



Equipes Notre-Dame

THE INTERNATIONALITY OF THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY MOVEMENT

1. A little history

The birth of Teams of Our Lady dates back to 25 February 1939 in France, when four couples met for the first time with Father Caffarel in a flat in Paris. They were responding to his invitation: *"Let us seek together, in all openness of heart, to understand the way God looks upon couples so that we can better respond to his call"*. These couples had previously come to ask Father Caffarel: *"How does our life, full of human happiness, worries and attachment to his creatures, enable us to respond fully to our God's demand for love? Does this demand for holiness also apply to married people? And Father Caffarel replied: "It certainly concerns you too."*

On 25 February 1989, the first team met with four couples and a priest, Father Caffarel. Today, just over 80 years later, the Teams of Our Lady movement is present in over 92 countries on five continents. What a tremendous expansion! This expansion is reminiscent of the Acts of the Apostles, where the number of disciples continues to grow and multiply, thanks to their missionary zeal to sow the Good News everywhere, under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the movement continues to grow today, particularly in Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe.

The main actor in this surprising and marvellous expansion is the Holy Spirit, who breathes a missionary spirit into the couples who are carrying out this expansion, while preserving the unity of the movement. But in concrete terms, how did this expansion come about? We could say that it took place in four different waves.

The first wave of expansion (1939-1959) was made up of the twenty countries that received direct influence from Father Caffarel, either because he personally initiated the teams, or because he participated directly in their spiritual formation, or because he gave decisive encouragement to the founders, as was the case for England. In France, the number of Equipes Notre-Dame grew very quickly. Couples were happy to tell their friends about the movement, a movement that responded to their aspirations.

"The period from 1937 to 1940 was decisive. A generation of young couples found themselves irresistibly driven to ask the Lord about the Christian riches of love and marriage (...). Two loves were their strength, their joy, their reason for living: the love of Christ and their married love. They aspired to respond unreservedly to the calls of each one".

The second wave of expansion (1956-1969) corresponded to the nine countries that were influenced by those who knew Father Caffarel. The members of the Leading Team and some priests who were friends of Father Caffarel played an important role.

The third wave of expansion (1970-1999) corresponds to the 22 countries that have been influenced by those who knew Father Caffarel indirectly.

And finally, the fourth wave of expansion (2000 to date) corresponds to the 33 countries that have been influenced by couples convinced of the importance and benefits of the movement.

To learn more about the history of the movement, and to recognise the action of the Holy Spirit in it, we invite you to read the excellent book, "*Développement et internationalisation du mouvement des équipes Notre-Dame*" (Development and internationalisation of the Teams of Our Lady movement) published in June 2021 by the International Leading Team (ERI) in the five languages of the movement.

2. The fruits of internationality

Spreading the word

The first fruit of internationality is to enable as many couples as possible to be part of the END movement and thus to benefit from its pedagogy and charism. If the movement had not crossed borders, there would only be French people in the teams.

This has always been a priority for the movement: to spread throughout the world. At Pentecost, every Christian receives the Holy Spirit and is sent on mission, i.e., called to proclaim the Good News to the whole world.

Taking a broader look

If the internationality of the movement allows more couples to be part of it, it also allows each couple to better be part of the movement by deepening the graces of the sacrament of marriage.

Within a team, the ways of living and practising the Endeavours vary. Some couples are comfortable with the Sit Down, while others practise prayer more readily but have difficulty with conjugal prayer. Sharing the Endeavours with other couples at the monthly team meeting enables each couple to make progress on their weak points, and when they manage to practise an Endeavour well and share it, it is a stimulus for the other couples. This fruitfulness of sharing at team level can also be found at sector, regional or super-regional level. This diversity of couples, teams, Sectors, Regions and Super-Regions, through encounters and exchanges, enriches the way we live the Endeavours, lead teams and run formation courses.

This variety of ways of appropriating the Teams pedagogy is even more apparent at the international level, because we are all marked by the culture of the country where we live.

It's a great opportunity to benefit from the experience of other countries and other cultures that stimulate us to go further and further along the path of holiness.

We remember taking part in a team meeting in Africa. We were struck by the rigour with which the couples questioned each other at the time of the sharing on the Endeavours, so as not to forget any point. This encouraged us afterwards to put more rigour into our base team in France.

Highlighting the sacrament of marriage

The way in which marriage is viewed and experienced varies greatly from one era and country to another. Much of this variety is linked to culture. Yet the sacrament of marriage is universal, transcending all cultures. A couple united by the sacrament of marriage receives abundant graces that enable them to draw closer to God on the path to holiness.

Meeting other couples, united by the same sacrament of marriage, helps to highlight what is universal, and what is culturally linked and varies according to the situation. This helps us to realise that the love that God gives us in marriage is much greater than the ways in which we live it.

A testimony of peace

In a world where there are still too many conflicts and wars, the Teams movement bears witness through its diversity that God's love is greater than human divisions. When couples from different countries, sometimes at loggerheads or in conflict, meet, pray and share together, it is a beautiful testimony that international relations must not be reduced to a balance of power, but instead can be a place of fraternity.

3. The challenges of internationality

The international nature of the movement is an invaluable opportunity that bears much fruit. But from a practical point of view, there are difficulties to be overcome.

Linguistic aspects

The first difficulty in exchanging and sharing is understanding each other if you don't speak the same language. So, we had to establish a few rules and operating procedures.

The official language is French. Official documents are therefore in French, and this is also the working language of the International Leading Team.

Five main languages are used in international exchanges: French, English, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. All documents of a certain importance that are distributed to all RRs and SRs are therefore translated and distributed in the five languages. The movement's international website must also be accessible in these five languages.

The International College, which brings together the leaders of the RRs and SRs with the ERI every year, also caters for the five languages.

A major translation effort is also made by many RRs and SRs in which other languages are used. The basic documents (piloting booklet, study topic, etc.) must be translated into the language spoken by each team.

In meetings and gatherings of SRs with several languages, it is necessary to put in place mechanisms to enable everyone to participate. This is a significant effort, which is bearing fruit. At Pentecost 2022, we took part in a gathering of SR Poland and Central Europe in Czestochowa, and we could hear Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian, English, French and German. Like Jesus' disciples in the Acts of the Apostles, we all understood that the Holy Spirit had been given to us and that we were being sent on mission. It was a magnificent manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit among us.

Cultural aspects

Beyond language, cultural differences sometimes make it difficult to understand each other. We don't all pay attention to the same priorities or the same aspects of events. When we meet someone, there's a risk that we won't listen properly and understand what the other person is saying.

This requires everyone to make an effort to listen and to be patient. We need to look at the person we are talking to with the loving eyes of Jesus, eyes that see the other person as a child of God who has something beautiful to communicate to me and whom I need to listen to and welcome.

The challenge of unity

When we don't speak the same language, when our culture leads us to have different sensitivities and different priorities, there is a risk that each country will make its own choices, and the unity of the Teams movement will be threatened. This would lead to no longer sharing the same wealth, and the fruits of internationality described above would be lost.

For unity to be preserved, it is up to everyone (RR, SR, ERI) to make an effort. Tools are at our disposal and must be used. Local adaptations of these tools must be chosen with discernment so that they bear better fruit, without threatening unity. The current reflection on synodality throughout the Church should help us in this direction.

The tools of unity include:

- The International College every year
- The major international gathering every six years
- Formation courses defined at the international level
- The annual study topic
- ERI mail, which is included in newsletters from each country/RR/SR
- The Guide to Teams of our Lady
- Etc, ...

We wish everyone a joyful and fruitful experience of the international dimension of the movement.

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