account of their experience to the world, with no major rules or methods, but giving testimony to a responsible commitment and with a renewed will of opening themselves to a fruitful life with generosity and humility.

Love, being creative, open and expansive can neither remain closed in on itself nor be only in a relationship between two people.

To be married in church is to know that we have to love more, a lot more, because love leads to confirmation that matrimony is God's human and divine **work of art**, as our founder said.

How do we face then the natural demands of today's challenging world?

Indissolubility is a consequence of the essential urgent need of the covenant of married love. If it was not an enduring benefit and an essential need we would not be able to bear witness to it.

The increase of tiny family cells in the West has changed the traditional concept completely. It has become vital to explain the Christian view to the world, inevitably connected to the essence of matrimony, and to the concept of family, requiring us to respond to those suffering under all these pressure.

When we were preparing this talk during a long Sit-down, we spoke about the graces we received when we got married. We consulted the marriage celebration booklet to recall the words we had said years ago.

We then decided to reflect carefully on this matter with our base team. When we were reading and rereading the blessings which are part of the matrimony liturgy we came to the conclusion that we had married without being aware of the meaning of the **yes** we had given and of the wealth that this **yes** contained.

Let us not lose assurance: It is urgent that society considers the deepening of the natural dimensions of Matrimony as an important issue. We have to discern the reasons why couples say that they want to enjoy their freedom. We must feel a responsibility to restore enlightenment to the confusion of ideas.

This is a mission of redemption which has to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

We heard Pope Francis saying in one of his latest "Angelus": "*Christians who are deaf to the Holy Spirit, become dumb, and don't evangelize*".

Father Caffarel told us this specifically when he wisely spoke about the triple function of the Holy Spirit: a **gift of life, of unity and of growth**.



3) In which direction should the Movement go forward, always keeping fidelity with its charism?

"We are all called to a personal and community missionary conversion."

If we were asked to define our Movement today, it would be interesting to talk about a Movement that converses, that can accept other opinions and thoughts as a service of love, since couples are meant to be full of compassion and charity towards others.

All this is excellent, but more is required from couples today...

When Father Caffarel challenges us in an explicit way regarding the END couples' mission, he wants us to bear fruit by using the gifts freely given to us in the sacrament of matrimony.

The anxieties which we feel today worry us, but they cannot deter or confuse us because the gifts of the Holy Spirit are immense and give us the capacity to go forward.

In his speech at the European Parliament, Pope Francis said: *"those who only dialogue in closed groups stay halfway"*

We found the same concern in an editorial letter Father Caffarel left us: *"Some teams are satisfied with a ghetto or even a sitting-room Christianity"*

And later on in the same editorial he says:

"I am not going to dilly dally... It is a matter of meeting God's expectations and the brethren's expectations, more thoroughly. In each team... may the couples ask themselves about the possibilities of going further in their commitment and in their self-giving..."

The answer to these troubling questions, both from the Pope and from Father Caffarel, can only be given through the fecundity of our Movement, and not by the use of well-worn words that others can say better than us.

The best way to transmit the joy of the Gospel is through personal contact, face to face contact with the other, in a joyful and loving welcoming.

"The Men of today listen more willingly to witnesses than to masters, or if they listen to masters it is because they are witnesses" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 41).

The reflection which is happening at the Bishops Synod has stressed the importance of doing again what was done in the beginning, when evangelization was made by the Apostle Paul together with a couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

Dear friends, we cannot forget the talents which were given to us and the mission God entrusted to us. We cannot exclude anyone from the Gospel, because uniquely the Gospel will be a light to give meaning to the human narrative, if it is announced taking into account the modernity and freshness of its message.

The Movement has to be prepared to answer questions about young peoples' anxiety in the light of the Gospel; the reasons marriages fail; the reawakening of the enchantment of love in older couples, the increase in the union of the two sacraments – marriage and holy orders- and how to make the effort to accompany everyone in all of these situations.

It is important that we reach out to the young who look for what they don't see and seem uninterested in the Church, adopting values that appeal to them and help them focus on the Gospel's values.



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Regarding marriages that fail, a real evil, we have to anticipate the crisis and accompany the couples, both through our testimony and by supplying a solid and deep formation enabling them to believe that love will always win.

Accompanying couples in their second union – as John Paul II reminded us in the speech he made to Teams of Our Lady in 2003, and had already focused on in *Familiaris Consortio* – and which is being done in many Super Regions, has to be the challenge for those who are not already committed to this issue.

Older couples, who retain a strong hope in the Movement's capacity, need the tenderness and the support to which they are entitled. They cannot be ignored since the riches that we enjoy now was transmitted by them.

To answer the Lord "**Here I am Lord...send me!**" we have to discern the reason, the foundation and the purpose of the mission, which is, after all, a challenge to our own vocation.

The Reason Why?

The sacrament of matrimony is the sign of the union between Christ and the Church. If God is the source of love, it is He who places his love into human love, so that the couples may open themselves and go out to the world, demonstrating the truth of what Jesus taught us when He came to earth.

Will our mission then be just an obligation or will it be something really important for today's society?

All those who want to see the study of humanity directed towards truth, and who show what it is like to love the way Jesus loved, challenge the world with the purpose of changing it.

The Gospel is important not only for our after-life, but also because it gives meaning to our existence here and now.

It seems to us that "Evangelizing" is not an optional invitation, but a pressing duty. "*To evangelize is to recognize that we are part of the missionary Church*". It is to recognize God's call.

So, Teams of Our Lady, strengthened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, feel happy. The moment has come for us all to realise and respond to the great challenges of the world, bringing meaning to its existence. Through their identity and specific mission, couples need to get involved, embracing the responsibility of their vocation.

The support?

Everything should lead us to God. The testimony we give to others is the result of the transformative action of the Endeavours and by the graces of the sacrament of matrimony, which show us how to overcome our selfishness and our limitations to reach the desired horizon. Couples who belong to a Church Movement cannot remain living their beautiful marriage passively.

The Pope talks to us about a "**Church that goes out**", and this is the same as saying that the path isn't just opening up to others, but going towards them with joy, to give them what God has already given us.



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What is asked of us is that we use our own resources boldly, being willing to face this challenge, and that we do not consider our mission a reward but rather a vocation; we are missionaries because we go out into the world fearlessly.

In a text from Jean and Annick Allemand's book called "Teams of Our Lady", Father Caffarel says "*The graces of the sacrament allow the couple not only to sanctify themselves in and through their state, but also to perform their mission in the Church*"

It is absolutely necessary for the Movement to be concerned with the couples' thorough and deep formation to enable them to answer this challenge in an effective way. We can neither be satisfied with what already exists nor start out with poor preparation, with no capacity to face today's challenges. We have to be ready to respond with creativity.

In short, the first step to be made should be to use the strength of our testimony, with the creativity granted by the Holy Spirit, to recreate and adapt our methods of formation, always keeping faithful to our charism, in order to answer the substantial challenges of today.

"The Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives". (Pope Francis, E.G. 43)

And on this subject our beloved founder said: "*good communication must contain an idea, a feeling or an image.*"

The Purpose?

Life is ruled by the priorities of the heart. We will never be free to understand the meaning of love and eternity if we remain self-sufficient. We need to learn the meaning of freedom and eternity, and those can only be learnt with God and with others. The sacrament of matrimony is a long road with its light and shadows that bears witness to the world of the victory of love over every crisis. Announcing Love and announcing Christ are not two parallel realities, but on the contrary, the same reality, "*We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!*" (Evangelii Gaudium 274)

And we quote once again Father Caffarel: "*I think Teams of Our Lady should not be shelters for well-intentioned adults, but assault groups made up of volunteers, whose members wish with all their hearts to deepen their Christianity, so that they can live it in their families, in their jobs and in society.*"

CONCLUSION

Based both on the Teams' Charter and on the **Second Wind** official document, the Movement needs to reinforce its awareness of this reality and its potential.

Only by reflecting on the past, offering oneself to God in the present and looking hopefully to the future can we answer the question Christ posed to his apostles:



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What are you looking for?

May the Chantilly gathering be not only an episode we remember from the past, but rather a light in our lives and in the Movement's life.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen us all and help us enter into the radiance that the Lord communicated to us at His Transfiguration during those days that He spent with us in the "tent".

Then we will be able to answer the question left by Father Caffarel: *Do you want to participate in the great task undertaken by Teams of Our Lady, to establish the kingdom of Christ in our homes, so that holiness may take root in the modern world, to train good workers in society, robust apostles of Christ? Then I will say you have the right idea* (Editorial of the Monthly Letter n° 6)

Let us leave together accompanied by Mary, asking her to lead us through this troubled and marvellous world in which we live, and to help us be signs of mercy and joy in this time and in this Life.

God showed the stars of heaven to Abraham and said:

*"That is your heritage"
"Your holiness will bear much fruit"*

Tó and ZÉ MOURA SOARES