

EURAFRICA ZONE: FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNION



We had our first personal meeting with the Eurafrika Zone in our capacity as Responsible Couple for Spain. It was a lovely meeting at Vasco and Ana's, our predecessors in the International Leading Team (ERI). We discovered the richness of sharing experiences on the international level. Syria was still part of our Zone and Samie and Amer recounted the first episodes of the current catastrophe there. We also discovered the beauty of the local teams' warm welcome. How could we not come home to our regions without the desire to proclaim and advance on the path marked by the Lord to the Teams of Our Lady!

We inherited a style of **community open to meeting and solidarity**. Material mutual aid is a distinctive characteristic of the zone, even during this period of great European economic crisis. The layout of the zone facilitates that.

There are only five couples: the responsible couples of the four Super-Regions (Italy, Spain, Francophone Africa and Portugal, to which belong the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa) and us, as the liaison couple with the ERI. We can meet at least twice a year. It is not unusual to see couples from different Super-Regions visiting each other with the aim of working together on training or organizational workshops and this strengthens our ties of friendship. After the last International College in Medway, we spent together for five days in the great town of New York. Thanks to Father Javier Grande, Spiritual Counsellor to the Spain Super-Region, we experienced unforgettable moments, like the mass celebrated in Central Park, surrounded by pedestrians. Common sense and strength emerge when a priest is part of the group!

We all have **different cultural expressions in our practice of the same faith**, which are signs of the universality of the Church. We also find differences in the dynamics. For example, whereas the number of teams has stabilised in the European countries, this number has increased by 56% since 2008 in Africa. The whole Movement needs to contribute to the continuation of this development. There are also differences in the challenges facing couples and the family, which the Church is studying now. In Europe, the dominant ideologies lead to the rejection of religion, to a lack of respect for life, to a fear of compromise, to increasing numbers of divorces... This has not yet arrived on the African continent, even if the threat still exists. However,

Africa suffers from its own inherent threats: the dignity of women and children, erroneous concepts about marriage, new and old forms of polygamy, ethnic conflicts, etc.

At the beginning of this year, there were over 3200 teams in the Eurafrica Zone, which means more than 38000 members and 2300 Spiritual Counsellors. Each Super-Region has its own aims, but all share the fundamental values.

The **training challenge** exists and we are all involved in the progressive implementation of the plan suggested by the ERI. The Portugal Super-Region opened the way and shared its experiences and material in a selfless manner, without forgetting the necessities of the regions of Africa, that one day will work independently. The French-Speaking African Zone placed a special accent on training Responsible Couples, so that they can achieve their aim of allowing the correct functioning of all teams in all the countries belonging to their zone. Spain and Italy gradually adopted their own programmes, with special attention to the gatherings of 'new Teams.'

The **expansion challenge** also exists. New territories and countries need the Teams of Our Lady on all continents. The Italy Super-Region is one of the strong points of the Movement in its expansion towards European countries where there are Christians, but no teams, like in Albania, Croatia and Slovenia.

The **last challenge is the one of 'New Evangelisation.'** Spain and Portugal share the desire to put together a project to accompany couples who live on the margins of the Church, with the aim of valorising the community spirit of the Teams: their capability to listen and welcome, their deep understanding of the value of marriage as well as the pedagogy of love that has been developed as well as its ecclesiology.

In the Eurafrica Zone, we would like to live and experience a true spirit of communion, and to work so that our Teams, living communities, made up of priests and couples, may be the reflection of a united and missionary Church.

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