



TEAMS OF OUR LADY – Equipes Notre Dame
From: The International Responsible Team (ERI)

CELEBRATION TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRST EVER TEAM MEETING 80 YEARS AGO

Dear Team Member:

On 25th February 1939, the first team meeting of a Team of Our Lady took place in Paris.

You and your team are being invited to celebrate this event - with team members from all over the world - on **25th February 2019**, exactly 80 years after Father Henri Caffarel and the first group of couples discovered together a new dynamic, a new way of living more fully, the love of God in their lives as people united by the sacrament of Matrimony.

By celebrating this event together we celebrate the life of the ecclesial community of Teams of Our Lady, which today is present in more than 90 countries, bringing together some 13,600 teams, 69,000 couples and almost 10,000 spiritual counsellors.

Below you will find a simple team meeting script, common to all teams that will be involved in this event, to be held on 25th February 2019.

Father Caffarel said that the team meeting is the life and soul of a Team of Our Lady; it is a time to celebrate conjugal, family and community life; it is a time to strengthen conjugal spirituality; it is a time to create apostolic, missionary and pastoral attitudes; is an opportunity for on-going formation.

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## THE TEAM MEETING

### 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In 1938, a young priest from Paris, Henri Caffarel, received a visit from a newly married woman who wished to receive advice on living the spirituality of her marriage. He tells her that it would be good for her husband to hear the same advice.

A few days later, this same young woman returns, accompanied by her husband. This couple does not want to be the only one to benefit from the priest's

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<sup>1</sup> This Introduction is based on the following bibliographical references: Teams of Our Lady. **Father Caffarel: energorates his message**. See "Father Caffarel's Message in the early years of END". Published by the Brazil Super Region; Jean Allemand. **Henri Caffarel: A man seized by God**. Published by the Brazil Super Region; Nancy Staff Moncau. **Teams of Our Lady: An essay on its history**. São Paulo: Nova Bandeira Produções Editoriais, 2000.

advice and suggests the presence of some other friendly couples, young people like them. Next, this couple introduces Father Caffarel to three other couples. Filled with love and committed Christians, they ask him to lead them in the quest to live their conjugal love in the light of their Christian faith.

"Let us make this journey together," or "Let us seek a way together" or "Why don't we gather together to learn about Christian marriage?" Father Caffarel replies, and in this way the common basis for marriage was launched.

On 25<sup>th</sup> February 1939, in the residence of one of the couples (33 Rue du Champ de Mars, Paris), Fr. Caffarel and four couples (Pierre and Rozenn de Montjamont ; Gérard and Madeleine d'Heilly; Michel and Ginette Huet; Frédéric and Marie Françoise de la Chapelle) met. The first team, named "Our Lady of All Joys", was born in this way. Thus, the first team meeting took place. Although not consciously, they were participating in the birth of our Movement of Teams of Our Lady.

Minutes were made of this historic meeting which contain very important ideas that advanced the guidelines for the direction of this "road" that was being built and the structure of the charism of the Movement <sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of the first meetings was to "increase our efforts to achieve, with a great openness of heart, TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S ATTENTIVENESS TO OUR LIVES and thus to respond better to His calling." <sup>3</sup>

Little by little, during the following meetings, these young couples realized that marriage is the living image of the love that unites Christ to the Church and they discovered the privileged place of the couple in God's plan. At the same time, they experienced community life where Christ's promise to be present ("*Where two or more meet in My name there I am in the midst of them*"). Their life progressed through openness to others, in union with God, between the spouses and between the couples.

## 2. TESTIMONIES

Some years later, one of the couples described this first encounter:<sup>4</sup>

"I believe that the question that we asked was: how could our life, so full of human happiness, of preoccupations, of attachment to people, allow us to respond fully to the love of God (when this love drives so many souls to the exclusive gift of celibacy)? Doesn't this demand of holiness concern us, the married, as well?"

And our priest said: Certainly it also concerns you.

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<sup>2</sup> Teams of Our Lady. **Father Caffarel: invigorates his message.** See "Father Caffarel's Message in the early years of END: Minutes of the Meeting," p. 11. Published by the Brazil Super Region.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid Gérard and Madeleine d'Heilly. Op. Cit., p 11.

<sup>4</sup> It was Gérard and Madeleine d'Heilly. See this testimony in Jean Allemand. *Henri Caffarel: A man seized by God.* Published by the Brazil Super Region, p. 37-38.

Then we said to him, "If it concerns us, how can we respond to it, since we are limited, tied on all sides, heart, body and spirit?"

And our priest answered forcefully, "To respond to you, you have a Sacrament, which is yours alone, but which, certainly, is very poorly known". The first step was already outlined.

We had all understood that it was necessary to begin an attentive and passionate search (purposefully using this word) for God's thoughts about our marriage. Not about "home life," education, etc., but about the source from which all this springs: the very sacrament of Matrimony.

What is this Sacrament? What does it produce in us? What grace is yours? How does it lead us to God and how does God take us?"

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*Father Caffarel, looking back, recalls this first encounter with the young Christian couples and this union of two loves: human love and the love of Christ. And he goes on:*⁵

These two loves, that of Christ and that of the spouse, are both totalitarian and exclusive: they are unconditional. However, the intuition of these young couples assured them that the one does not oppose the other, but also that they must not be lived separately, independently.

Seeking confirmation of their intuition, they questioned the priest closely: they wanted God's answer, without any evasiveness.

It is useless to resort to psychological subtlety here: for the priest, it is sufficient to remember - or discover - the traditional teaching on the sacrament of Matrimony. In fact, to say that marriage is a sacrament is to say that Christ transmits His grace to the spouses through marriage, through this gift of love that they make to one another.

Christ's love uses human love, as He does in other ways, through water or consecrated oil, to show Himself and communicate. And it is not only in order to sanctify souls, but also to transfigure their own conjugal love, so fervent and so fragile, through which He wants to give Himself to the spouses throughout their existence.

The mutual gift of the spouses, which Christ uses to bestow His grace on them, is also the way by which they will come to Him, as two Christians, united to make a commitment to help one other in the search for the Lord.

⁵ Idem, p. 38-39

Married love therefore reveals itself as ordered to the love of Christ: through Him, Christ gives Himself to the spouses, through Him the spouses give themselves to Christ.

3. SOME IMPORTANT IDEAS OF THE MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING

3.1- Marriage: collaboration with the Creator

Although He could create all things without our participation, He decided to ask for our consent and collaboration to multiply not only bodily beings but also immortal souls.

3.2- Love is always fruitful

Love is fruitful for its own sake, simply because it exists. Thus, this fruitfulness will not always be visible. There will be other kinds, often invisible, but explicit and real. True love is forever fruitful, and it will be much more so, as it grows. To give warmth to life, it is necessary to nurture and care for it, just as one does with fire.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Jean Allemand writes⁶ on the increase of groups of couples from 1941 to 1942, and says that "prayer, present from the beginning of the groups, has a still greater place. Sometimes whole nights are devoted to it when it comes to begging the Lord for someone threatened or deported (by war). The couples, gathered in the apartment of one of them and restrained by the curfew, take hourly turns in interceding for him.

Father Caffarel called this period of war so fraught with danger, restraint, suffering and separation, the period of "the grain of wheat that dies." So the future crops were prepared. Some members of the first groups even offered their lives for the development of the young Movement which was then being organized.

Years later, Farther Caffarel emphasized:⁷

Forty years of priestly ministry, of spiritual direction, leave me with no doubt: people who do not pray, or who pray only a little, are like those with anemia to whom the doctors say: 'You are without natural defences; you will succumb to the first epidemic.'

And as this Movement begins to spread, many members do not pray: the surveys show that some 48% of the couples do not remain faithful to 10 minutes of daily prayer and that few members are even maintaining the habit of prayer.

⁶ Testimony in Jean Allemand. *Henri Caffarel: A man seized by God*. Published by the Brazil Super Region, p. 40.

⁷ "Insufficient prayer, faltering faith". In: Teams of Our Lady. *Father Caffarel: invigorates his message*. Published by the Brazil Super Region, p. 116.

Will our teams stop being schools of prayer? However, this is an essential aspect of his reason for being.

As I recall memories of the first teams, I rediscover this necessity, this joy of praying together that encouraged the couples. It's true that then we had war, privations, threats, fear, arrests and deportations ... And now life is easy; or, in other words, life presents less difficult life problems.

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**Let us pray together**, guided by the meditation of one of those present at the first team meeting, so that we can strengthen in our lives this time of daily prayer:<sup>8</sup>

"Bless us, Lord. Bless our love ...

We are very weak, but we want our Marriage to glorify You as much as You desire.

Oh, God, who truly resides in our souls, make us wholly one to the other, and to those whom you have entrusted to us.

May we be of one heart, totally for You."

## 5. MEDITATION TEXT

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt 18,20)

What do you come to do in Teams? <sup>9</sup>

By 1948, Father Caffarel had placed before the team members the great figure of St. Paul and his passionate search for Christ.

"During the last vacation, I did many long walks in the forest. I carried with me the Letters of St. Paul. Once again, I was struck by the unfailing attachment of the Apostle to Christ.

In the course of these readings, dear friends, you were very present in my meditations and the subject of the next teaching I would send you was impressed upon me: in the Teams of Our Lady, we must aim at the essential. The exchanges of ideas, the solid friendships, mutual material and moral assistance, all this is not the primary goal. The essential thing is to seek Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> Teams of Our Lady. *Father Caffarel: invigorates his message*. See "Father Caffarel's Message in the Early Years of END: Minutes of the Meeting," p. 14. Published by the Brazil Super Region.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from the Study Topic 2008-2009: *Selected Texts of Father Caffarel*. (beginning of Chapter I)

Unfortunately, words become tedious; I fear that the expression "seek Christ" does not arouse in you more than a very weak response.

Here are some texts - or rather - some cries of St. Paul that will show what it is to seek Christ and, having found Him, to belong to Him.

St. Paul is infused by love: "The love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor 5:14). "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, anguish, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, sword? ... But in all this we are more than conquerors" (Rom 8,35-37).

It happens to him, as with all of us, to find himself faced with an alternative: to please men or to please God, and take sides: "If I would continue to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1: 10). "We are fools for the sake of Christ" (1 Cor 4,10).

Christ is the axis of your life. You do not hesitate, however, to sacrifice the sweetness of your intimacy with Him to meet your brothers, so that they may belong to your Master: "I am pulled two ways: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, that is better by far, but for your sake the greater need is for me to remain in the body" (Phil 1:23).

Various sufferings are not spared him, and doubtless he knows hours of anguish. He reacts: "I know in whom I have put my faith" (2 Timothy 1:12). Do you realize all that there is of heroic courage and tenderness of heart in these words?

His life has only one reason for being. He will be faithful to martyrdom: "He is destined to reign" (1 Cor. 15:25).

There is no doubt that we are far from this holiness. The question, however, is whether or not we want to be possessed by the same consuming passion. And, returning to the Teams, if this is what you are looking for in the first place, if this desire guides your exchange of ideas, your prayers, if it is really the reason for your friendship and mutual help. " (French Monthly Letter, November 1948).

## **6. QUESTIONS FOR THE SIT-DOWN**

- a) "Married love, far from rivalling the love of God, is a path for Him."

As a couple, are we convinced of this?

What are the special qualities or weaknesses of growth on our own spiritual path?

- b) "Like all the baptized, you are indeed called to holiness. But it is up to you to tend to it according to the way that is proper to you, in and for married life. "How do we respond as a couple, not separately, to this call to conjugal holiness?"

What are our special qualities or weaknesses in our path to holiness?

- c) Father Caffarel raises this question when he speaks of Marriage: "In this great company 'of the Lord who wants to form for himself a people who manifest His glory and His love, what is the function or vocation of human love?"

Let us ask ourselves about the function of our conjugal love. Do we strive to live it fully?

## **7. QUESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMING THE TEAMS IDEAS**

At this meeting, celebrating the 80th anniversary of the first team meeting, we will reflect and share a little bit about the journey of each couple in the Teams of Our Lady, regardless of whether they have been few or many years in the Movement.

- a) Do you know how your base team started? Who were the founding couples of your team? Who was your team's first Spiritual Counsellor? Do you know the history of your team?
- b) What motivated you, as a couple, to join the Teams Movement? Has this motivation continued or increased?
- c) What is your assessment of the preparation of your team's monthly meetings? Is there a preparatory meeting held with the presence of the Spiritual Counsellor? Do the meeting's leaders, together with the Responsible Couple, see to it that there are powerful moments of prayer / meditation and sharing?

## **8. ENLIVENING MUTUAL HELP IN THE TEAM AND IN MARRIAGE**

In the light of what was discussed at this meeting, establish in each couple and in each team a concrete way to grow in our desire for God, as the first couples of the Teams of Our Lady did together with Father Caffarel.

## **9. PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD HENRI CAFFAREL**

God, our Father,  
You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel,  
a fountain of love which bound him totally to your Son  
and inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.

A prophet for our time,  
he revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person  
in the words Jesus addresses to each of us: "Come follow me".

He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of marriage,  
the sign of Christ's fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her.

He showed that priests and couples  
are called to live a vocation of love.

He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death.

Prompted by the Holy Spirit,

he accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer.

Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.

God, our Father,

through the intercession of Our Lady,

we ask you to hasten the day

when the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life,

so that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son

in accordance with their particular vocations in the Holy Spirit.

God our Father, we invoke Father Caffarel to ... (personal intention)

Amen.

## **10. MAGNIFICAT AND FINAL BLESSING**