



Equipes Notre-Dame

The team meeting as a celebration

We have spoken so many times about the team meeting that anything we say may sound like a song we have heard a thousand times before, and to which we no longer pay attention after hearing it so often. And yet, before reading this short text, we would like each of us to ask ourselves how much importance do we attach to the team meeting, how do we prepare for it, and what feelings do we have about the next team meeting? Our feelings can be varied. There may be a certain expectation about how it will go; perhaps a certain boredom and the feeling of already knowing what is going to happen because we have been in Teams for a long time; perhaps a certain discomfort or a little feeling of guilt because we have not prepared very well; or perhaps a real excitement about meeting our team members again. Each one of us will have our own feelings, and with each stage of our team life these feelings will surely change. Nevertheless, the essence of the meeting is always the same: The meeting is the celebration of our team life, and it is something we share with Christ himself.

We have learnt this directly from Father Caffarel when he was asked in 1973 what he would say to the Teams if it were the last time he could address them. He considered several things that were certainly very important, such as, conjugal spirituality, the Charter, charity in the team, the psychology of small groups, the deepening of faith, the mission of Teams in the church today... and yet he decided to choose the Christian meaning of the team meeting. "The monthly meeting of a team should not only be defined by its structure, its spirit, the friendship of its members, or the desire for it to be a stage in their search for God. It must first of all recognise its supernatural substance and its mystery". And to explain what this mystery was all about, Father Caffarel outlined what was fundamental in the team meeting: "In the middle of the room where these couples are gathered, there is the intense presence of the Risen Lord, alive, attentive to all, loving each one as he is, with his virtues and weaknesses, and ready to help them become what he wants them to be".¹ There is no greater celebration than the possibility of turning our meeting into a gathering animated by the breath of the Spirit who sustains us on our journey. Recognising each of our team members as the people, who together with us, are welcoming Christ himself in the meeting. This makes us realise the greatness of this time, whose mystery and transcendence we sometimes fail to perceive.

This greatness does not detract from the feelings that Father Caffarel talked about at Chantilly when describing the first team meetings: joy, ambition, enthusiasm, passion...² We believe these are feelings that we have when we are celebrating something, when we truly believe that something is worthwhile, and we are enjoying it. But we must not confuse celebration with a superficial pastime. Celebrations and rituals build our lives. Most of the time these are moments of joy, but they are not always joyful and festive. A funeral celebration is sad, but for Christians it also has a deep background of hope. It may happen that some of our gatherings are sad because we are sharing something in our lives that is objectively sad, but it does not lose a profoundly celebratory meaning. Celebrate comes from the Latin *celeber*, meaning numerous, abundant. It is an antonym of *desertus*, deserted,

¹ Editorial monthly letter, march-april, 1973

² F. Caffarel, Chantilly Conference, 3 may 1987

abandoned. In the meeting we feel accompanied, sustained and supported by the people of our team and by Christ himself present in the meeting.

The team meeting is the celebration of our life together, where we give ourselves and open ourselves to others. We get to know each other deeply and truly, each with his or her own personal mystery. We help each other to meet Christ, to let the Lord be present in our life and to guide us, to discover God's thoughts for us. We support with our prayers the couples and the spiritual counsellors who accompany us on this journey. We rejoice and grieve with the joys and sorrows of our team members. In short, we celebrate life together.

For example, our own team meetings have been a joyous school for teaching us practical lessons about the celebration of life. We began our own life in END as a newly married couple, in a team that spanned the ages of three generations. We had much to learn about life, marriage and our faith as a couple. Even from those early days, the team meeting was a great gift for us. Recalling the story of Martha and Mary, we felt like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening intently as others shared their wisdom and their stories. Through prayer and reflection, we learned to see the hand of God at work in our lives.

Of course, our Team has changed considerably over the past 40 years. During this time, we have celebrated the many joys and sorrows in our lives. We have also confronted the death of some of our members. But life is also about renewal, and we have been inspired by younger couples who have joined our Team. These couples have revitalised our Team meetings in ways we could not have imagined. Today, our team still spans three generations, and we are now part of the older generation. At our team meetings, we still feel like Mary sitting in the presence of Jesus. It is a place where we feel loved, accepted and supported. We continually give thanks for our team meetings which give us encouragement, hope and inspiration.

We invite you to do a sit down and reflect not on what your team meetings are like, but on our attitudes to being at the meeting. It is important to first review previous meetings and to acknowledge our attitudes, both positive and negative, with sincerity. We can review the quality of our listening, our body language, what we say and how we take in what is said..... Then we can think about whether there is something that is helping and worth enhancing, or whether there is something that is worth changing because it is not helping. Father Caffarel also saw this community of people who love each other as a sign of God for others.³ Being a sign of love is an enormous responsibility that we must learn to take care of.

We can end this sit down with a prayer: We place before the Lord each of the members of our team, giving thanks to God for each one of them, and celebrating their life at our side.

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³ L'Anneau d'Or, Mai-August, 1956