



**CALL to SERVICE
In the TEAMS
OF OUR LADY**

ERI March 2004

Contents

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------|
| 1. | INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| 2. | CALL TO SERVE | 4 |
| 2.1. | IN JESUS' FOOTSTEPS..... | 4 |
| 2.2. | THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE..... | 4 |
| 2.3. | TRUSTING IN THE LORD..... | 5 |
| 3. | THE STAGES OF THE CALL | 5 |
| 3.1. | A TIME OF DISCERNMENT | 6 |
| 3.1.1 | <i>For the couple who make the call to serve</i> | 6 |
| 3.1.2 | <i>For the couple who receives the call to serve</i> | 7 |
| 3.1.3 | <i>Looking for a couple for a service and for a Spiritual Counsellor :</i> | 7 |
| 3.1.4 | <i>Prior consultation</i> | 7 |
| 3.1.5 | <i>Help in discernment in making a choice</i> | 7 |
| 3.2. | TIME FOR DECISION | 8 |
| 3.2.1. | <i>Choice of a couple for a service or choice of a Spiritual Counsellor :</i> | 8 |
| 3.2.2 | <i>Call to serve from the Leading Couple of the relevant entity</i> | 8 |
| 3.3. | AT THE TIME OF MAKING THE APPOINTMENT | 9 |
| 3.4. | AT THE TIME OF FORMALISING THE APPOINTMENT | 9 |
| 4. | WHAT DURATION OF WHAT APPOINTMENT ? | 9 |
| 5. | REPLACEMENT OF ERI | 10 |
| 6. | REFERENCE DOCUMENTS | 10 |
| 7. | APPENDIX 1 : INFORMATION FORMS: LEADERS | 11 |
| 8. | APPENDIX 2 : INFORMATION FORM: SPIRITUAL COUNSELLORS | 12 |

1. Introduction

“If anyone serves, let it be as in strength granted by God” (1 P 4: 11).
“A spiritual responsibility can only be considered as received from the Lord and not one that is usurped. This means to say that we must remain in union with the One who entrusted it to us”. Father Roger TANDONNET¹

There are many calls in the Bible. Whether it is to prophets such as Abraham and Moses or to the disciples in the New Testament, each time God calls a particular person by name: Samuel, James, John ... This call is for a very precise mission and each time it is in order to renew or reaffirm his Covenant with his people.

We still see the Lord acting today: calling Mother Teresa, Jean Vanier, Sister Emmanuel, our Holy Father Pope John Paul II... and so many others near and far that are more or less known to us. The list of such people is long!

Mary's call is, of course, the outstanding call. Let us take time to read again these verses of the first chapter of St Luke's Gospel (Lk 1: 26-38) and note some elements that reveal the fundamental characteristics of the true Christian vocation.

1. God uses intermediaries: *the angel Gabriel was sent by God (V26);*
2. the call occurs in specific historical context: e.g. *in a town in Galilee called Nazareth (V26);*
3. to a particular person: *a virgin betrothed to a man of the house of David, called Joseph (V27);*
4. the intermediary calls the person by his/her name: *The Angel said to her: ‘Mary, do not be afraid’(V30);*
5. we are disturbed by the call: *She was deeply disturbed by these words and wondered what this greeting could mean (V29);*
6. but God's messenger says: *do not be afraid; you have found favour with God (V30);*
7. we feel very poor and inadequate in the face of the immensity of the task and we ask numerous questions: *But how can this come about...?(V34);*
8. but God reassures us by sending us his Spirit: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow (V35);*
9. moreover, God gives us signs that confirm the call; it is up to us to be open and to discern them: *your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month (V36);*
10. finally, following Mary's example and knowing that *nothing is impossible to God (Lk 1: 37), we respond trustfully: I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word (V38)*

¹ Extract from the Guide of the Teams of Our Lady 2001

2. CALL TO SERVE

2.1. In Jesus' footsteps

Every position of responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady is a service.

The Teams of Our Lady are not structured on the principles of political democracy. We are not “in office” because we have stood for election, campaigned on a programme of promises and been elected by such and such a majority vote.

We have been called, not only because of our qualities, but because the Lord “*looked steadily at us*”.

“Jesus looked steadily at him”... and said “come, follow me” (Mk 10: 21).

We are called by Jesus :

“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (Jn 20: 21)

We are convinced that the Lord gives us the means, the necessary gifts, even before calling us. We do not need therefore to worry what we are to say or what we are to do “*because the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you*” (Mt 10: 20). Following the example of the first apostles who “*left their nets and followed him*”, we joyfully respond to his call. The call of the Lord is first and foremost his initiative and not ours. We respond to his loving gaze on us as a couple.

Let us also read again, in this context, the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30). The master gave each a number of talents according to their ability. The Master knew in advance the capabilities of his servants. He knew already of what we are capable. He does not ask us for the impossible. On the other hand, he expects from us in return that we put all our heart into it and bear fruit in abundance. The “*wicked and lazy servant*” is reprimanded by the master for his laziness in not going to the bank to deposit his master’s money. But “*to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough*”, because he was worthy of his master’s trust and has exercised his talents.

In the end, when we discern his call, we listen to the Lord and, with Samuel, we say: “*Here I am, as you called me... Speak Lord; for your servant is listening*” (1S3: 1-10).

2.2. The spirit of service

On the subject of service in the Teams of Our Lady, the “Guide to the Teams of Our Lady” has this to say: “*Responsibility in the world, is often synonymous with power. When Christ washed the feet of his disciples, he showed us in the Teams of Our Lady another way of exercising responsibility: by putting ourselves at the service of our brothers and sisters. Responsibility in Teams is an invitation to greater love and all responsibilities are calls to serve.*”

This sums up perfectly the spirit of service in Teams.

Let us always remember Jesus' example: *"The greatest among you will be your servant"* (Mt 23: 11).

"If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him" (Jn 13, 15-16).

We are called to deny ourselves so as to give ourselves to others - not only because we are at the "service" of others - but because, in imitation of the Master, we want to live out more fundamentally our commitment as Christians in the world.

2.3. Trusting in the Lord

"Blessed are the poor" (Mt 5: 3)

The poor of the Beatitudes are those who put their trust totally in God's Providence: those who **trust him in everything**. The poor are those who, imitating Saint Paul, recognise their own weakness: *"for it is when I am weak that I am strong"* (2 Co 12: 10). When I recognise my weakness and the limit of my capabilities, when I trust fully in the Lord and when I make room for Him totally, it is then that He can act through me, making use of all the gifts that He himself has put deep within me; it is then I am strong in the Lord.

Blessed is he who takes no pride in what he has received, in the gifts the Lord has put in him, but in whom praise naturally gushes forth: *"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...for He has done marvels for me"* (Lk 1: 46-49).

Hence, I hand over all my worries and all my actions to Him: *"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, would hand him a snake? ...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him"* (Lk 11:11-13).

Does not the Lord tell us not to fear, as he said to his disciples when he sent them on a mission, for he is with us always: *"yes, to the end of times"* (Mt 28: 20)?

3. THE STAGES OF THE CALL

Needless to say, the various stages of the call mentioned below can occur as many times as new leaders are considered for appointment. It seems important to us, nevertheless, that each "candidature" should experience the same stages of the call.

Let us also remind ourselves that, since it is the Lord who calls us, we are to put ourselves entirely in his hands. Only faithfulness and constancy in prayer can put us in a condition of total trust in his action. It is then that we can be sufficiently poor in ourselves to listen to him and be moulded by his Spirit.

It is recommended to call a new couple to a particular service before the expiry of the previous holders' mandate. This is in order that the new couple may have enough time to

get sufficiently the measure of the task and may know better the peculiarities of the service to which they are being called.

3.1. A TIME OF DISCERNMENT

3.1.1 FOR THE COUPLE WHO MAKE THE CALL TO SERVE

The couple who make the call must ask the appointed couple to put themselves at the service of the Movement. It is, right from the first day, that the appointed couple must remain attentive to the couples they are to serve so as to detect hidden charisms. In the course of their mandate, the leaders will find the favourable time to put this or that couple “to the test” by entrusting this or that task to them.

Let us remember that calling a leader to serve in Teams is done collegially. The document on “Collegiality in the Teams of Our Lady”, published by ERI following work done during the meetings of the College in Melbourne and Rome, speaks of the “call” in the following terms²:

“Since the beginning of the Teams of Our Lady, collegiality has been part of the way our Movement operates. Its obvious aims were good relationships and decision-making. Nevertheless, it implies the presence, within the College, of couples called to a particular service. This call, though made through men and women, is a call from the Lord to serve. It confers the same rights and duties and thus establishes the essential conditions for true collegiality.”

“Super-Regions, Regions or Sectors are the special levels at which collegiality is practised in the spirit of communion with the Movement, in the context of the universal Church. It is the role of these levels of leadership to solve local problems of organisation, to choose and appoint new leaders and to animate the Movement.”

The same laws and principles that apply to true collegiality are to be found in the process of calling couples to serve. We repeat them here without going into details that can be found in the document on “Collegiality”: equality, transparency, discussion, balance between collegiality and responsibility, and chain of collegiality. Since calling couples to serve is imbued with the spirit of collegiality, it implies the following collegial characteristics:

- A joint search for truth
- A search for communion and consensus
- The establishment of trust
- A process of assuming responsibilities and of decision-taking
- An acceptance without reservations of common decisions

² Although the document on “collegiality” was drafted at the request and for the benefit of the “ERI / S-R College”, it applies with due adaptations to animating teams and other entities in the Movement.

3.1.2 FOR THE COUPLE WHO RECEIVES THE CALL TO SERVE

Let us remember that the call to serve is addressed to a “couple” and not to one of the spouses. It is therefore, as a couple, that the under-mentioned stages are experienced. To help their discernment, the couple will draw in great measure from - among other things - the ‘endeavours’: conjugal prayer, sit-down, personal quiet prayer.

We single out mainly the following stages:

- o A time of prayer
- o A time for discernment
- o A time for consultation
- o A time for response

3.1.3 LOOKING FOR A COUPLE FOR A SERVICE AND FOR A SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR :

The leading couple of each entity (Sector, Regions, Super-Regions, the Movement as a whole) have their own customs and practices to obtain (with all discretion) as many names as possible. What is essential is that this should be done in a collegial way within the team leading that entity.

One must not be afraid of insisting nor of re-contacting candidates who declined to commit themselves in the past. Circumstances of life, as well as motivations, may have changed in the mean time. Furthermore let us remember that it is the Lord who calls.

3.1.4 PRIOR CONSULTATION

This first stage ends in the drawing up of a list of several names (3 or 4) “possible candidates”.

The opinion of the Liaison Couple of the entity concerned will be sought:

- o For the Sector: the Regional Couple
- o For the Region: the Super-Regional Couple or the Leading Couple of the Province
- o For the Province : the Super-Regional Couple
- o For a Region or Sector linked directly to ERI: the Liaison Couple for the Zone
- o For the Super-Region: the Liaison Couple for the Zone

The results of this first stage will then be the subject of a sharing within the college of the relevant entity which will be asked to express its opinion.

3.1.5 HELP IN DISCERNMENT IN MAKING A CHOICE

To help us direct our search for a couple to serve in Teams, let us bear in mind the following elements in considering candidate couples.

- All positions of responsibility in Teams are exercised as a couple. Even if, for example, one spouse expresses himself/herself more easily than the other, are the two spouses involved? Do they take decisions as a couple?
- When we have seen them acting within Teams, have they shown a sense of organisation, a spirit of service, a true sense of collegiality? Can they delegate or do they want to do it all themselves?
- Is their team ready to accept their commitment and to support them?
- Is it a couple that exercises an impact around them?
- Is it a couple that considers prayer essential?

- Do they turn to the Lord when faced with important decisions to take? Do they call on the Spirit for discernment?
- How much do they know about the Movement, its charisms, its formative way? Do they love the Movement? Do they believe in its formative way?
- How does the couple take part in the life of the Movement?
- What previous experience have they got of the workings of the Movement? In what other ways have they served?
- How good are they at listening to others?
- Do they love the Church? Are they in the picture on what happens in it?
- How comprehensive is their religious formation? (if necessary, question discreetly the Spiritual Counsellor of the Sector or Region).
- Before accepting to serve the Movement, the couple will need to make choices between various commitments they already have, individually and as a couple, and to set priorities. Are they ready to sit-down and exercise discernment with the help of the Holy Spirit? Or will they attempt to accumulate commitments and perhaps water them down? We need to help them to discern.
- Ease of relating to others.
- ...

No one, of course, possesses all these qualities simultaneously. One or other of them will inevitably be lacking. It would be therefore a question of finding a good balance and a measure of compromise.

If we cannot answer one or other of these questions for lack of familiarity with the couple in question, we need to take time to make enquiries or to try out the couple when an opportunity arises. This is one more reason not to leave things to the last minute and therefore to start preparing for the succession in sufficiently good time.

3.2. TIME FOR DECISION

3.2.1. CHOICE OF A COUPLE FOR A SERVICE OR CHOICE OF A SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR :

Once opinions have been gathered, as described above, it will be necessary to go back to the appropriate leading team (Regional, Super-Regional or International leading team) which will make its choice collegially. The actual call serve to the candidate to serve can then take place.

3.2.2 CALL TO SERVE FROM THE LEADING COUPLE OF THE RELEVANT ENTITY.

The call to serve must be carefully prepared:

- by prayer
- by a personal meeting
- by allowing the couple time to think - a time that is sufficient but limited and specified by common consent. There is nothing like personal contact to explain the task to which the couple is to be called and to answer questions. One must avoid making the approach by telephone, letter or e-mail!

We cannot over-stress the importance of presenting the “service” to which the couple is being called in total clarity and truth. What is the service? What are its responsibilities? What is the duration of the mandate? What has already been set up? Etc.

3.3. AT THE TIME OF MAKING THE APPOINTMENT

The official appointment is made by the couple leading the entity

- In the case of a Sector, by the Regional Couple
- In the case of a Region, by the couple leading the Super-Region or Province
- In the case of Regions directly linked to ERI, by the International Leading Couple.
- In the case of a Super-Region, by the International Leading Couple
- In the case of the International Leading Couple or Spiritual Counsellor, with the agreement of the President of the Pontifical Counsel for the Laity.

3.4. AT THE TIME OF FORMALISING THE APPOINTMENT

This is the administrative stage thanks to which the newly appointed couple will receive all the Movement's literature that concerns them.

We highlight the following procedures:

- The retiring couple completes the information sheet on the chosen couple or Spiritual Counsellor (these information sheets are obtainable from the International Secretariat on written or e-mail request – see format of sheets in Appendices 1 & 2). The retiring couple attach a copy of the completed information sheet to their covering letter (see below)
- The retiring couple sends a letter to the couple leading the relevant entity asking them to make the appointment
- The couple leading the relevant entity formalises the appointment by letter to the retiring couple. The couple leading the relevant entity is:
 - In the case of a Sector, the Regional Couple
 - In the case of a Region, the couple leading the Super-Region or the Province
 - In the case of Regions or Sectors directly linked to ERI, the International Leading Couple
 - In the case of a Super Region, the International Leading Couple

4. WHAT DURATION OF WHAT APPOINTMENT ?

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| at Sector level | 3 years |
| at Region level | 4 years |
| at Super-Region or Province level | 5 years |
| within ERI | 6 years |

These durations of service apply to:

- Couples or Spiritual Counsellors of the Support Team of the Couple leading the entity.
- Members of services linked to the Couple leading the relevant entity (e.g. satellite teams, secretariat etc.)

5. REPLACEMENT OF ERI

The replacement of members of the International Leading Team (ERI), including its Spiritual Counsellor and Leading Couple, follows the same procedure as described above.

In the case of members of ERI, the ERI-SR College participate actively in the prior search and consultation but it is the ERI that makes the call to serve.

In the case of the International Leading Couple, it must be noted that their appointment is subject to the prior agreement of the Pontifical Counsel for the Laity on presentation of their name by ERI. This prior agreement is also required for the Spiritual Counsellor who must, in addition, receive the permission of his ecclesiastical superior.

We remind you that, except when the need arises, members of ERI do not represent their country of origin. Furthermore, ERI is not always composed of members from the same countries in proportion to the number of teams in these countries

6. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

1. “Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady” – ERI May 1993
2. “Guide to the Teams of Our Lady” - ERI May 2001
3. “Collegiality in the Teams of Our Lady” - ERI January 2003

7. APPENDIX 1 : INFORMATION FORMS: LEADERS

| |
|---|
| INFORMATION SHEET |
| COUPLE SERVING: SECTOR - (SUPER) REGION etc. |

ENTITY:

| | | | | | |
|-------|--|----------|--|----------------|--|
| NAME: | | FORNAME: | | DATE OF BIRTH: | |
| | | FORNAME: | | DATE OF BIRTH: | |

ADDRESS:

| | | | |
|---------------|--|---------|--|
| PHONE Number: | | E.MAIL: | |
| | | FAX: | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|--|---------------------|--|--|--|
| DATE of Marriage: | | Number of Children: | | | |
| | | AGE: | | | |
| | | | | | |

DATE of joining Teams:

| RESPONSIBILITIES AND SERVICES IN TEAMS: | No of years: |
|---|--------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| OTHER COMMITMENTS IN THE CHURCH: | No of years: |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
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| | | | | |
|------------------|-------|--|--|--|
| LANGUAGES SPOKEN | HIM : | | | |
| | HER: | | | |

| | | |
|------------|-------|--|
| OCCUPATION | HIM : | |
| | HER: | |

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS:

FOR USE BY THE SECRETARIAT:

8. APPENDIX 2 : INFORMATION FORM: SPIRITUAL COUNSELLORS

| |
|---|
| INFORMATION SHEET |
| SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR OF: SECTEUR - (SUPER) REGION etc. |

| |
|--------|
| ENTITY |
|--------|

| | | | | | |
|-------|--|----------|--|----------------|--|
| NAME: | | FORNAME: | | DATE OF BIRTH: | |
|-------|--|----------|--|----------------|--|

| | |
|----------|--|
| ADDRESS: | |
|----------|--|

| | | | |
|------------|--|---------|--|
| TELEPHONE: | | E.MAIL: | |
| | | FAX: | |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|----------|
| DATE of ORDINATION: | | Place: |
| CONGREGATION: | | DIOCESE: |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| DATE of joining Teams: | |
|------------------------|--|

| RESPONSIBILITIES AND SERVICES IN TEAMS : | NO of YEARS: |
|--|--------------|
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| | |
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| | |

| OTHER COMMITMENTS IN THE CHURCH: | NO of YEARS: |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
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|------------------|--|--|--|
| LANGUAGES SPOKEN | | | |
| | | | |

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|-------------------------|
| MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS: |
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| FOR USE BY THE SECRETARIAT: |
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