

Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples**
Meeting 1

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

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PRESENTATION

These new piloting manuals respond to a request made by most super regions (SRs) and regions attached (“Régions Rattachées”, RRs) to the International Responsible Team, always referred to by the French acronym ERI (“**É**quipe Responsable Internationale”).

The couples responsible from around the world expressed, at the International College held in Fatima (Portugal) in 2018, the need to revise and update the piloting manuals on various aspects related to the charism, pedagogy, and mysticism of the Teams of Our Lady (TOOL). These booklets are intended to be simple and attractive, available in different languages, thereby providing support for the formation and expansion of the movement in countries where it is already present and beyond.

To this end, ERI set up a Satellite Team (“**É**quipe Satellite”, ES), composed of couples of different nationalities and cultures, as required for this type of project within the movement.

This ES started its work with a review of the fundamental concepts of piloting as an initial and indispensable stage of formation in TOOL, as well as with an extensive survey of piloting material used in all SRs and RRs.

Not surprisingly, the current piloting manuals illustrate the needs expressed by the SRs and RRs and the multiculturalism of TOOL. The movement is present in more than 90 countries in 2022, with couples and spiritual counselors or spiritual advisors¹ from very diverse backgrounds and origins. This cultural and religious richness must be considered from the very beginning of the piloting stage in the movement.

The piloting stage consists of an initial training for couples joining the movement, on its pedagogy and the life proposal within TOOL.

1. A spiritual counselor (SC) is a priest and full member of the team. A spiritual advisor (SA) is a non-priest, lay or religious person, man or woman, with a training in theology and some pastoral experience. The SA is also a full member of the team as an individual (not as a couple). A detailed guide available from TOOL describes the role of the SC or SA: “The Priest Counselor and the Spiritual Accompaniment in Teams of Our Lady”.

During this period of formation to live out marital spirituality, piloting includes the presence of an accompanying pilot couple, according to a methodology now common to the whole movement. This approach ensures that TOOL, as an international movement, will develop on the same basis everywhere, thereby strengthening its unity within a great plurality of situations.

After the piloting period, couples continue to deepen the meaning of conjugal spirituality through witness and study of topics that deal with conjugal love, Christ and the Church.

To develop these new piloting books, the ES has taken as much as possible from the material and practices contained in manuals and tools of the different SRs and RRs of the movement.

ERI hopes that this manual will be used in all SRs and RRs, to remain faithful to the charism and mysticism of TOOL. However, it is possible, when necessary, to adapt it to the current needs of couples, especially the younger ones, with respect to testimonies or texts proposed for further understanding.

Fundamentally, the manual contains what ERI considers to be essential for piloting within the different realities of SRs and RRs, both in terms of content and conduct of each meeting.

Finally, the ERI asks to maintain, throughout the piloting phase, loyalty to our movement, considering the expansion that is taking place, either through the increase in the number of team members or through the opening of new borders. This requires from members at all levels of service a genuine concern to preserve the unity and faithfulness towards its founding charism and mystique. Blessed be God who has brought us together in the love of Christ.

Paris, July 2023

International Responsible Team - ERI

INTRODUCTION

Dear Couple and Spiritual Counselor or Advisor:

Welcome to the Teams of Our Lady Movement!

We are happy that you have decided to come together to form a small church community. We welcome you with great joy and affection.

By joining us, you are helping to rekindle the charismatic and missionary flame of the Teams of Our Lady (TOOL). Your presence reaffirms the prophetic force of witness and proclamation of Jesus Christ as hope and joy for all men and women, for couples and families of our time.

We hope that you will find spiritual strength and that together we will be able to communicate the joy of the Gospel, of the family and of marriage in all areas of our Church and society.

The purpose of TOOL is to help couples deepen the richness of the sacrament of marriage and to develop conjugal spirituality, thereby sanctifying themselves through a closer relationship with God.

Through a renewal of married life thanks to the movement, the human couple is called to witness God's love by living daily the evangelical ideal that Christ proposes to all his missionary disciples.

Father Henri Caffarel, founder of the movement with the first couples, declared that the essential objective of TOOL was to help couples progress towards holiness: no more, no less. Therefore, couples are encouraged to move towards Christian perfection in their married state together as husband and wife.

This journey of couples is carried out within a basic team of four to six couples and a priest spiritual counselor or a well-trained spiritual advisor. The basic team forms a small domestic church gathered in the name of Christ and is based on integral and continuous formation, mutual help and witness.

The period of piloting is the initial stage of formation within the movement. It is fundamental and indispensable for transmitting to couples and the spiritual counselor or advisor the basic knowledge of life in TOOL, its pedagogy, organisation, charisma, and mystique.

The specific objectives of piloting are:

- ✦ To develop the relationship with God at a personal, couple and team level.
- ✦ To enable a deeper understanding of the sacrament of marriage and conjugal love.
- ✦ To transmit and promote the lived experience within the Teams of Our Lady.
- ✦ To practice community life as a team, through hospitality, praying, sharing, mutual support, and fraternal correction.
- ✦ To stimulate the integration of the basic team into the movement and the Church.

This team journey is accompanied by a pilot couple with experience and knowledge of the movement. The journey is designed to encourage and contribute to a life formation within a small church community.

At the end of piloting, it is hoped that the new couples and their spiritual counselor or advisor will be able to fully adhere to the Teams of Our Lady movement, in communion with the whole Church.

Our TOOL movement is placed under the guidance of Mary, disciple and Mother, because she leads us to Christ, the centre of our spiritual life. This is why the movement is deeply Christ centered: it meets in the name of Christ, who, through his Spirit, nourishes and strengthens our faith, enabling us to be in greater communion with God every day.

Dear couple and spiritual counselor or advisor: may Mary guide you on this path of a vital encounter with her Son Jesus, and may we together, along with all other teams in TOOL, do whatever he tells us.

MEETING 1

WALKING AS A TEAM WITHIN TOOL



“A team [within Teams of Our Lady – TOOL] is not simply a human community. It comes together “in Christ’s name” and attempts to help its members to make progress in the love of God and in the love of one’s neighbor in order to answer fully the invitation of Christ”¹

1. Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2018). Appendix 2 - What is a Team of Our Lady? - A Christian Community, page 128.

1 | Hospitality

Dear couples and priest spiritual counselor (SC) or spiritual advisor (SA), welcome to this first piloting meeting!

The home of one of you welcomes all members unceremoniously as brothers and sisters, with great joy. It is important to feel comfortable.

Hospitality is a characteristic of Christian life. Brothers and sisters come and gather as a team in search of God's love for a time of blessing. Each member is expected, with his or her unique personality.

Take time to welcome one another. Open your hearts to each other. Feel embraced by Christ who will accompany you and pour out his graces upon you. Remember that the first Christian communities, gathered in homes, were small cells of the Church and shared everything together.

Why did the movement propose that couples meet in their own homes instead of churches, parish halls or any other place?



The home of a couple and a family is a haven of life, a place where a unique story is built, full of emotions, feelings, concerns, achievements, and joy. The home is a safe area of reference for every human being, where he or she builds bonds and takes root in a family, where he or she is loved and welcomed, where he or she finds support and protection in times of need.

“In a word, to create a “home” is to create “a family”. “It is to learn to feel connected to others by more than merely utilitarian and practical bonds, to be united in such a way as to feel that our life is a bit more human”.²

For couples, home is the place to live as a family, to plan marital life, to welcome family and friends, and to rest after daily struggles.

The home is also a Church symbol, a privileged place for living fraternal relationships proposed by the Christian faith. The first Christians organised communities from their homes where they lived the essence of Christianity: charity and communion with their brothers and sisters.

As a result, the Christian home has always been open and welcoming, reflecting a closeness between people and a missionary spirit. It is a testimony of living faith in a small ecclesial community.

2 | The Meal

There is no better reason to get together than to share a meal around the table.

Life in TOOL will provide many opportunities to do so. The meal is not just about eating together; it is also a time to share our lives. Jesus himself used to meet in the home of his friends to share a meal.

Let us recite the Lord’s Prayer together, joining hands, and then ask our SC/SA to bless the meal.

2. Pope Francis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, n° 217.

3 | Presentation of Part of the Meeting: General Sharing

Everyone is invited to introduce himself or herself and share part of his or her personal story. A team is formed and built when its members are ready to open their hearts and reveal themselves to others.

In the pedagogy of TOOL, general sharing is a part of the monthly meeting. It is a time to mention important moments and events of our lives (family and professional joys or concerns, commitments in the Church or elsewhere as well as failures or sadnesses). We are invited to analyse these events, in a spirit of faith, in the light of the Gospel.

It is a moment of openness to each other, a time for each person to express himself or herself while others are listening. It may be a time to call for help and support. It is not a time for discussion. Instead, it is a time for welcoming, getting to know each other and understanding the realities experienced by each team member.



While one person is speaking, all others are paying attention (thereby developing a culture of listening). Personal differences should not be seen as an obstacle. Instead, they are a richness and a source of challenges that can

strengthen the Christian community. Each person speaks about himself or herself, with confidence and freedom, without hiding what he or she really is. A golden rule prevails within the movement: **absolute secrecy or absolute confidentiality of team exchanges**. What is said during the meeting must never be disclosed outside the team.

In the pedagogy of the movement, this “tour de table”, that is a time for each member to express himself or herself individually while all others listen, has a specific name called “General Sharing”. It is an essential part of the monthly meeting; it takes place at each new meeting. To help you in this first experience, it is proposed that each spouse and the SC/SA retrace his or her own journey and formulate what he or she expects or hopes for by joining the movement:

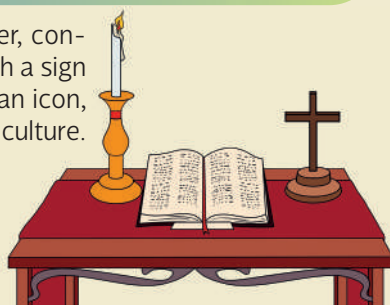
- a) Each person describes his or her own journey from a human, family, professional, cultural or spiritual perspective as he or she sees fit.
- b) What are the wishes and desires of each spouse personally and as a couple? What is each person looking for?
- c) What are you expecting from team life?

4 | Prayer

In the joy of addressing the Lord together, consider highlighting this special moment with a sign placed in your midst: a candle, a picture, an icon, or any other symbol according to the local culture. You can also begin with a song.

The Word of God: Epistle to the Colossians 3:12-15

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, goodwill, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” The Word of the Lord!



Meditation

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (Second Epistle to Timothy, 3:16).

The Word we hear touches our heart in different ways. Each person in turn may express a prayer that the text inspires him or her, or repeat a phrase that most caught his or her attention. The SC/SA is also invited, as every other member of the team, to share his or her meditation.

Prayer intentions

After the meditation, we can share with each other, if we wish, intentions that will be entrusted to the Lord and that continue to be carried by members throughout the next month. We can also choose collectively to express these intentions at the time of the final prayer and blessing.

Concluding liturgical prayer

Taken from the official prayers of the Catholic Church, the concluding liturgical prayer links the small church (ecclesiola) to the whole Church (ecclesia). It reminds team members that they belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, with which they are called to maintain strong bonds of unity. The Liturgy of the Hours provides a list of prayers. The Psalms are an excellent example of liturgical prayer.

Psalm 132 (133) has been chosen for this meeting. It should be read slowly to savor its words and let them resonate in our heart.

Psalm 132 (133), verses 1 and 3b:

*How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.*

5 | Study Topic: What is a Team within Teams of Our Lady (TOOL)?

We may have a desire to move forward in our married life but often feel unable to do so. What if we were to meet other people willing to help us move beyond our personal weaknesses? The TOOL proposal

responds to this desire. It brings couples together to help them draw out the richness of their marriage and face up to its challenges.

A team within TOOL is therefore a Christian community of couples and a counselor or advisor. Forming a community is more than simply gathering a few people. Ideally, a team within TOOL is made up of 5 to 7 couples united by the sacrament of marriage, accompanied by a priest Spiritual Counselor (SC) who represents Christ or a Spiritual Advisor in areas where there is a lack of priests.

To create lasting links, a community must meet regularly, at least once a month. Here are some of TOOL characteristics that you will discover gradually:

- ✦ A team within TOOL is always freely initiated. Membership is sincerely desired by each participant.
- ✦ It is essential to live a community experience, where everyone participates with their gifts, but also with their weaknesses.
- ✦ A community has its own ways and adopts certain rules to function properly.
- ✦ Its members have a dual desire: to be helped by others and to help others.
- ✦ A fundamental element of a team is that it is accompanied by a SC/SA who is a full member and to whom the team must give special attention, care, and affection.

Moreover, there is something essential about a team within TOOL that differs from a regular human group. A team within TOOL gathers in the name of Christ. Jesus made a promise to us: *“When two or three of you are gathered in my name, I am in your midst”*.

The more you deepen ways of living your marital love, the closer you will be to God. And the reverse path is also true: the more you seek God, the more you will be able to love your spouse and your brothers and sisters in the team.

This link with Jesus Christ is strengthened by the presence of a SC who brings to the team the grace of his priesthood [or by a SA who brings his knowledge and wisdom to guide members spiritually]. What a privilege! The SC or SA makes Christ present in the team and ensures that we do not stray away from what Christ proposes to us.

Questions for the topic discussion

To exchange your views on this topic, here are some suggestions that you should prepare in writing as a couple:

- a) What are the most important characteristics of a Christian community?
- b) What do you have to do to accept other members of the community as they are, without judging them, especially if their path is different from yours?

6 | Supplementary Texts

6.1. *“The result was that I had before me couples in whom dwelt two loves: love of their spouse and love of Christ... this is why they were eager to discover how to progress towards holiness with those two loves in their heart.*

The first meeting, very joyful, full of optimism, flowing from the great joy, which was theirs, of loving each other and loving Christ. They put thirty six questions to me and suddenly my apprehensions disappeared, I was even surprised to feel so much at ease, and then I understood why I was so much at ease. For the previous 10 or 15 years, I had had a relationship of love with Christ. In the company of these couples, who spoke to me of their love, I discovered the same laws which I had discerned in my relationship with Christ; the laws of love are the same everywhere. And this is what immediately won me over and made me enthusiastic; we were going to be able to help each other, they would bring to me the concrete life which they were leading, and I would bring to them such notions I had about spirituality... All of them, without exception, had no difficulty with the thought that holiness was their vocation. Holiness seemed to them the flowering of love... And then, this thought immediately led them to discover, in a entirely new way, the sacrament of marriage; it was not just a formality but a real source of prodigious grace...

*We had no idea that four months later war would be declared, the four couples would be dispersed and I myself would go off to the army”.*³

3. Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2018). Appendix 3 - Father Henri Caffarel - Extracts from the Chantilly Conference, 1987, pages 140-141.

6.2. “Unforgettable meetings. We could sense the same atmosphere of joy as if we were to set off at dawn on a beautiful summer day for a walk in the mountains. Each one of us brought a gift: the priest, his overall knowledge of marriage and the Christian doctrine; each spouse, a springtime experience of love and marriage. To find what we were looking for, it was necessary to go beyond biological, psychological, and sociological considerations, and beyond legal and moral points of view. If marriage is a “great mystery” as St Paul once proclaimed (Ephesians 5:32), only an act of faith can penetrate its divine richness. And indeed, our meetings took place in an atmosphere of lively, curious, and enthusiastic faith.

Not only is marriage part of God’s plan, but it reveals the richness of that plan. This was one of the most joyful discoveries of these young minds eager to know. How diligently they practised discovering the parable of marriage!»⁴

7 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Note the date, place, and time of the next meeting.
- ✦ Deliver the booklet for the 2nd meeting, which should be read and studied during the month, so that each couple can prepare for the next meeting in writing.
- ✦ Suggest the following homework: during the next month, set aside a few minutes each day to **read from or to listen to the Word of God**. You can use the Bible, liturgical books, or electronic means available.
- ✦ Take time to prepare a personal meditation related to next meeting’s prayer, especially if you find it difficult to improvise.

8 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Final blessing by the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor.

4. Father Henri Caffarel. **Vocation and Itinerary of the END**. Chapter : Les Origines – L’Anneau d’Or, number 87-88, August 1959, Pages 239-256.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Known generally by the French designation of Équipes Notre-Dame (END), Teams of Our Lady (TOOL) began in France in 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II. A young woman sought out a young priest and asked him how to reconcile marital love and love of God. The woman was concerned about making her spouse happy while he worried about earning a living for their offspring. Does God have a dream for the couple? This priest was Father Henri Caffarel. He asked the woman to come back with her husband, and soon afterwards to bring other couples who had the same desire. Father Caffarel did not have a ready-made answer, but he pronounced a phrase that has become famous in our movement: *“Let us seek together!”* That is how a small group of 4 couples and a priest started Teams of Our Lady, which at the time did not even have a name. They started to hold meetings and to think about the meaning of the sacrament of marriage and the love of the couple. When the war came, husbands were conscripted.

There was a painful period of death and famine which aroused fraternal help among these couples, considering the difficult times. This led them to discover the value of prayer. Gradually, it became clear to them that each couple’s love was willed by God as they discovered its many facets during their team life.



Teams of Our Lady
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**Piloting
Manual
for Couples
*Meeting 2***

Paris, July 2023



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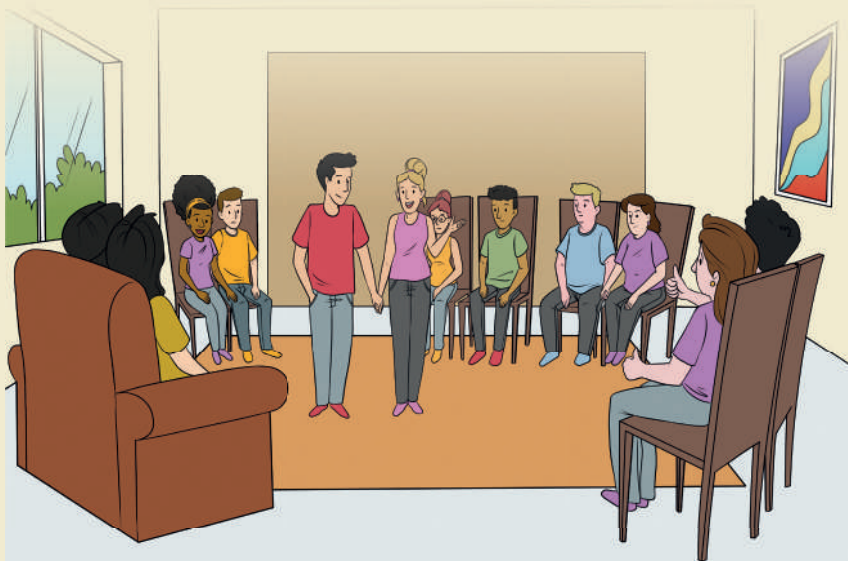
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MEETING 2

BUILDING COMMUNITY BY LISTENING TO GOD AND OTHERS



“Indeed, we are asked to listen to the Word of God with more than a distracted ear. We are asked to listen, earnestly and sincerely. It is said of King Solomon that he prayed to God: “Lord, give me a listening heart!” It is with the heart that we really listen to the Word of God”¹

1 | Hospitality

Hospitality is a Christian virtue. The Acts of the Apostles provide the example of Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who generously opened their home to the first communities to hold their meetings and also welcomed Paul, the apostle.

¹ Father Henri Caffarel. “Ecclesia”. III Chapter: Mystique of the Ecclesia - 5th condition. Conference in Brazil, 1957.

2 | The Meal

The meal is a moment of expression of friendship and consolidating the community. Around the table, we share a meal and share our lives.

3 | General Sharing

Getting to know each other is a prerequisite to building any team or community. It is a two-way street. On the one hand, each person is attentive to discovering the wonderful universe of each other person God has placed beside them on this journey. On the other hand, each person must learn to trust and to open his or her own heart so that others can appreciate it affectionately. It is a time to learn to respect differences that may complement us and open new horizons. It is also a time to remove the veil of appearances and reveal our truth. Sharing is a method that helps us realize the importance of each other person, a loved brother or sister, a fellow traveller.



4 | Prayer

In the joy of addressing the Lord together, consider highlighting this special moment with a sign placed in our midst: a candle, a picture, an icon or any other symbol according to local culture. You can also begin with a song.

Word of God: Gospel according to St. Matthew – 13:8-23

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Meditation

The Word of God touches our hearts in different ways. It calls for a personal response in the form of a prayer of praise, request, or thanksgiving. Each person may express a prayer that the text inspires to him or her, or repeat a phrase or a word that most caught his or her attention.

Prayer intentions

After the meditation, each member can share an intention that will be entrusted to the Lord and that will be carried by team members throughout the next month. We can also choose to express these intentions at the time of the final prayer and blessing.

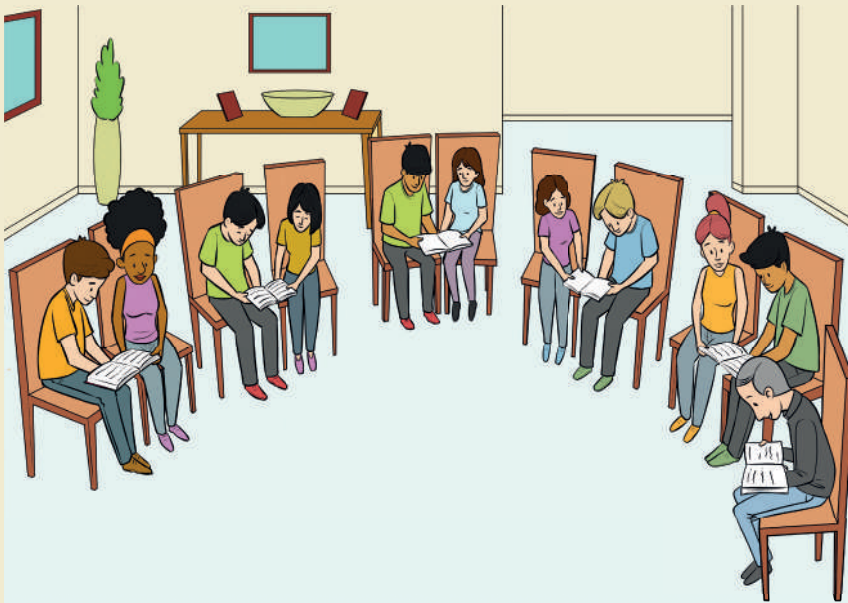
Concluding liturgical prayer

To conclude, we can connect with the universal Church by reading the psalm of the day, reciting the Lord’s Prayer or taking any other liturgical prayer chosen by the host couple.

5 | Study Topic: a Listening Team

5.1. Listening to the Word

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28).



5.1.1. How does God speak to us?

He speaks to us in many ways:

- ✦ Through the prophets and the saints.
- ✦ Through creation: creatures, nature and the cosmos.
- ✦ Through events of history and events in our personal lives.
- ✦ Through the Holy Scriptures.
- ✦ Above all through His Son, Jesus Christ, and through His Church.
- ✦ And also through others.

Christ is the Word of God incarnate. He is our light. His whole life is

given to us as the Word of God, a concrete and life-giving Word: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:1.14).

5.1.2. Why does God speak to us?

- ✦ God speaks to us because he loves us and wants to reveal his great desire to be close to us.
- ✦ He speaks to us to save us and to share his abundant life.
- ✦ He wants to communicate his thoughts, desires, and will to each of us.

5.1.3. Why listen to his Word?

- ✦ The Word of God is a source of joy: *“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”* (John 15:11).
- ✦ The Word of God helps us establish a loving relationship with Him and a personal contact with Christ.
- ✦ His Word gives orientation, breath, and meaning to everyone’s life.
- ✦ It helps us to apply the Gospel in our daily life, our personal life, our married life, and our family life.
- ✦ It nourishes our personal prayer as a source of life and renewal.
- ✦ It helps couples become more fully Christian because listening to the Word of God brings husband and wife closer to the Lord and to each other.

5.1.4. What are the difficulties of listening to God?

- ✦ Material difficulties: noise, fatigue, interruptions, illness, lack of regularity, stress of the current life.
- ✦ Spiritual obstacles: discouragement, laziness, distraction, superficial reading, lack of catechetical formation.
- ✦ These difficulties can be overcome by perseverance, calling on the help of the Holy Spirit, creating inner silence, and being faithful to an endeavor² called “Listening to the Word of God”. This endeavor will be explained in the current meeting (cf. 8) and experienced during the coming month.

2. Endeavors are inner attitudes to help apply the Gospel in daily life. TOOL members are committed especially to six endeavors: 1) listening to the Word of God; 2) a daily silent personal prayer; 3) a daily conjugal prayer; 4) a monthly conjugal dialogue under the eyes of God, called the “sit-down”; 5) a personal “rule of life”; 6) an annual retreat. Each endeavor is further developed throughout this booklet.

5.2. Listening to others

5.2.1. Attitudes of good listening

- ✦ Lend an ear and try to understand what the other person is saying, wanting, or feeling.
- ✦ Pay attention to what is said and what is happening.
- ✦ Welcome differences.
- ✦ Respect the concerns and joys of each person, without judging, with the sole aim of letting the other person express himself or herself.

5.2.2- Some tips for good listening

- ✦ Be available, with a watchful eye.
- ✦ Be patient, without interrupting or anticipating the other person's thoughts.
- ✦ Listen to ideas, not just words.
- ✦ Show interest: rephrase and ask questions.
- ✦ Forget personal worries.
- ✦ React to ideas, not to the person.

5.3. Questions for the topic discussion

5.3.1. Gathered as a team by the Word of God

- ✦ What is my experience of listening to the Word of God?
- ✦ Do I realize that Jesus is addressing me personally in his Gospel?
- ✦ From my understanding of the topic, what am I missing to achieve good listening of the Word of God?
- ✦ What should I do to make progress in listening to the Word of God?

5.3.2. United as a team through listening to each other

- ✦ What does truthful, sincere listening bring to each of us? When did I feel I was being listened to and how?
- ✦ What attitudes do I need to work on to better listen to the person speaking?
- ✦ What key points could be implemented to better listen to each other as a team?

(These questions are offered to help you think about the issue. You can choose those that appeal to you most or devise your own questions.)

6 | Supplementary Texts

6.1. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, nº 153

In the presence of God, during a calm and recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: “Lord, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this? Or perhaps: What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?” When we make an effort to listen to the Lord, temptations usually arise. One of them is simply to feel troubled or burdened, and to turn away. Another common temptation is to think about what the text means for other people, and so avoid applying it to our own life. Sometimes, we look for excuses to water down the clear meaning of the text. Or we can wonder if God is demanding too much of us, asking for a decision which we are not yet prepared to make. This leads many people to stop taking pleasure in the encounter with God’s word; but this would mean forgetting that no one is more patient than God our Father, that no one is more understanding and willing to wait. He always invites us to take a step forward but does not demand a full response if we are not yet ready. He simply asks that we sincerely look at our life and present ourselves honestly before him, and that we be willing to continue to grow, asking from him what we ourselves cannot as yet achieve.

6.2. Henri Caffarel, The Gospel, a love letter

“Within the Church which is a great community of hope, they too lived “joyfully in hope” (Romans 12:12). The hope of the Christian community is the love promised by God. The Word of Christ is also, and above all, a confession of love. On every page of the Gospel, this love emerges.

... Love creates love. But as a married couple, you are aware that we need to be told again and again that we are loved. Indeed, being loved is such an unforeseeable and un hoped-for miracle amid a world of sin. Those who do not listen regularly to the Word will soon forget that they are loved by God. However, the family that reads the Gospel carefully and faithfully will discover a gushing source of love, just as a love letter reveals various subtle tones of affection. Thus, the Word of Christ in the Gospel can transform a couple into a community of love... The couple is

alternately a community of penance, a community of faith, a community of hope, and a community of love; it is shaped by the Word of Christ, present and alive in the Gospel.

To justify not reading the Gospel, a friend once wrote to me: “After all, several books on spirituality explain the Gospel; their reading is more attractive because they are better adapted to our way of thinking”. What a surprise! The great difference between the Gospel and spiritual books is that the latter transmit knowledge, derived from the Gospel, whereas the former is the living, permanent, and effective Word of Christ. The Gospel is the same, direct Word that once calmed a raging storm, healed a leper, raised the dead, forgave sins and begat the children of God.

The Word of Christ in the Gospel has not lost its relevance, nor its virtue: it has endured, filled with creative power”.

6.3. Henri Caffarel, Finding God

“Finding God is the goal of true prayer. Through the grace of prayer, the encounter between God and his child becomes irresistible. When the child seeks him, the Father cannot shy away. When the Father seeks him, the child who understands the infinite paternal love can no longer shirk.

St Gregory of Nyssa tells us what it means to find God. It is an aspiration that grows gradually, with the grace of God, in the heart of the Christian: “To find God is to seek him relentlessly. Indeed, seeking and finding are not two different things; they are inseparable. The beneficial result of seeking is to seek further and endlessly. The desire of the soul is fulfilled because it remains insatiable; to see God properly is to never cease desiring him”.

7 | Presentation of a Part of the Team Meeting: the Meal

“They broke bread in their homes and ate with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46).

The first part of the monthly meeting usually begins with a meal. This is a time of intimacy that is fundamental to strengthening the bonds of friendship between people. It is important that the meal remain simple. Each couple may bring a dish so that everyone takes part and those who have little time or modest means may feel comfortable.



The meal should be a moment of grace when the team experiences the joy of being reunited, celebrating, and praying.³

During the meal, as well as during the whole meeting, Christ is present among us. Therefore, the meal has a spiritual dimension that we are called to live in simplicity and communion.

Mealtimes are a time of friendship, a time for sharing not only bread and salt but also, and above all, one's life, concerns, joys and sorrows, successes, and failures... Couples of the team need to live this friendship in order to know each other better on a human level so they can grow and help each other more effectively on a spiritual level.

It is important that everyone may speak and be heard without interruption and without side conversation. A simple meal makes it easier to listen.

8 | Presentation of an Endeavor: Listening to the Word

Every morning you communicate with your spouse and with your children. You are there to listen to their complaints, their worries, their words of love or gratitude.

How about the Living Being, the Word made flesh, revealed in the Gospel, who is waiting to share with you all his love, have you thought about that?

3. Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2018) - Chapter 5 (5.3.1) – The Monthly Meeting.



All you have to do is open your book and read. Gradually, we learn to savor each word and each verse. Listening to the Word is more than quickly browsing at the text or simply hearing with the ears. Listening to the Word involves the heart, which engages our whole being.

Teams of Our Lady invite each couple to listen to the Word of God every day. This endeavor includes two essential terms: LISTEN and WORD OF GOD. It is not just a matter of reading the Word. We are invited to listen carefully to what God wants to tell us, to welcome his Word and to keep it deep in our hearts, just as Mary did.

To live this endeavor fully and to allow the Word of God to find its way deep into our hearts, we need to set aside enough daily time in silence. Listening to the Word of God is a heart-to-heart conversation, and a sincere effort to live by his Word in our real life.

Let us then open our eyes to the divine light. Let our ears and hearts be open to the voice of God who cries out to us every day: “Today, *if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*” Psalm 95 (94), 8.

Lectio Divina



One way of listening to the Word of God is to practice “Lectio Divina”.

Lectio Divina consists of four steps that help us climb towards God. The four steps are as follows:

a) **Reading:** choose a biblical text.

Read, study, and become familiar with the text. Read as many times as necessary. Through careful reading, the sacred text begins to be part of yourself. Pay attention to what the text is about, who it is about and who it is intended for.

✦ What does this text from the Word of God say to me right now?

b) **Meditation:** discover what God wants to tell you.

Meditation means thinking about the text. The Holy Spirit has something to tell you. The text is then brought to bear on the current situation, thereby making it concrete, real and transformative for you.

✦ What is God saying to me in a unique, personal way through his Word?

c) **Prayer:** enter into a dialogue and loving communion with God.

Pray and notice that “SOMEONE” is coming to meet you. What does the text lead you to say to God? Praise, thank, plead, intercede, in short, ask God for his Word to fulfil his mission for you.

✦ What is my response to God at this time?

d) **Contemplation:** putting the Word of God into practice.

The fourth step of Lectio Divina proposes putting the Word of God into practice and discovering a “new way” of being and taking on life (transformative commitment). This step provides a real taste the WORD. Contemplation leads to stillness, rest, and a deep experience. It is a gift and a grace. Contemplation is also a time to bear witness to the changes brought about by the Word.

✦ What will I do to make the Word effective from now on?

Listening to the Word of God is one of the great resources for progressing along the path of holiness proposed by TOOL and which we are called to follow.

9 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Prepare the next meeting’s general sharing; do this as a couple.
- ✦ Read the next study topic and prepare in writing ideas you wish to express during the exchange; also do this as a couple.
- ✦ **During the coming month, try to listen to the Word of God** each day by reading a passage from the Gospel; meditate on it according to the method proposed this month on the endeavor.
- ✦ Prepare a personal spiritual sharing related to your experience of listening to the Word of God:
 - How did the Word of God affect your life?
 - What were your successes and failures?
 - How fruitful has listening to the Word of God been for you?
- ✦ Let’s practice real listening of each other during the next meeting.

10 | Final Prayer and Blessing

The movement is placed under the patronage of Our Lady, whom Paul VI called “the Virgin who listens”. She is our model of listening, being available and being obedient to the Holy Spirit. At the end of the meeting, the team prays, in communion with all members of the movement, by reciting the **Magnificat** (Luke 1:46-55), the movement’s official prayer.

“The term Magnificat comes from the Latin verb magnifico. It is very powerful and translates as ‘exploding with joy’. (La Croix Newspaper)

“The wonders that God does for her [Mary] are the wonders he does for us and for all humanity called to holiness”. (Cardinal Lustiger).

Before reciting the Magnificat, each team member can express personal prayer intentions.

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked with favor on His humble servant.*

*From this day all generations will call me blessed,
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.*

*He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.*

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

Final blessing by the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

Pay attention to this story: “The first team which was set up just before the war did not even think about giving itself a name. [...] However, everything that exists eventually needs a name; so, since we didn’t think about it, other people gave us one... and what a surprise when we heard about... the Caffarel groups! I was not flattered by this; it seemed to be a bad joke... We had to stop this at all costs. And to do so, we needed to give a name of a saint, something that would sound more... conventional... and authentic! It was then that I imitated the gesture of [French poet Charles] Péguy taking his children and putting them in the arms of the Virgin: ”just quietly in the arms of Our Lady who bears the sorrows of the world”. From that time on, everything went well. Naturally. And that is why our teams are called the Teams of Our Lady”.



Father Henri Caffarel. Monthly Letter, Équipes Notre-Dame, May 1949.

Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples
*Meeting 3***

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

This document is for internal use by the
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MEETING

3

WALKING WITH CHRIST AS A TEAM



“Christ can be fully active only if we are gathered first and foremost for Him, and to meet Him. Hence, we need to bring to light this true intention. We come together in the name of Jesus Christ; we must be aware of this before any meeting”. (Father Henri Caffarel)

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them “ (Matthew 18:20)

“You are the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

1 | Hospitality

What a pleasure it is to be together again for another meeting of our team. Let us make the most of these moments. Let us make an effort to leave our worries outside.

The topic of this meeting will be inspiring. Who would not be happy to recognise that Christ himself walks beside us?

We are invited to become aware of his presence. He reveals the love of the Father to us, he treats us as friends, he helps us, and he takes us by the hand. This invitation is a privilege and a gift. Let us rejoice because this encounter with him will be a real celebration.

2 | The Meal

As in previous meetings, the meal is friendly. It should be a moment of grace when the team experiences the joy of being together, celebrating, feasting, and praying.

Let us begin the meal with a prayer and a blessing from the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor.

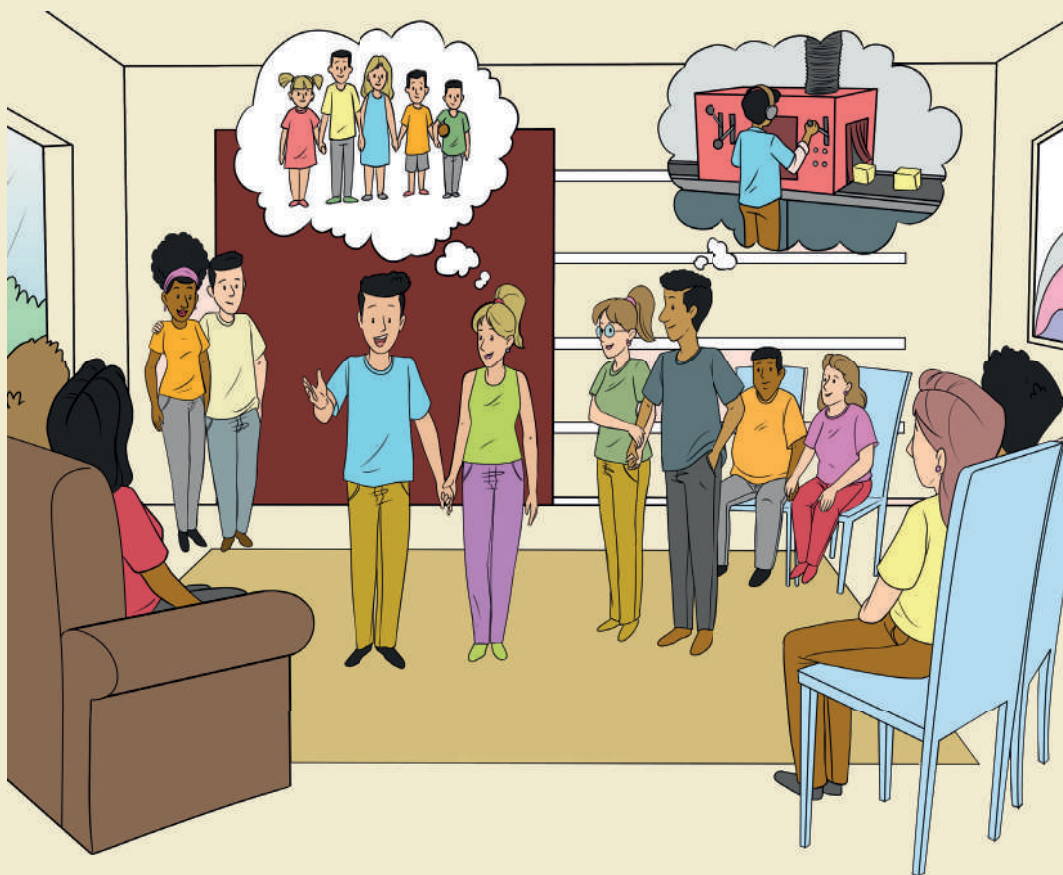
3 | General Sharing

“A community is a union of people who do not hide their joys or sorrows, but in hope make them visible to all. In community we say: “Life is full of successes and failures, joys and sorrows, highs and lows, but we do not have to live them alone.”¹

General sharing is a very important moment where everyone expresses themselves while others listen.

1. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Dutch Catholic priest (1932-1996), author of many spiritual books including “Can you drink the cup I am about to drink?” in which he recalls his daily life at the Day-break Ark community near Toronto.

Let's share what has been meaningful to us over the past month, how we felt about such an event by expressing ourselves in the first person. If you don't know what to talk about, here are some questions that can help you choose a meaningful subject.



- What are the highlights of the past month? What is the most important event I experienced during the month?
- What are the dark and bright signs in my life? How can I react?
- What does my experience of team life so far inspire me?

After everyone has shared, anyone can intervene if he or she considers it useful, in an attitude of mutual listening.

4 | Prayer

In the joy of addressing the Lord together, it may be appropriate to highlight this privileged moment with a sign placed in our midst: a candle, an image, an icon, a statue, or any other symbol reflecting our religious culture.

A song or an **invocation to the Holy Spirit** can be used to begin.

Word of God: Gospel according to St John 15:12-17



After sharing his last meal with his disciples, Jesus said to them:

“This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends. You are my friends if you do as I command. I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; I call you my friends, for all that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit and abiding fruit, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. What I command you is to love one another.

Meditation

Each person in turn may express a prayer that the text inspires him or her. The SC or SA is invited, as every other member of the team, to share his or her meditation.

Prayer intentions

After the meditation, we can share with each other, if we wish, intentions that will be entrusted to the Lord and that continue to be carried by members throughout the next month. We can also choose collectively to express these intentions at the time of the final prayer and blessing.

Concluding liturgical prayer

To conclude, we can connect with the universal Church by reading the psalm of the day or by reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

5 | Study Topic: Teaming up with Christ

An essential concept of the journey is that we each begin from a personal starting point and that we move forward to the common goal of meeting God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Each of us may be at a different stage of the journey. **Christ** calls us both personally and as a couple. We wish to journey as a couple, sustained by our sacrament of marriage.

In the sacrament of marriage, Christ has said “yes” to our mutual “yes”. He has committed himself to walk with us, to make our love succeed by infusing it with his own love, if we also walk with him. Christ wants to lead us to happiness, the fruit of love.

For three years Christ taught his disciples to love one another as “he loved them” (John 13:34). But the result was not very convincing during the Passion. After his death and resurrection, however, he sends them his Spirit and fire, which bind their little **community** together in love. The disciples are then propelled on the roads of the world to proclaim his Good News.

“To love as Christ did is to tell each other our best thoughts and our best deeds, i.e. what we know of God and what we experience with Him” (Father Caffarel).

In the Acts of the Apostles (2:42), saint Luke recounts the devotion of the first disciples to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

- ✦ Couples in TOOL are brought together as a team in **the name of Christ**. They place Him at the heart of their lives. **The team** is only a means, not a goal: the goal is to meet God, to meet Christ. The team focuses on building the Kingdom of God, otherwise it risks becoming a ghetto or a lump rather than being the ferment and the leaven in the dough...
- ✦ It would be unfortunate to reduce the team to mere friendship between members. The team strives to be a **community of Christ’s disciples**. We come together as a team to live, as much as possible, the true love of Christ, the true love of others.
- ✦ All team members are responsible for the spiritual growth of each couple.
- ✦ Couples want to be guided by Christ.
- ✦ They want to bring the message of Christ to the world.
- ✦ They are proud of belonging to the Church and walking with it, supporting it actively.
- ✦ Together they seek relentlessly the infinite riches of Christ.
- ✦ They seek unity with Christ through prayer, an important part of their lives.

Questions for topic discussion

- Do we personally and as a couple feel a call from Christ to walk with him? How do we respond to it? How do we live it?
- “When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the their midst”: how do we want to live this reality of faith, especially in the team?
- How can we walk as a team with Christ and how can we help each other to do so? In what practical ways?

6 | Supplementary Texts

- ✦ **When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in their midst.** *“To meet Jesus Christ means, first of all, to listen to the one who is there. He speaks to us through Scripture which arouses our love for his Word. He also speaks to us through the teachings of the Church which have gradually developed over centuries of meditation. Christ also speaks through our brothers and sisters in ways that go beyond words. He speaks in different ways during a team meeting, so it is necessary to have “a listening heart” and “an understanding mind” as young king Solomon desired (1 Kings 3:9). Christ speaks intimately to each one of us, revealing his Father and his great plan, inviting us to conversion. He speaks to move us to help others... Beyond talking, Christ gives a Spirit of strength to those who confess their helplessness, as he did with little peasants of Galilee who became tireless witnesses of the Savior”²*
- ✦ *“Have you noticed a small phrase in Christ’s sentence? He did not simply say: “When two or three of you are gathered together, I am in your midst”. He added: “in my name...”. In other words: if you want my promise to be fulfilled, it is not enough that you are gathered for any reason, however good it may be. Indeed, you must also be gathered for me, to love me, to seek me. The second condition for the promise to be fulfilled is in the word “gathered”. People can meet together without being united, reunited, or truly “gathered”. Finally, how is union achieved in the name of Christ? It is by bringing together the best of two or more children of God: their knowledge and their love of the Lord. Otherwise, they simply come together, side by side, never seeking or finding union.”³*

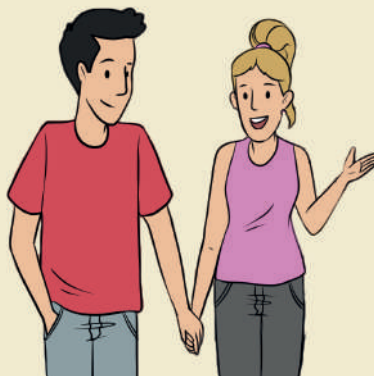
2. Father Henri Caffarel. Letter of the END, March-April 1973.

3. Father Henri Caffarel. Les Equipes Notre Dame, Essor et Mission des Couples Chrétiens. Chapter “At the service of the new commandment (1965) - The response of Scripture”, page 85.

7 | Testimony: A Community Gathered in the Name of Christ

“Joining TOOL after 10 years of marriage was a way of showing God, the Church and ourselves the desire to move forward in our couple’s spiritual journey. We recognised that nothing can be taken for granted. In the team, we found remarkable, radiant people who clearly shared our desire.

As we were married late, and the team was formed according to the age of the children, we were older and had fewer children than the other couples.



Sharing our lives in all simplicity required some humility. However, we did not feel intimidated because of the extraordinary people in our team. Meeting people who shared our desire for a life grounded in God renewed our hope. It made us realize that, despite our lack of social visibility, we were not entirely alone on this journey.

The goodwill we experienced in the team, rooted in the love of Christ, gave us a lot of light. We learned to use tools to better understand what seemed to us like jargon, enabling us to powerfully move forward.

(Couple from the Super Region France-Luxemburg-Switzerland)

8 | Presentation of a Part of the Team Meeting: Prayer

“Jesus told them a parable about how they should always pray and never grow weary” (Luke 18:1).

“Prayer is a personal dialogue between God and the individual or the community. (John Paul II, Agenda for the Third Millennium).

Prayer is an essential part of the life of each team. It is the centre and summit of the meeting and can sometimes take the form of a celebration of the Eucharist (**after asking permission, if necessary**). It allows each person to respond personally to the Word of God from his or her own experience, formulating intentions, praising, or thanking Him.

Praying together during the team meeting opens our hearts and prepares us to welcome God's grace. The prayer can be recited at the beginning of the meeting or after the meal and the sharing.

The prayer begins by reading aloud a **text from the Scriptures**; it is followed by a time of silence to welcome the Word of the Lord and to meditate on it.



Members then express their thoughts on the text in the form of a **shared prayer**. God speaks to us through the voices of our brothers and sisters. Silence after each meditation is itself a prayer. In this way, we listen to the Word from within ourselves and through the small “church” formed by the team.

Team members then offer **prayer intentions** so that everyone can join them by giving thanks, by asking for enlightenment, strength, forgiveness, or intercession. These intentions can also be formulated before the final prayer of the team (cf. 11). Each team defines the moment it considers most appropriate.

All couples and the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor listen as a team and carry together each other's prayer intentions. These intentions may be incorporated into daily prayers of team members during the following month.

Then the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor, who has participated in the shared prayer and formulated his or her own intentions, summarises the prayers and intentions of the couples and presents them to God.

The time of prayer usually ends with a liturgical prayer, the Lord's Prayer, a psalm, or a hymn that brings us in close union with the universal Church of Christ, of which we are an inseparable part.

9

Presentation of an Endeavor: Personal Prayer

Personal prayer is the form of prayer by which TOOL members are invited to enter into deep communion with Christ.

The movement gives practical guidelines for this purpose, which everyone should adapt with discernment.

9.1. Definitions

Numerous definitions of prayer have been proposed throughout history and reveal different facets of this encounter with God.

- ✦ Prayer is a conversation with God (St Clement of Alexandria).
- ✦ It is a casual conversation with God (St John Chrysostom).
- ✦ It is “taking care” of God (St. Benedict).
- ✦ Prayer is an intimate exchange of friendship in a one-to-one conversation with God by whom we feel loved (Saint Teresa of Avila).
- ✦ It is to think of God by loving him (Charles de Foucauld).
- ✦ It is a dialogue of a child of God with his Father in Heaven, under the action of the Holy Spirit (Dom Marmion).

Father Caffarel also spoke out frequently on the subject.

“Personal prayer is a conversation with God, a deep orientation of the soul; it requires mindfulness, a full presence to God of our whole being, body and soul, with all our senses”.

“Do you want to learn how to pray? Seek knowledge from Christ. I am not talking about a purely intellectual knowledge, but a knowledge of faith and love. And first of all, believe firmly that Christ is not a figure lost in the mist of history. He is a living person, the Living One who stands at your door and knocks, as he says himself [Revelation 3:20]. He is the Christ who turned towards you and wants to enter into a personal relationship with you. You are called to find out what Christ feels and thinks about you and what he wants from you. In order not to get lost in speculation or illusion, there is only one way: take hold of Him, never let go, and search relentlessly. Gradually, with growing certainty, the true face of Christ will be revealed to you. With the help of his grace, you will discover the deep riches of his love, of which Saint Paul speaks.”⁴

4. Father Henri Caffarel. The unfathomable riches of Christ ; henri-caffarel.org.

9.2. The time, place and attitude for the personal prayer

Teams of Our Lady propose to set aside “time for the Lord, for an intimate moment with Him, and to live in His presence”. This time should be planned in advance (initially 10 minutes). This practice requires perseverance and humility.

Find a quiet place that can help you pray from the heart.

Make room for inner silence to welcome the presence of God and to offer yourself to him. Bring back your mind to him whenever it starts wandering.

On days when the Word does not reach me, simply embrace the Lord’s feet and offer yourself to him. Consciously surrender yourself to his watchful eye and abandon yourself into his hands. This abandonment in prayer will bring out faith, hope and love from all our being.

Talk to the Lord: take time to confide to him. Express in your own words a response to his Word. Talk to him as a friend would talk to a friend. Ask him for advice. Thank him, adore him, praise him. Be silent and listen to him.

9.3. The conduct of personal prayer



The first step is to enter into prayer: after a sign of the cross, place yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself entirely to him. Invoke the Holy Spirit.

“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”.

“Lord, I want what you want,” used to say Father Caffarel.

Move the focus away from yourself and refocus on God. There is no uniform way to engage in a loving encounter with Jesus. However, an essential aspect is to make yourself totally present, with fervor and humility, because the guest is waiting for you with open arms.

Ask the Lord for a grace, a favor. For example, you may ask to increase your love for Him, your faith, or your perseverance in prayer.

Take the chosen text from the Word of God, read it slowly, several times. Picture the scene, contemplate it. Watch the people act, hear what they say... Make a pause where you find interest, flavor, a specific appeal.

You may complete the personal prayer by reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Finally, we turn to the Lord to give him thanks for his presence, and for his creative work through us and throughout the world.

10 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Make a note of the date and place of the next meeting; decide on a facilitating couple.
- ✦ Prepare your participation for the general sharing as a couple.
- ✦ Read the next study topic and prepare in writing any ideas you wish to share during the exchange; do this as a couple.
- ✦ Continue to listen to the Word of God.
- ✦ You are invited to discover and take time for **prayer** every day.
- ✦ At the next meeting, you will have an opportunity to discuss about two endeavors: how did you experience Listening to the Word of God, and the Personal Prayer?

11 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Before reciting the final prayer, personal intentions may be expressed now by each member of the team if this was not done during the initial prayer time (cf. 4).

During the previous meeting, it was stated that the **Magnificat** is the official prayer that unites all TOOL members worldwide.

The former spiritual advisor of ERI, Father Bernard Olivier, o.p., presented the Magnificat as follows: *“The Church has chosen this hymn of thanksgiving as one of the main elements of the daily liturgy: it is the evangelical hymn of the Evening Prayer (Vespers). So, if we want to listen to the Word of God offered to us and if we want to be nourished by it, we cannot simply recite or sing the Magnificat in a distracted way. We should enter the spirit of the text which takes us into the heart of the mystery of God. With Mary, we must greet joyfully the fulfilment of the promises and of the expectations of the people of God.*

Magnificat :

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked with favor on His humble servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed,
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.*

*He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.*

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

Final blessing of the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

Did you know that in 1947, when the Teams of our Lady Charter was promulgated, many TOOL members did not accept it because they thought it was too demanding?

Father Caffarel did not abandon these dissidents who formed another less rigid movement called the Foyers de Chrétienté (“Households of Christianity”). But a few years later, this movement disappeared while those who wanted to be faithful to the proposal of the 1947 Charter saw the TOOL movement flourish and spread to many places in France and abroad.

Jean Allemand. A Man Seized by God, page 71, Excerpts - Brazilian Edition.



Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples
*Meeting 4***

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

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MEETING 4

RADIATING AS A TEAM: MUTUAL SUPPORT AND TESTIMONY



“A team, above all, must be a school of mercy. When married couples practice mutual help and brotherly love, their hearts grow. And little by little, their love spreads beyond their house, their neighborhood, their country... It goes all the way to the seashore.”¹

1. Father Henri Caffarel. The fruits of mercy. Monthly letter of the END, October 1950.

1 | Hospitality

We are happy to welcome the whole team. We appreciate being welcomed by the host couple who opens their home to us. Let us pause for a moment, open our hearts, and create an atmosphere of openness, friendship, sincerity and joy.

2 | The Meal

Let's start the meal with a prayer and blessing from the spiritual counselor or advisor.

3 | General Sharing

During general sharing, each person speaks in turn while others listen. Prepare as a couple what you want to share with the team. And if nothing specific comes to mind, you can help yourself by answering one or more of the following questions.

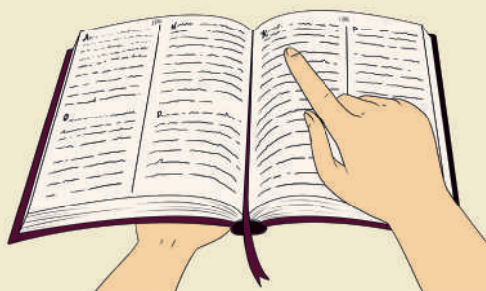
- ✦ What are the highlights of the past month? Or what is the most important event experienced during the month?
- ✦ What are the dark and light areas? How can we react?

4 | Prayer

Word of God:

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

“Be merciful, as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and it will be forgiven you”. (Luke 6:36-37)
“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the laws of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).



Meditation

“For the Word of God is living and effective” (Hebrews 4:12). The words we have just heard have touched our hearts in different ways. Each person can express aloud the prayer that these texts inspire in us, repeating or retelling the phrase or word that most caught our attention.

Prayer intentions (here or at the end of the meeting)

Concluding liturgical prayer

A psalm or another official church prayer to remind us of our membership and participation in the life of the universal Church of Christ.

5 | Introduction to Sharing about the Endeavors

This first sharing of our spiritual life is based on two endeavors already presented: listening to the Word of God and personal prayer.

Sharing about the endeavors is a way of helping each other. Talking about our discoveries, difficulties, and ways of overcoming them provides everyone with valuable help on the path of spiritual growth.

Briefly explain to other members how listening to the Word of God and personal prayer have been a part of your life this month. Before the meeting, ask yourself whether you have really taken time to meet God personally.

6 | Study Topic: a Team Reflecting God's Love



A love that knows how to be mindful to the needs of others

The team pays special attention to one another. Each member of the team looks at everyone else with empathy. Everyone tries to notice needs, concerns and anxieties of other members. Love overcomes the worst obstacles. When we love someone, or when we feel loved by someone, we understand better what each person wants to express.

✦ A love that is given freely

Team members practice selfless love. We love without expecting anything in return. Our love may even cost us something, but we always love freely.

✦ A love that does not overlook weaknesses and mistakes but understands and forgives them

The team helps each member discover the truth about himself or herself and may even resort to fraternal admonitions. At the same time, team members always try to understand and forgive mistakes.

✦ A love that recognises the inner beauty of others without judging

The team can see the goodness and beauty in every person. Noticing and discovering inner beauty requires patience, perseverance, and a caring interest. No one in the team judges other members.

✦ A love that seeks truth of the heart before truth of the reason

There is no growth in a team without being merciful to one another. Brotherly mercy requires looking at your neighbor first with your heart.

✦ A love that obeys with confidence the will of the Father

The team helps discover and discern God's will for each other, and then to make the right choices.

✦ A marital love that becomes a witness of God's love

Love withers if it closes in on itself. However, mutual help contributes to the flourishing of each couple who becomes more responsible and active for its own spiritual growth.

The team supports its members in their growing love of God and neighbors. Each member of the team becomes responsible for the spiritual growth of others and participates indirectly to their witness.

Love is a great testimony that TOOL can give to the world.

We are witnesses and prophets of God's love for our children.

Couples are witnesses of Christ in the Church and in the world.

The team that gathers in the name of Christ and reflects God's love radiates this love to others nearby and far away. It becomes a sign of unity and a witness to those close and around it, and eventually to the world.

Couples in TOOL respond to the Church's call for new evangelisation based on human love and family life.

Couples are called to be the leaven of renewal, not only in the Church, but also in the world.

The teams strive to meet the four requirements of brotherly love: to give, to receive - and sometimes with more difficulty - to ask and to know how to refuse.

Questions for the topic exchange

- a) How do you understand the words: "*Where brotherly love is, there is Christ*"?
- b) Despite faults of your loved ones, do you perceive their inner beauty? Does this require patience and perseverance? How do you overcome difficulties?
- c) Do you help each other in your marriage to discover the truth about yourself?
- d) What testimony can we give to the world through our love?

7 | Supplementary Texts

7.1. The fruits of mercy²

Today, I would like to tell you why it is so important that fraternal mercy be always present in your team and that it continue to grow.

- ✦ *The team must above all be a school of mercy. When married couples practice mutual help and marital love, their hearts grow and gradually their love spreads beyond their house, their neighborhood, their country... It reaches the seaside.*
- ✦ *It is important to build a Church in which the Eucharistic Christ is always present. However, it is equally important for Christianity to build communities of mercy: this is a different way of showing the presence of Christ among people. Where there is brotherly love, there is Christ. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)*
- ✦ *Where Christ is, there is the Church. The Church is where there are loving Christians. Christ is in the community of Christians if the community sincerely wants the presence of the Church, by putting itself at the service of the Church.*
- ✦ *Christians, when united, have an extraordinary power of intercession: "If two of you agree on earth to ask for anything, it will be granted to them by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19).*
- ✦ *Brotherly love is an exceptionally fertile spiritual source: the surrounding desert begins to bloom. The parish priest of a suburban parish once told me: "When one of the streets in my parish smelled too bad, I asked two Christian families to move in (this was before the war!). And to simply witness their brotherly love. Within six months, the inhabitants of the street got a breath of fresh air. «*
- ✦ *To practice fraternal mercy is God's mission to humanity. This most important mission reveals the depth of his Trinitarian life. Seeing Christians who are "one" as the Father and the Son are one is more meaningful and persuasive than just talking about God.*

2. Father Henri Caffarel. Monthly letter of the END, IV year, n° 2, November 1950.

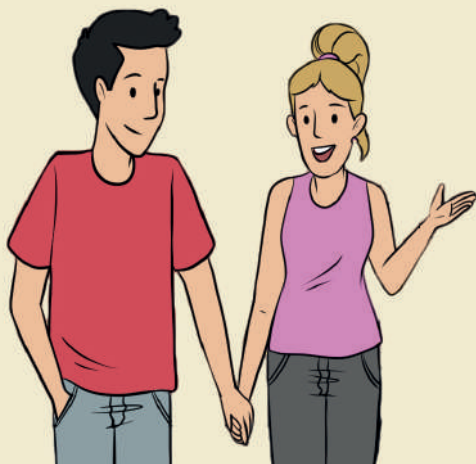
- ✦ *Nothing on earth glorifies God more than fraternal mercy because, as we know, nothing on earth resembles Him more. Is this your goal: to make your team the fruit of mercy?*

7.2. A Good Vision³

I wanted to talk to you about kindness because it is so necessary in the daily life of the team. After thinking about it however, I now want to talk about a different, even more fundamental quality that prepares and comes before kindness. This quality has no name in French [nor in English]. It doesn't matter, let's call it "good vision". Good vision is the ability to see goodness in everything and everyone around us. It originates from a good character. Others will say that it is a sign that your liver is functioning well. Don't believe it: good vision is an art, and a most difficult one! I remember a story by Georges Duhamel [a French physician and writer, 1884-1966]. It was during the war. For two years he lived with a silent man in whom - it seemed - the soul was dead. One day, this silent man uttered a word whose intonation disturbed Duhamel: could there be a depth in this silent man that had not been noticed before? Duhamel decided to investigate. "I spent several days with a pickaxe, a hoe and a mining lamp. I discovered the truth with the amazement with which you discover underground caves with unexplored rivers, colonnades, vaults ...". You must first try to know each person for real. And then believe in the richness of his depth, in the richness of his intelligence, in the richness of his heart, which is even more noble: in the image of God, more or less hidden in him, the discovery of which will certainly be delightful. Such a discovery of someone's inner world requires a lot of patience, perseverance, kindness, respect, and intense and persistent attention to his tastes and abilities, aspirations, failures, and passions: a thousand signs through which you can see the inner life. Remember the important command of the Fox in the Little Prince's tale: "You see well only with your heart. The most important thing is invisible to the eyes". Believe me: the whole team will soon practice mercy I spoke about in the previous Newsletter..., provided that all members practice GOOD VISION.

3. Father Henri Caffarel. Monthly letter of the END, IV year, n° 3, December 1950.

8 | Testimony: Mutual Support



When we started in the movement, we had been married for only 7 months. We were still in a difficult phase of adaptation to our new home and city. Early on, we thought of giving up, but it felt like giving up God and our happiness. And so we continued on this “bridge” called a Team of Our Lady, which became our family, our support and our protection at all times in

our life. We remember a time when this ‘bridge’ made us touch the sky. We were living in a house next to another building in our backyard. We were told that it could collapse, and we had 40 minutes to leave our house. Very terrified, not knowing what to do, we sent a message to our team saying we needed help. EVERYONE sympathised with our situation and within 10 minutes they were there to help us, carrying bags, and providing support, hope and strength. When we think about this scene, tears stream down our faces. God prepared friends/family that we could count on in any situation.

After loading a lot of stuff into the cars, still baffled by what was happening, we were asked, “Where are we going to bring all this?” We looked at each other, and we had no answer to that question. At this point a team member immediately said, “Home!” A feeling of relief came upon us; we would bring everything there. Imagine the mess when we got there, with everyone carrying things as they did! We were welcomed, cuddled, and supported by this family, as well as by the entire team. It meant a lot to us, receiving so much affection from everyone; we were receiving immeasurable love from every member of our team. We stayed for 2 weeks, with our son and a dog, until

we found another house where we could move into. Everyone was involved in helping us, each in their own way; they played an important part in making it through this great difficulty.

We received a lot of help and affection from the movement in general (not only from our team). This led us to become a virtuous group, supporting one another. We feel more and more that we belong to each other and that we all belong to God.

Our life in TOOL has exceeded our expectations. More than simply called to serve, we have been nourished, with maturity and faith, to follow step by step the path of marital holiness, according to the mysticism enlightened by our great founder Father Caffarel. We understand the deep meaning of the sacrament of marriage, where much is asked, but where love is in overabundance.

(Couple from the Brazil Super Region)

9 | Presentation of a Part of the Team Meeting: Introduction to Sharing on the Endeavors

“By obeying the truth, you have sanctified your souls to love one another sincerely as brothers” (1 Peter 1:22).

Sharing on the endeavors is a path of conversion for the community formed by the team. This part of the meeting aims to give a concrete expression to spiritual help between members of the team. It takes place in an atmosphere of prayer, careful listening, mutual support, motivation, love, and respect for each other’s needs. The best time for sharing about endeavors is the time after the team prayer, a way of continuing and prolonging the atmosphere of prayer.

Each member of the team is invited to share his or her experience with endeavors, his or her efforts over the past month. Sharing them is not an examination of conscience, nor a review of successes and failures, but a review of the efforts needed to progress in the spiritual life. Each member of the team is at a different stage of his or her spiritual life, which develops at his or her own pace. It is important to accept this diversity so that everyone can share openly and confidently.



The experience, progress or difficulty of each team member can help others to follow their own faith journey. Sharing also contributes to create and build community. Indeed, community develops when we share our lives, when we search together, when we help each other, when we share the gift of God that we have received. Sharing about endeavors is the place and time to be in presence of the Other in its broadest and deepest sense. In summary, sharing about endeavors has two important functions:

- a) To accompany, support and motivate each other to put endeavors into practice;
- b) To deepen the experience of three life attitudes proposed by TOOL:

- ✦ Seeking diligently God's will,
- ✦ Seeking the truth about oneself,
- ✦ Living the experience of encounter and communion.

10 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Make a note of the date and place of the next meeting and decide on the facilitator.
- ✦ Prepare your participation in the general sharing as a couple.
- ✦ Prepare for sharing about two endeavors: listening to the Word of God and personal prayer.
- ✦ Read the next study topic and prepare your thoughts in writing for the exchange; do this as a couple.
- ✦ Continue to listen to the Word of God. You are invited to discover the Word and to take time for prayer every day.

11 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

Reciting the Magnificat each evening bears witness to the common prayer of TOOL and expresses our thanksgiving. This Marian prayer brings joy to our hearts and renews the Eucharistic thanksgiving for the gift received and the gift offered. At the end of each day, should we not be overjoyed to happily give thanks to the Lord for the wonders and his actions in the world? To recite Mary's song is to give thanksgiving together with a woman, entrusted to a man - Joseph - and who is so "filled" with the Holy Spirit that she is pregnant with the Son of God [...] The couple who prays in this way reflects the Church singing the wonders of her Lord, the Lord who continues to exalt his servant. In other words, couples join together in the secret of their hearts, their lives, and their flesh, truly saying "yes" to God. They are the Church that prays.⁴

Let us pray together:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked with favor on His humble servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed,
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.*

*He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.*

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

Prayer intentions expressed at this time if this was not done at the end of the regular prayer time (cf. 4).

Final blessing of the spiritual counselor or the spiritual advisor.

4. Father Henri Caffarel. Des Equipes Notre-Dame à la Maison de Prière, Actes du 1er Colloque (2010), page 220.

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

His name was Henri Auguste Marie Caffarel, born on July 30th 1903 in Lyon, France. He was the eldest son of a very devout Catholic family, which had given several priests to the Church.

In fact, it was an uncle - Abbé Louis Vernard - who baptised him. Father Caffarel is very discreet about his family and never talks about his parents. His father was the head of a successful business supplying raw materials for the hat industry. Financially, the family was well off, and never had any difficulties. Father Caffarel received a classical education and passed his baccalaureate at the Marist Fathers.



He enrolled in the Faculty of Law but interrupted his studies due to health problems.

Suffering from anaemia and chronic fatigue, while waiting to resume his studies, he worked with his father and joined the Action Catholique Lyonnaise.

Father Henri Caffarel. From the Teams of Our Lady to the House of Prayer - Book of Acts of the 1st Colloquium, page 18.

Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
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for Couples
*Meeting 5***

Paris, July 2023



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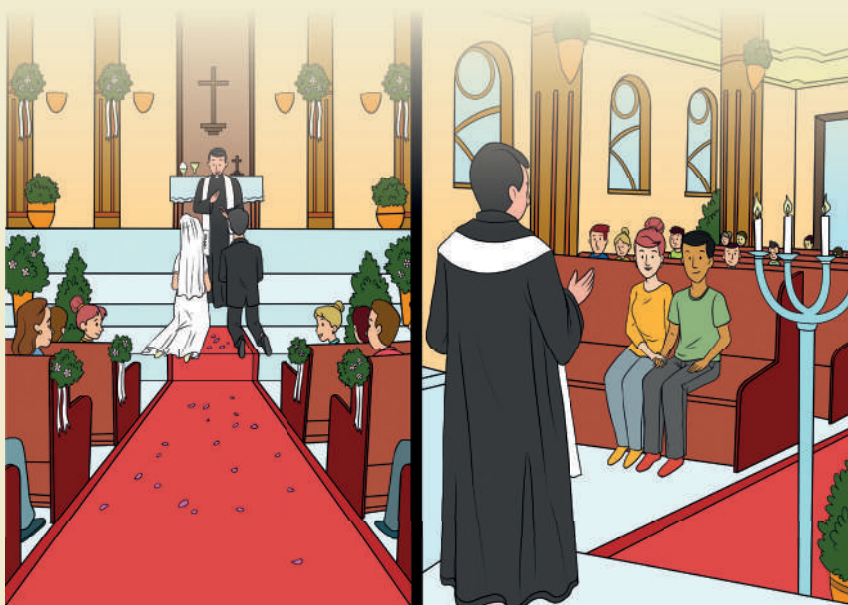
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MEETING

5

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE AND MARITAL SPIRITUALITY



“In fact, [the sacrament of marriage] is a commitment to a life of giving, renouncing and sacrifice that become more and more frequent as a response to repeated demands of love. The unity of the couple starts when each spouse gives himself or herself to the other; it is never a completed task. Unity must be regained every day and deepened by renewed and ever more perfect gifts and renunciations”¹

1. Father Henri Caffarel. L'Anneau d'Or, special issue “Le mariage, ce grand sacrement”, n° 111-112, May-August 1963, Extracts.

1 | Hospitality

In the joy of meeting again today, you are called to rediscover the treasure of the sacrament of marriage and the paths of conjugal spirituality. The TOOL movement invites you in this great adventure of love for God and your spouse. The meeting has much to offer you: God wants to show you the best of human love. Let the light of the Holy Spirit guide you. Prepare your heart and start sowing the seed of God's grace. Then you will see how abundant the harvest is.

2 | The Meal

The meal is part of the meeting that allows us to feel like brothers and sisters. It is a happy moment of exchange, joy, and encounters that strengthen the community united around the same table. During a fraternal meal, which reminds us of the bread given and shared by Christ, we are called to appreciate the joy of living as brothers and sisters.

3 | General Sharing

The general sharing is a time when everyone expresses himself or herself while all other members listen and try to understand and help the person sharing. During the last month, each one of us has experienced remarkable events, disturbing concerns, or beautiful discoveries that we would like to share.

4 | Prayer

We can use a sign placed in our midst: a candle, a picture, an icon...

You can also begin with a song or another symbol from your country's culture to introduce this moment of prayer.

More than just listening or speaking, the time of prayer means placing oneself before God. It is a moment of encounter, of relationship with Someone who

wants to speak to us about love. We must take off all disguises, throw off our masks and recognise who we are, in order to free ourselves and be transformed. The time of prayer begins by listening carefully to a biblical text, after which each person expresses, in simple words, a personal response or a repetition of words, that have strongly touched him or her. The prayer includes praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and requests for forgiveness. Let the Word of God touch you.



Word of God: 1st Corinthians 13:4-8

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends”.

Meditation

The Word we hear touches our hearts in different ways.

Each person can express the prayer that this text inspires in them out loud. Or repeat the sentence or word that caught their attention the most.

Prayer intentions (here or at the end of the meeting)

Concluding liturgical prayer

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.” (Song of Songs, 8:6-7).

5 | Sharing on two Endeavors: Listening to the Word of God and Personal Prayer

During Meeting 4 (section 9), we saw that each team member is invited to share his or her experience of the endeavors during the previous month. Sharing them is not an examination of conscience, nor a statement of successes and failures, but a review of the efforts needed to progress in the spiritual life.

Each team member is at a different stage of his or her spiritual life, developing at a his or her own personal pace. Accepting this diversity is important so that everyone can share on the endeavors openly and confidently.

We propose to continue meditating on the **Word of God** and the **Personal prayer**. Can we share the benefits and difficulties of living these moments over the past month?

6 | Presentation of a Part of the Team Meeting: Study Topic



To help us to deepen our faith, Teams of Our Lady propose each year a new study topic. Some topics concern biblical texts, Church documents, various texts on the couple, marriage, love, work, the family, the missionary couple, etc.

A reflection on various topics helps us to develop our “intelligence of

faith and to evangelise our lives”. The annual topic should not just be an exchange of views. Rather, it is intended to transform our lives, for each couple and for the spiritual counselor/advisor. The exchange on the study topic will be fruitful only if it is prepared as a couple, in writing. Each couple studies the topic together, takes time to have exchanges and puts their conclusions in writing before the team meeting.

In a typical topic, we find biblical citations, texts by the founder of TOOL (Father Caffarel), personal testimonies and questions for further exploration by members.

During the meeting, members discuss and answer the proposed questions. Obscure points should also be clarified and there should be a brief discussion when disagreements appear. All team members participate, contributing to the deepening and concrete implications of the questions raised in the life of each person... The SC/SA brings the light of the Church’s doctrine and teaching.



The exchange on the topic does not consist of a purely intellectual and theoretical study but should lead each couple to discover the means to grow as a couple, as parents, as citizens, in short, as children of God in the different aspects of human life.

7 | Study Topic: The Unsuspected Richness of the Sacrament of Marriage

The study topic of the present meeting places us at the heart of the spirit of Teams of Our Lady. The heart of TOOL, also called charism, is a specific gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Church for the common good of couples. This gift was welcomed by our founding couples and by Father Caffarel at a time when marriage was in crisis.

“We live in an age of contrasts. On the one hand, divorces, adultery, free love and ‘neo-malthusianism’ are widespread; on the other hand, a growing number of couples aspire to a thoroughly Christian life. Some of these have founded the Teams of Our Lady”²

Since TOOL appeared at the outbreak of the Second World War, we can understand the power of inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He breathed into this historical context the charism that led our founders to reflect on the value of the sacrament of marriage and to discover conjugal spirituality as a path to fulfilment and conjugal holiness. The charism, a work of the Holy Spirit, came as a response to the aspirations of couples who asked themselves: “What is the relationship between human love and the love of God?”

The Sacrament of Marriage is the keystone of TOOL. All couples are united by the Sacrament of Marriage, while priests are united to Christ by the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Marriage is a sacrament. *“Here is the case where the priceless pearl is locked up. Let us open it. It contains more riches than all the names with which the imagination of men has ever adorned love.”³*

What is a sacrament? Sacraments are signs, very concrete and effective manifestations of the grace and presence of God who gives us his divine life. They are acts of Christ who grants us sanctification. Indeed, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC n° 1114) states that Christians *“profess that the sacraments of the New Law were all instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ”*. There are seven sacraments, and it is no coincidence that they are manifested at fundamental stages and important moments in the life of the Christian. Celebrated with dignity in faith, the sacraments confer the grace they signify. They are effective because Christ himself acts in them (CCC n° 1127). Sacramental grace is the grace of the Holy Spirit given by Christ and

2. Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2018) - Appendix 1 - The Charter of the Teams of Our Lady - Why the Teams of Our Lady? - page 113.

3. Father Henri Caffarel. On Love and Grace - Chapter II - This Mystery is Great: Marriage is a Sacrament - Extracts.

proper to each sacrament (CCC n° 1129).

The Sacraments of Holy Orders and Marriage are ordained for the salvation of others (CCC n° 1534): *“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman form an association for life as a whole, arranged by their natural character for the good of the spouses and for the generation and education of their children, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament among the baptised”*. (CCC n° 1601).

The life of spouses, in their daily relationships, is subject to tensions between good and evil, joys and sorrows, aspirations and failures. If Christ is not present in their lives, everything becomes more difficult. But if he is present, this fragile love, this human union, will be sustained by a much greater strength, for the Lord cares for husband and wife.

The movement of TOOL is centered on the couple, conjugal love, and the Sacrament of Marriage. Its charism is conjugal spirituality, which Father Caffarel defined as follows: *“Conjugal spirituality is the art of living in marriage the evangelical ideal that Christ proposes to all his disciples”*. He also says that: *“Married love finds its source in the love of God. It is at the heart of this relationship that married spirituality is born. At the origin of conjugal spirituality, there is a call from Christ. Our vocation as a couple is to go together towards Christ, one with the other, one through the other”*. (2018 TOOL Guide - chapter 4, page 24). The purpose of TOOL is to help couples discover and share the riches of the sacrament of marriage and to move towards holiness. Conjugal spirituality enables couples to renew daily the gift of themselves to each other.

Spirituality covers all areas of a couple's life: not only their moments of prayer, but also their concerns for the support of the family, domestic chores, the relationship between spouses, gestures of affection, attention and even their sexual relationship. Spirituality is global and embodied in daily life. It leads couples to become aware of the greatness of their love, an act and gesture of praise to God. Gradually, couples realise that their marriage, lived in a fully Christian sense, becomes a privileged place of divine life, a place of fulfilment and a path to holiness. We urge each couple to deepen the richness of their sacrament of marriage and the path proposed by marital spirituality.

Questions for exchange on the study topic:

- a) Do you turn to Jesus Christ during the inevitable difficulties that occur in your married life?
- b) Have you stopped to think how this human love that you so desired and that led to your marriage might also bring you closer to the love of God? How can this be done?

- c) Has living married love supported by the love of Christ enabled you to discover new paths and opportunities for your life? Which ones?
- d) Do you accept responsibility for the human and spiritual growth of your spouse?

8 | Supplementary Texts

“When a young love comes humbly to the feet of Christ to entrust itself to him, it can set sail and sail into the future with joyful hope. The Master says: “I will be with you always, to the end of your days”. Often in the course of your life you will have to return to Christ, renewing together the offering of your love and receiving the blessing of his love.⁴

“The mutual gift of spouses is the means by which Christ bestows his grace on them. This gift is also the path by which they will go to him because when two Christians unite, they commit themselves to helping one another in search of the Lord. In this way, married love is revealed as being entirely ordered to the love of Christ: through him Christ gives himself to the spouses, through him the spouses give themselves to Christ.⁵

Marriage is an offering to Christ

“We now consider the Sacrament of Marriage not from God’s side, but from man’s side. While a sacrament is an act of Christ, it is simultaneously, on the part of the one who receives it, an external and visible act of self-giving to Christ. Sacraments are not only signs of grace, but they are also signs of faith. And this second sacramental reality [an act of human self-giving] is no less rich in spirituality than the first [an act of Christ]. In the case of marriage, what does the “faith” of spouses consist of? It can be defined at different levels: cooperation, commitment, consecration.

Cooperation:

“The graces of marriage remain sterile without the cooperation of the spouses. The faith that Christ demands of us is not a simple outpouring of the heart, nor a vague adhesion of principle: it is a will to act. Here we come across a strange sensitivity of the divine plan: an appeal to human freedom and an appeal to respect each creature as telling signs of divine love. If God only wanted to be served, he would have simply given orders; however, he continually wants to be loved. He must be chosen, preferred, and acted upon because

4. Father Henri Caffarel. L’Anneau d’Or, n° 12, Speech on Marriage, December 1946.

5. Father Henri Caffarel. L’Anneau d’Or, n° 99-100, Epilogue - May-August 1961.

he decided he wanted to be loved. “Man proposes and God disposes”, but we can also say that God proposes and man disposes: such is the order of love. In marriage, what does such cooperation consist of? Without cooperation between spouses in the presence of God, the spiritual riches of marriage would remain buried and unproductive. Does cooperation seek a superhuman perfection above and beyond married life? Some couples are mistaken where one breathes rarefied air, a kind of “odor of sanctity”, which makes them and us feel uncomfortable. True holiness is something else than this tension of the mind and nerves, which kills spontaneity. The holiness of love is love itself. Let us understand each other: cooperation in conjugal graces, is to continually love each other more and better. Thus, to seek greater intimacy of hearts is to cooperate; to give oneself bodily in respect and love is to cooperate; to develop the spiritual life of one’s spouse, to bring up children, to work for the family in the office or at home, all this is to cooperate in the sacramental grace of marriage. Let us not put on buskins or cothurns [high-heeled shoes used in ancient Greek tragedies], let us not walk on tiptoe: “simple dress and flat shoes” is the costume of life; to be so clothed, we will go neither less quickly, nor less far. It can be said that the spiritual level of a home is measured simply by the intensity, the sensitivity, and the fullness of intimacy. Since the first morning of marriage, love and grace have been intertwined: grace invites the best love, and the best love opens up more widely to grace.⁶

9 | Testimony: Conjugal Spirituality

We have been married for 10 years, are happy parents of 4 children and have been members of a new Team, Santeramo 1 sector, Altamura, for one year.

About a year ago, our family suffered the spontaneous termination of C.’s fourth pregnancy in the first quarter. Each member of the family went through the pain of the loss in their own way and at their own pace: our 7-year-old daughter prayed every night to Jesus to send her a new little sister; I devoted more time to my favorite sport, cycling, by going on longer and more frequent bike rides; I, C., fought harder than anyone else to overcome this moment by resuming daily life, I felt an emptiness



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6. Father Henri Caffarel and André Joël. L’Anneau d’Or, n° 27-28, May-August 1949, Special Issue “LE CHRIST ET LE FOYER” [Christ and the couple]. Note: the extract includes only the first point.

inside me, a need for attention and affection to overcome my bad mood. I was seeking more care from my husband who was becoming distracted and more distant from me.

Thanks to the monthly “sit-down” [one of the TOOL’s endeavors to be discussed later in this manual], we realised that we had drifted away from God, from prayer as a couple and that we were going through a moment of spiritual desert. We resumed prayer by listening to the Word of God which started healing our wounds, filling our voids and rebuilding our ruins! Through prayer we were able to confide to each other our sufferings and our expectations, to forgive each other’s lack of attention and to decide to rebuild our marital relationship by drawing on Love.

First, we experienced that conjugal prayer [further explained in section 10.1] is a privileged moment for a peaceful and fruitful exchange between spouses. Conjugal prayer is a time to put aside any misunderstanding, to favor new reconstruction projects, and to reconfirm the love between spouses. Even with our best personal intentions, we realized our need to draw nourishment and support from Our Father’s Love to face the storms of life.

Finally, after a few months, God confirmed His faithfulness and attention to the prayers of the little ones, by giving our daughter her long-awaited little sister.

(Couple from SR Italy)

10 | Presentation of an Endeavor: Conjugal Prayer and Family Prayer

10.1. Conjugal Prayer



Praying as a couple is a grace given by God. It is a pledge of spiritual unity and a source of fruitfulness for the couple. This spiritual unity radiates around the couple by bringing peace, a key to the treasure of the sacrament of marriage.

Our founder, Father Caffarel, in the magazine *L’Anneau d’Or* (number 98), encouraged each couple to understand the Conjugal Prayer. Why such a prayer? It is required for conjugal love because, through prayer, the spouses achieve greater intimacy in different aspects of their lives. Although the motivation of greater intimacy is good, it is not sufficient. In addition, conjugal

prayer becomes a covenant between the couple and Christ, a meeting of two loving hearts that seek the warming love of God. Marriage is a sacrament, a sign and symbol of God's love. Conjugal Prayer renews this encounter of three persons: the husband, the wife and Jesus Christ. Praying together as husband and wife means that the couple recognise their dependence on God and place their destiny in his hands. Spouses appreciate how fruits of their marriage come from the graces of Christ.

Remember that the Lord speaks to each spouse, often in a special way through words and gestures from the other spouse.

In the conjugal prayer, we can freely intercede, praise, give thanks and ask for forgiveness. When we intercede together (husband and wife) for a specific intention, the request becomes stronger, as we are reminded in the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 18, verse 19): *"If two of you on earth unite their voices and ask for anything, it will be granted to them by my Father in heaven"*.

We also pray to praise God, acknowledging his power and action in us. And from this praise we usually move on to thanksgiving. It is essential that we learn to be grateful for all that we receive in our lives, the joys of married love, the beauty of a family, the possibility of providing for ourselves through dignified work, and so many other graces that are given to us. In prayer, the couple must also know how to ask for forgiveness, to recognise their weaknesses, their mistakes, the wounds they have inflicted on each other, on their children or their friends. Asking for God's forgiveness is the miracle that allows the soul to be purified and to be totally reconciled with the spouse and with God himself.

There are no rigid rules about how and when to pray together. The form is not important. Each couple will discover what best suits their reality and sensitivity. But it is good to choose a fixed time to pray together (when getting up, when going to bed, etc.), to set aside a minimum time for this moment, and to make it a commitment by regularity and constancy, every day. Prayer will develop gradually with perseverance.

Let us not be overwhelmed by difficulties involved with any new initiative. It is natural to begin with the traditional prayers; some spouses will quickly dare to imagine more spontaneous prayers. The day will come, however, when you will pray freely, opening your hearts, showing the reality that dwells in your soul, and so, united, you will each discover the rich benefits of this common prayer.

10.2. Family Prayer

While the movement proposes to its team members a priority commitment to the conjugal prayer, all family members, including children, are invited to pray in unity and flourish together through the family prayer.



The age of the children will determine the possibilities, forms, and timing of family prayer. It is essential to instill in the hearts of children that “*I and my family want to serve the Lord*”, as stated in Joshua 24:15. If it is not possible to pray with older children, who will develop their own style of living and praying, always pray for them. Breakfast, or a meal together, may also be a particularly good time to say a family prayer. This is an opportunity to help young children learn to pray. Much of what has been said about marital prayer can be applied and adapted to family prayer, which should also, as far as possible, become a constant and persevering commitment, making an effort to ensure that obstacles such as lack of time, tiredness of the day, routine, domestic preoccupations and professional work do not prevent this rich opportunity for family prayer. If you as a couple aspire to a happy family, pray together, parents and children.

In conclusion, it is up to the couple to pray together and in the family. But even if we take the initiative, prayer is also the work of God who helps us to pray ever more deeply and confidently. We only need to give him a little time so that he can work the miracle of multiplying the beneficial effects in us.

11 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Make a note of the date and place of this meeting and decide on the facilitator.
- ✦ Prepare in writing, as a couple, your participation for the next general sharing.
- ✦ Read the next study topic and prepare in writing, as a couple, your participation in the exchange related to the topic.
- ✦ Continue to take time for listening to the Word of God and for the personal prayer.
- ✦ You are invited during the month to try to pray together (conjugal prayer).

12 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

As we become accustomed to praying the Magnificat, we can run the risk of reciting it as a routine. This is why the movement insists on deepening our understanding of its meaning and theological content.

“The Magnificat is part of the Gospel related to the Christ Child, written by Luke the evangelist. As a literary genre, it is a song that picks up on the song of Samuel’s mother Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and quotes several passages from the Old Testament. The Magnificat raises the following question: how is it possible that the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, has remained a hidden event? The Magnificat gives the following answer: God loves the humble and the poor, and the coming of the Messiah is both an extremely joyful and extremely humble event. Mary is at the heart of this mystery of humility, as the Lord’s “handmaid”, and of glory, as she is blessed among women, and for all generations”⁷

Let us try to enter the spirit of this prayer which takes us into the heart of the Mystery of God. With Mary, let us greet joyfully the fulfilment of the promises, the realisation of the expectations of the people of God.⁸

7. R. Laurentin. Structure and Theology of Luke, 1964. Cf. Father Bernard Olivier in Magnificat.

8. Father Bernard Olivier, Magnificat, Extracts from the Preamble.

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.*

He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.*

*He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.*

*Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

Final blessing of the spiritual counselor or the spiritual advisor

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

One day in March 1923, Father Henri Caffarel revealed that it was the day of his encounter with Christ, which determined the choice of his vocation: “At the age of twenty, Jesus Christ, in an instant, became Someone for me. Oh, nothing spectacular. On that distant day in March, I knew that I was loved and that I loved, and that from then on it would be for life between Him and me. It was all over” (Interview in the magazine “Panorama Aujourd’hui”, No. 116, July 1978).

This is the “encounter with Christ” to which Henri Caffarel said YES. His decision is taken. He will be a priest to lead others to the same encounter with the Lord. To make each person, as he or she is now, “a seeker of God”.

Jean Allemand. A Man Seized by God, page 20/21. Excerpts - Brazilian edition.



Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples
*Meeting 6***

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

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MEETING 6

A LOVE THAT GROWS THROUGH DIALOGUE



“The mirror of the couple is Christ, the human face of God. Dialogue between spouses (called the “sit-down”) is unique because God is invited at the center of this encounter. The sit-down is an opportunity to discover the living Christ speaking to the couple. In the presence of God, Christ speaks through each spouse.¹”

1. ERI, « La mystique des Points Concrets d'Effort et du Partage – Thème d'étude », [Mystique of Endeavors and Sharing – Study Topic], French Version (2011), page 43.

1 | Hospitality

We come to the team meeting burdened by everyday life. We come as a couple, carrying in our hearts our children, our family, and our social environment (work, activities). We come to meet other couples, accompanied by a spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor who walks on the road with us, like Jesus who walked on the road to Emmaus. We come together in the name of Christ. We are happy to meet again and be joyfully greeted by the host couple.

2 | The Meal

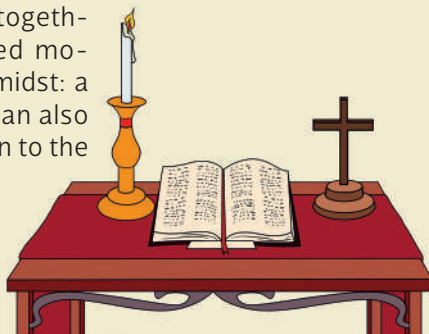
As in previous meetings, the meal is friendly, festive, and simple. It is a concrete expression of our fellowship. It is a moment of grace when the team experiences the joy of being together, celebrating, feasting and praying. Let us begin the meal with a **prayer** and **blessing of** the SC/SA.

3 | General Sharing

At each meeting, we take time to share what makes up our lives: highlights of events that have taken place since the last meeting. This is not a detailed presentation of our agenda. Let us confide in each other what makes sense to us, what we felt during a specific event, what we have experienced from the viewpoint of faith. The general sharing is an important moment (cf. chapters 1-3) when each person expresses himself or herself in the first person while others listen without interrupting.

4 | Prayer

In the joy of addressing the Lord together, let us highlight this privileged moment with a sign placed in our midst: a candle, a picture, an icon... You can also begin with a song or an invocation to the Holy Spirit.



Word of God: Gospel of Luke 14:28-32

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.

Meditation

The Word we have just heard touches our hearts in different ways. Each person may, in turn, express aloud the prayer that the text inspires them. The SC/SA is invited, as is every member of the team, to share their meditation.

Prayer intentions (here or at the end of the meeting)

Let us then share with each other, if we wish, intentions that we want to entrust to the Lord and that we will carry throughout the next month.

Concluding liturgical prayer

We are invited to link ourselves to the universal Church by reading the psalm of the day, reciting the Lord's Prayer or choosing another text from the official liturgy of the Church.

5 | Sharing on the Endeavors

Each member of the team is invited to share his or her experience on the endeavors over the past month. Sharing them is not an examination of conscience, nor a review of successes and failures, but a review of the efforts needed to progress in the spiritual life. Each team member is at a different stage of his or her spiritual life, developing at his or her own pace. It is important to accept this diversity so that everyone can share openly and confidently.

It was proposed at the previous meeting to continue to **listen to the Word of God**, to **pray** and to try to live a **conjugal prayer**.

- ✦ Can we share about the benefits and difficulties of living these endeavors last month?

6 | Study Topic: Love that Grows through Dialogue



“Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage... Men and women... communicate differently. They speak different languages, and they act in different ways.”²

Communication and dialogue are essential binding elements of any **relationship**. They strengthen the couple and contribute to each spouse’s comfort in the relationship. Communication and dialogue create an environment where everyone can express themselves safely and freely and feel welcome.

Love implies reciprocity, dialogue, exchange, and communication. Conjugal love is a total gift of oneself. Nothing is granted once and for all. Remaining curious is essential to discover your spouse again and again.

Pope Francis continues in his exhortation by inviting couples to give themselves

“...time, quality time. This means being ready to listen patiently and attentively to everything the other person wants to say”.³

The full development of two personalities is unity in diversity.

- ✦ It is essential to feel listened to and to understand each other. This means respecting the way each spouse thinks and reacts, considering natural differences between a woman and a man.
- ✦ “*Love is a decision*”: we do not question our love every day. But let us cultivate this mutual love as a herdsman tends to his flock.
- ✦ **Forgiveness** is essential for building love between spouses. Each and every day, do not hesitate to say “please”, to say “thank you”, to ask for forgiveness and to accept it.

Questions for the topic exchange:

- 1 To love is to know oneself, to choose, to give and to welcome. What does love mean to us? Do we take time together, just for the sake of being together? Do we feel the need of being together?
- 2 The union to which we are striving must allow us to flourish mutually. What encourages our exchanges? What place does dialogue have in these times together? Do we know how to listen to each other in truth? What joys or difficulties do we encounter?
- 3 Marital dialogue helps Love to grow: how can we make it last? This sincere dialogue allows us to move forward even if it is sometimes difficult or painful. Do we know how to discover our spouse’s vision?

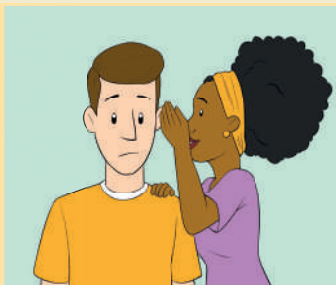
2. Pope Francis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on Love in the Family, n° 136, April 2016.

3. Pope Francis: *Ibid* n° 137.

7 | Additional Texts

7.1. Father Gilles Renaudin:⁴

Three basic laws govern all dialogue:



1st law *“Listen to the other humbly, because you can always learn from someone else; believe that each human encounter helps you discover things about Christ that you had not yet discovered; listen to the other patiently, ... and with your heart”;*



2nd law: *“Know how to listen, see the other person as a valid counterpart and someone before whom you will marvel ... One of the most extraordinary virtues to which the Lord invites us is to to be amazed: to discover what is beautiful, what is true in the other person....”;*



3rd law: *“Respond to the true meaning of the other’s request...”.*

We did not get married just because we loved each other, but because we want to love each other all our lives, through joys and difficulties. Hence communication is important throughout the married life.

4. Father Renaudin (priest of the diocese of Paris, 1928-2020); he gave lectures on the general laws of dialogue that can be transposed to marital dialogue. Excerpts from the booklet « Le devoir de s’asseoir » [« The sit-down »], Equipes Notre-Dame, September 2011, pages 17-19.

7.2. *“Marriage is a precious sign, because “when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God, so to speak, ‘reflects’ himself in them, he imprints in them his features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us...”⁵*

7.3. Pope Francis during an audience with TOOL on 1 September 2015 said, *“I am also thinking of the monthly time of dialogue proposed between spouses - the famous and demanding “duty to sit down” which goes so much against the grain of the habits of a hurried and agitated world leading to individualism -, a moment of exchange lived in truth under the gaze of the Lord, which is a precious time of thanksgiving, forgiveness, mutual respect and attention to the other ...”*

7.4. Stephane Cummins, a relationship and marriage specialist and 35-year team member of TOOL, spoke on the subject of ‘communicating with love’ at an international meeting of TOOL regional leaders in Rome in September 2015.

“... we communicate with each other all the time. When we say that, we include non-verbal communication, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice. As couples and individuals, we know that these things can either enhance or reduce our level of communication. A lot of our communication is non-verbal....

When I talk about the “sit-down”, I know that some couples among us find it difficult to do. We may find it somewhat embarrassing; each spouse can interpret this endeavor in a different way...there is something special about the “sit-down” if it is done properly, especially with regards to non-verbal communication. When we have an opportunity to speak, we are often too eager to say something while in many cases speech is not necessary.

Communication ... employed ... in our daily life can be broken down into a five- level pyramid. Starting from the bottom, we have:

- a) *Firts-level communication: commonplace or mundane conversation. This is the basic form of communication: I don’t say anything about myself to the other person, there is no sharing ... of feelings. We do this every day with others and also with each other in the couple. We may contact the other person to ask how they are, or to remind them of what they are supposed to do during the day.*

5. Pope Francis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on Love in the Family, n° 121, April 2016.

- b) *The second level in the pyramid is telling facts and rumors. I recently suggested to a group that Facebook is slowly replacing the communication of rumors... These rumors are what we say about our neighbors. Now that Facebook can include pictures of what our neighbor is doing, we have to be careful because our own picture can appear there too. Commenting on a football game, a film... seen recently... are things we do regularly.*
- c) *The third level has to do with our ideas and judgements. This is not for everyone. When we formulate our ideas, our judgements, our political beliefs, and our faith, we are very selective about who we share them with. Few people will listen to you when you talk about your religious beliefs. Of course, among Christians, we would expect to share this level of communication.*
- d) *We move to the next level, that of feelings and emotions... we don't discuss our feelings and emotions with just anyone. Who can I communicate with at this level if not my spouse? Should I also talk about it with another family member or with a close friend?*
- e) *Moving up the pyramid to level five, we come to open and honest communication. This is the level where all of us, as married couples, should be. So far, I have emphasised talking, and our concern to have an opportunity to say something, but frequently a big part of communication is listening. A woman I met recently called Susan Muto has written a book entitled "One in the Lord". She is American and has written a lot about spirituality. She emphasises ... the importance of listening. And I would like to quote her: "If people don't really listen to each other, they run the risk of having their conversation reduced to superficial topics, like the weather, or sports, never reaching their deep desire for communion".*

If we want to talk to each other with an open heart, like a married couple, and if we want to enjoy these conversations, we will have to spend at least as much time listening as talking. Otherwise, the opportunity will be lost, and we will have reduced our conversation to mere chit-chat lacking in depth and we will have wasted the possibility of getting to know one another better..."

8 | Testimony: Conjugal Dialogue through the Sit-Down

We have been married since 2015 and joined the community 4 months after the wedding.

We had learned the principles of marital dialogue during our engagement. The awareness of the value of dialogue in the spirit of prayer made us uncomfortable. For six years we had periods when we did not want to do a sit-down. Our main excuses were fatigue or lack of organisation for childcare. A more profound excuse was fear. On



the one hand, the wife had to insist to have these conversations. She took the husband's reluctance as a sign of lack of commitment. On the other hand, he was afraid to stand in the nakedness of the truth. Showing vulnerability through words required more effort than focusing on touch during marital intimacy. At first, we found the structure of the sit-down too rigid. Our big challenge was the moment when each spouse would make apologies to the other. If a prayer is also an apology to God, then the sit-down would become a form of mutual confession or time to examine our consciences.

We overcame the reluctance to the sit-down by focusing first on prayer. This helped us to start the conversation by pointing towards God and moving from the daily hustle and bustle to simply being together. A longer and deeper initial prayer facilitated the dialogue.

Gratitude is an element of prayer particularly important to us. When we begin the conversation by seeing the positive aspects in our spouse, we soon realize how much support we are getting from him or her. We become more open, tender, and honest as we look at other aspects of our relationship, even the difficult ones.

Having experienced different places and times for the sit-down, we know that it is easier at home in the daytime. This requires good planning, but it

is a clear sign that the meeting and our relationship are just as important as anything else.

We are aware that doing a sit-down requires an effort from both of us but we see how essential it is for our relationship. We truly want to listen to each other and to God. Once we have completed the sit-down, it is much easier to work together every day. Often after the sit-down conversation, our intimacy is deeper and our decision to live together is stronger as well as our desire to persist in the grace of the sacrament of marriage.

(Couple from SR-Poland)

9 | Presentation of an Endeavor: the Sit-Down



In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, Father Caffarel led groups of couples that would eventually become TOOL. He realised how difficult it was for husbands and wives to communicate, especially on a spiritual level. How can we encourage this communication that is vital for the couple? The spark came one day when he read the Gospel of Luke. He wrote a short article on the subject entitled “An overlooked duty”.

*“Before getting married, you exchanged viewpoints, weighed both material and spiritual resources, and drew up a plan. But now that you are married and busy at work, are you not neglecting to **sit down** together to examine the task accomplished, to rediscover your ideals, and to consult the Master Builder? I know the many objections and difficulties, but I also know that your couple may one day collapse if you do not take care of the frame... To avoid routine, there is another way which I want to talk to you about at greater length. Take out your calendar and, in the same way you would write down a concert or a visit to friends, make an appointment with your spouse, as a couple. Make sure that these two or three hours are fixed, practically unchangeable, even sacred! Don’t let a trivial reason make you miss this appointment with yourselves, in the same way you would not cancel an evening out or a dinner with friends.”⁶*

The sit-down is a moment of intimacy for the couple in the presence of the Lord. It makes it possible to improve the dialogue within the couple by speaking to each other in truth.

Why practice this endeavor while sitting down? It is difficult to see inside each other while walking, and even more difficult while running. Hence the need to sit down...

Through our sacramental marriage, we have made a commitment to God, which means that he also takes part in the construction of our couple. He helps us develop a deeper relationship in dialogue and love.

A specific aspect of this dialogue is that it takes place “**under the eyes of God**”. The invitation of God into our couple, already initiated on our wedding day, is repeated every time we pray together. This moment of dialogue proposed by TOOL, as a couple in the presence of God, is also a pleasure because it leads to building in love.

“The sit-down is an appointment similar to dating prior to marriage, a joy of rediscovering each other. You are encouraged to make it a habit soon after marriage, before routine sets in and before each spouse becomes tempted into a personal withdrawal. Reflecting together and praying together are important binders for the unity of the new couple.

6. Father Henri Caffarel. Un Devoir Méconnu [An Overlooked Duty], L’Anneau d’Or n°5, November 1945.

“The sit-down is a dialogue in the presence of God. Spouses look and listen to each other under the loving gaze of God, without prejudice, by seeing themselves as they are, accepting that they are different... (Father Caffarel in an article entitled “Les points concrets d’effort”, the French term for “endeavors”https://equip-es-notre-dame.com/sites/default/files/livre_pape_les_pce_fr_0.pdf).

The sit-down is in fact much more than a dialogue between spouses. It is a three-way dialogue. It can only be realised under **His gaze**.⁷

The sit-down is a gift between spouses, under the eyes of God. For this reason

- ✦ **Make an appointment** for a date and a place (without children, without telephone, at home or outside).
- ✦ **Be prepared:** each spouse prepares for the meeting. Discussing with your spouse is not as natural as it may seem. You should strive to be constructive without hurting his or her feelings, and to sustain a loving exchange. List the points to be discussed or choose one or another delicate issue.
- ✦ Since the meeting is held under the gaze of God, it is strongly recommended to start with **an invocation to the Holy Spirit** or a reading from the Bible. *“The sit-down begins with a prayer and by inviting the Lord to the meeting. The presence of the Lord will bring spouses to open up to each other and to create a spiritual climate of charity and humility”.* Father Henri Caffarel

The sit-down is not a time for airing grievances. Instead, it is a time for **building the couple**. In light of the Gospel, it allows the couple to serenely address difficult questions in a spirit of openness, of listening and of welcoming each other. Each spouse becomes open to question “out-dated positions” and habits periodically. The sit-down contributes in promoting the true good of each person and of the couple and the call of the Lord in our lives. It is a dialogue in truth.

Many issues can be addressed, such as family life, the couple, work, leisure, education of children, commitments, etc. **Various ideas for the sit-down are** formulated each year in the study topic prepared by TOOL, but each couple can naturally choose to address other issues according to their current concerns.

The sit-down, under the gaze of God, maps out a ‘path of holiness’ for the couple. Some decisions as a couple can be made for the month ahead.

End the sit-down with **a reading from the Bible or a conjugal prayer**.

7. Teams of Our Lady. The Sit-Down : Sitting under the gaze of God, page 6, September 2011.

10 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Note the date, place, and time of your next meeting.
- ✦ Continue to make time for the three other endeavors previously discussed: listening to the Word of God, Personal Prayer and Conjugal Prayer.
- ✦ You are also invited over the next month to experience **a sit-down: make an appointment now**. The sit-down will also be part of sharing on the endeavors at the next meeting.
- ✦ Read the next study topic and prepare as a couple, in writing, your ideas for the exchange as well as for the general sharing.

11 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed”.

From the very beginning of the Magnificat prayer, a dominant idea is announced: joy, or more precisely, a burst of joy. We are called to share Mary’s joy for God’s supreme gift to humanity. The immediate reason for this joy is expressed: “for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant”. This is how the encounter between Mary and God is presented. We discover the poverty-humility of a woman who wants to be a servant. This is the only title Mary gives herself, both here in the Magnificat and at the end of the Annunciation narrative where she declares: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be done to me according to your will”.⁸

Let us pray together:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him*

8. Father Bernard Olivier. Magnificat, extracts from the first chapter.

in every generation.

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.*

*He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.*

*Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

Prayer intentions if not expressed at the end of the prayer (section 4)

Blessing of the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor

GETTING TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

Our founder was also the director of a magazine entitled “L’Anneau d’Or” [“The Golden Ring”]. It was founded in 1945 and published until 1963; it dealt with conjugal and family spirituality and reached a wide audience. The magazine contained teachings of priests dedicated towards marital and family problems from a spiritual perspective. It reported several experiences of couples seeking a truly Christian life in various parts of France at the time. In an editorial published in issue number 50 of the magazine [in 1953], Father Caffarel introduced the “sit-down” [which he called in French “Devoir de s’asseoir” or “Duty to sit down“]. The sit-down later became a spiritual endeavor for all couples. It proved to be very appropriate and fruitful for the establishment of conjugal dialogue in the presence of Jesus. Father Caffarel also founded a magazine called “Offertoire” [“Offer-tory”], dedicated to the spirituality of widows.



Jean Allemand. A Man Seized by God, page 44. Excerpts - Brazilian edition.

Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples
*Meeting 7***

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

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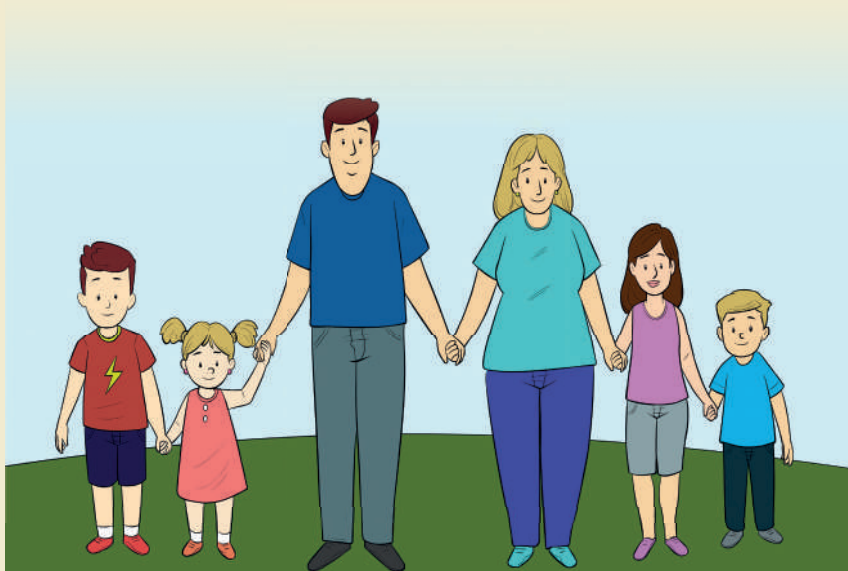
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MEETING 7

MARRIED LOVE THAT AIMS AT HAPPINESS AND HOLINESS



“We are called to holiness, but a saint is not, as some might imagine, a kind of champion who performs feats of virtue or spiritual achievements. A saint is first and foremost a person who is won over by God and who gives his whole life to Him...You are called to holiness. As a couple, you are directed towards holiness from the beginning of your marriage and throughout your conjugal life”.¹

1. Henri Caffarel. *Séduits par Dieu* [Seduced by God]. Monthly Letter of the Teams of Our Lady, 16th year n° 10, July 1963.

1 | Hospitality

Hospitality is not the sole responsibility of the couple who welcomes you in their home. It is an attitude that can radiate from each person who offers the best of himself or herself when meeting other team members. Be ready to open your heart, with confidence and without reserve, to be touched by the love of God, and to become a brother or sister.

2 | The Meal

When we share a meal in a team, where Christ is present, spiritual intimacy is no longer theoretical but becomes concrete. In the Gospel of Luke 10:8, it is said: *“In whatever city you enter and are welcomed, eat what is served to you”*. In the fellowship of a meal, a surprising journey can occur, bringing people together, narrowing gaps and providing a springboard towards others.

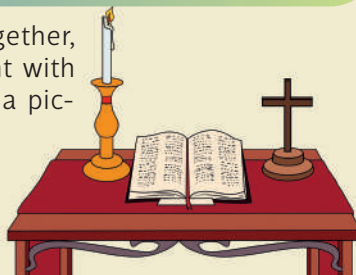
3 | General Sharing

This moment of general sharing allows the small team community, gathered in the name of Christ, to experience fraternal mutual aid, to get to know each other better and more deeply, to forge links, and to discover the richness of each member. Team life is organised and harmonised in this concrete exchange of words and by listening with attention and respect.

4 | Prayer

In the joy of addressing the Lord together, let us highlight this privileged moment with a sign placed in our midst: a candle, a picture, an icon...

You can also start with a song.



The Word of God: Gospel of John 15:8-14

“It is the glory of my Father that you bear much fruit, and that you be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I tell you this, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made complete; this is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you.”

Meditation

The Lord speaks to each of us. His Word touches our hearts and in a surge of filial love each one can respond to the Lord by expressing aloud his prayer or by retelling the phrase from the Gospel that has touched his heart the most.

Prayer intentions here or at the end of the meeting

Concluding liturgical prayer: Psalm or other

5 | Sharing on the Endeavors

“A good time for sharing on the endeavors is after the communal prayer, in a manner that continues and extends the climate of prayer”. (Guide to the Teams of Our Lady - 2018 Edition, p. 46).

Each member of the team is invited to share his or her experience of endeavors over the past month: **listening to the Word of God, personal prayer, conjugal prayer and the sit-down.**

The experiences, progresses or difficulties shared by each person can help others to continue their own journey in faith.

6 | Study Topic: Marriage, Source of Happiness and Path to Holiness



God created us in his own image. He who is Love, created us in the image of love. He wanted us to share his happiness, to have his joy in us and to have perfect joy.

To love each other with a true, authentic and deep love, to be happy and to walk towards holiness: this is the vocation of every Christian couple, this is the call that the Lord, our God, addresses to us.

After having seen, in the previous chapter, that Christian marriage is the guarantor of love and that this love is built through dialogue, we are going to discover that marriage can be the natural place of happiness and a path to holiness.

Nowadays, happiness and holiness have become two notions that are variously understood and, especially in the case of holiness, outdated. This means that in the eyes of many of our contemporaries they no longer have a place in marriage as an institution.

But this is precisely why Teams of Our Lady want to bring to the world a triple message of salvation for couples:

- ✦ Love can last and deepen in marriage.
- ✦ Marriage can be a special place for happiness.
- ✦ Marriage can be a path to holiness.

All this depends on the willingness of couples to live the sacrament of marriage as a blessing from God.

✦ **Marriage, source of happiness**

A married life without sharing and communion leads to loneliness, which in turn leads to despair and abandonment, because one can feel lonely even within a couple. On the other hand, it is in the stable couple based on dialogue that spouses find understanding, solidarity and deep security that society is not able to fully provide.

On the day we said “I do” before God for life, we committed ourselves to be there for each other, to love each other for life, and to contribute, each of us, to the happiness of the other.

Being happy together is a criterion of true conjugal love. Father Caffarel had a deep conviction: couples are made for happiness.

Seeking happiness in the daily routine of our lives, in the small pleasures and joys of everyday life, moving forward hand in hand, facing life together, even when going through difficult days, experiencing moments of deep communion, of open dialogue, of sincere mutual forgiveness, of true communion in the carnal expression of love, giving each other freely and sincerely in a surge of deep love, being concerned about the fulfilment of the other: all these actions are sources of sacred joy and happiness.

But it is important to understand that happiness cannot be found once and for all and that the experience of happiness is fragile. This is why happiness, like love, is built by sharing, listening, being affectionate, and giving oneself freely. Searching to make the other spouse joyful brings happiness to both.

Thanks to the grace of our sacrament of marriage, we can go through the different stages of our lives as lovers, appreciating each moment with its own specific joy. Through this grace, we get to know how to love each other, forgive each other, seek reconciliation, and find happiness.

✦ **Marriage, path of holiness**

The word holiness may sound frightening to many Christians. We often think that holiness is not for us; it is reserved only for a select few. In reality, we are all called to holiness because we carry within us, through the sacrament of baptism, the source of holiness. Jesus himself called us: “*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48).

The Second Vatican Council made it clear that all Christians are called to

find the path to holiness, whatever their state (lay or religious, single or married). For couples in the marital state, the movement has developed its own specific role: *“The essential aim of Teams of Our Lady is to help couples tend towards holiness. Nothing more, nothing less”*. (Father Henri Caffarel)

For Christian spouses, daily life is the place to find the path to holiness. Spouses are sanctified by living an authentic and sincere love every day. There is no need to look elsewhere for exceptional means.

However, the journey towards holiness requires time and perseverance. It may sometimes be necessary to overcome discouragement, and to start over. The journey of couples will almost inevitably go through difficult and painful moments. But couples must learn to put aside anguish and fear because the grace of Christ will sustain them. Christ patiently accompanies spouses throughout the journey even when progress seems too slow for our relentless desire to move quickly forward.

Pope Paul VI had encouraging words for couples in his speech to Teams of Our Lady in 1970: *“Dear sons and daughters, you are well convinced that, by living the graces of the sacrament of marriage, you are journeying with a tireless and generous love towards holiness. We are all called to holiness by grace and not by arbitrary demands, by the love of our Father who wants the full development and total happiness of his children. Moreover, to achieve this, you are not left to yourselves. Christ and the Holy Spirit, these two hands of God, as Saint Irenaeus called them, are constantly working for you.*

In conclusion, walking towards holiness as a couple is not an impossible dream. The desire for holiness will fill our hearts as we let God work through us and we let him sanctify us by his grace.

Questions for an exchange on the topic

- a) Are you convinced that marital happiness is within the reach of all couples? Under what conditions can it persist in the long term?
- b) Can you list some of the simple pleasures in your life as a couple? Try to share them with the other couples in your team.
- c) All couples go through difficult and painful times. How do you overcome the frailty of happiness and keep hope for better days?
- d) What role does each spouse play in the other spouse's happiness?
- e) What is your idea of holiness?
- f) Do you feel called to holiness? Do you feel that God's call is addressed to you personally?

(These questions are offered to help you with the exchange; you can choose the ones that interest you most).

7 | Supplementary Texts

7.1. Apostolic Exhortation “Amoris Laetitia” - Pope Francis.

126. *In marriage, the joy of love needs to be cultivated. When the search for pleasure becomes obsessive, it holds us in thrall and keeps us from experiencing other satisfactions. Joy, on the other hand, increases our pleasure and helps us find fulfilment in any number of things, even at those times of life when physical pleasure has ebbed. Saint Thomas Aquinas said that the word “joy” refers to an expansion of the heart. Marital joy can be experienced even amid sorrow; it involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but always on the path of friendship, which inspires married couples to care for one another: “they help and serve each other”.*

130. *On the other hand, joy also grows through pain and sorrow. In the words of Saint Augustine, “the greater the danger in battle the greater is the joy of victory”. After suffering and struggling together, spouses can experience that it was worth it, because they achieved some good, learned something as a couple, or came to appreciate what they have. Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort.*

7.2. Address of Pope Paul VI to Teams of Our Lady - 4 May 1970

*All too often, the Church has seemed, quite wrongly, to suspect human love. We want to make it clear to you today: no, God is not the enemy of great human realities, and the Church does not ignore the daily values lived by millions of couples. On the contrary, the good news brought by Christ the Savior is also good news for human love, which was considered excellent from the beginning - “And God saw that it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Although corrupted by sin, human love was **also redeemed to the point of becoming a means of holiness through grace.***

*[...] **All the baptized are called to holiness**, according to the teaching of the Church solemnly reaffirmed by the [Vatican II] Council. But it is up to you, as a couple, to strive for it in your own way, in and through your conjugal life. The Church teaches us that the couple is “strengthened by grace for holiness of life” [Gaudium et Spes, 49], and that part of the family’s mission,*

received from God, is to become “the domestic sanctuary of the Church” [Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11].

[... All marital love, when rejoicing towards eternity, is characterized by spousal fulfillment, fidelity, exclusivity, and fruitfulness]. It is in this perspective that desire finds its full meaning. As a means of expression as much as of knowledge, the conjugal act maintains and strengthens love. Its fruitfulness leads the couple to full blossoming: it becomes, in the image of God, a source of life.

[...] These are the perspectives from which Christian couples live out the good news of salvation in Christ **and progress towards holiness in and through their marriage**, with the light, strength, and joy of the Savior.”

7.3. The following comments are taken from a booklet entitled: “Sexuality, Love, Marriage” and are included in the study theme “Marriage a Sacrament for the Road”, May 2008.

[...] “Called to holiness”. Pope Paul VI’s speech can only be fully understood if we keep in mind the Pontiff’s perspective. He does not intend to invite his listeners to mere mediocrity, but he reminds them that they are called to holiness. They do not have to flee to the desert to reach it: human love is neither a road to perdition nor a sidetrack, but a true road to holiness. This should seem obvious. And yet, it took centuries for the Church to develop a mature thinking on the subject.

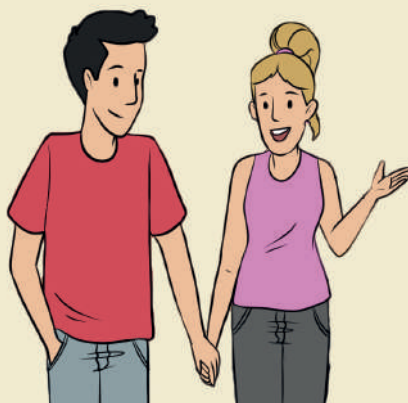
[...] The balanced pontifical reflexion guards married Christians against two opposing and extreme temptations: “the fascination of the flesh” on the one hand, and contempt for the flesh on the other hand, sometimes expressed by people who claim to act as angels. Those who know the high dignity of their baptized body and of their sexual life avoid these two temptations. St. Paul’s advice is not to leave out the body, but to “glorify God in your body” by conforming to the spirit, the mind and the law of Christ.

[...] To properly understand and interpret what the Pope says, it is important to remember to whom he is addressing himself: to spouses who know and accept the moral rules of Christian marriage, who know they are called to holiness.

[...] A great love and a tender sensitivity permeate from this portrayal of the Christian couple: “[the couple may appear as] a weak and vulnerable community, sometimes sinful and penitent, but forgiven, on the way to holiness in peace!...” In addition, the Pope sends a warning to the self-satisfied spouses by quoting Saint Paul : “Let him who prides himself on his feet beware of falling” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

8 | Testimony: Happiness and Holiness: the Means to Achieve Them

The piloting experience was a great way to teach us everything about Teams of Our Lady. The piloting couple was very clear about the expectations within TOOL. They explained very well the good practices to be acquired. They described the six endeavors: listening to the Word of God, personal prayer, conjugal and family prayer, the sit-down, the Rule of Life and the annual retreat. They also talked about the associated responsibilities: pray the Magnificat, attend monthly team meetings,



examine seriously the monthly study topics, support the movement, participate in the annual team evaluation, read the newsletter, offer hospitality to others, attend team conferences, imitate the Christ in our daily lives, attend weekly mass.

It all seemed incredibly difficult but very exciting and intriguing. Once the piloting experience was over, the responsibility to continue was handed over completely to us. An inevitable feeling of uncertainty started to set in: would we be able to do the right things without the piloting couple? How could we, as new member couples and as a newly formed small community, manage the endeavors and the responsibilities? Our priest Father Liam, along with resources provided by the movement and with the enthusiasm of the other new couples, enabled us to build trust, develop strong relationships, and support each other.

A year later, we were able to see how our marriage had evolved as Catholics and as part of a team of married couples: our relationship was enriched and given a new dimension. It is also wonderful to be part of a journey taken and appreciated by hundreds and thousands of Catholic couples around the world. The journey is a gift that further strengthens the bonds of marriage. Teams of Our Lady have had a great impact on our couple's life, unity, and faith. Witnessing these changes has been a truly inspiring experience and has played a huge part in our involvement in the movement.

(Eurasia Zone couple)

We expected Teams of Our Lady to be somewhat intimidating, given the very “ambitious” objectives set by Father Henri Caffarel: “Marriage as a path to holiness”. On the contrary, during the piloting, we were impressed by the humility shown by even the most experienced couples. This encouraged us to say “We can do it too, we must do it, it is our vocation”.

(RR-Canada couple)

9 | Presentation of the Pedagogy of the Teams of Our Lady



9.1. The movement’s pedagogy is based on three aspects:

- Gradual growth:** the Lord takes us from where he finds us; it is for each individual to progress step by step along a path of spiritual growth.
- Personal growth:** progress is individual and appropriate to each couple: each will have their own pace and their own way of putting the propositions of the movement into practice.
- Action:** there can be no conversion within a person or within a couple unless they translate their desire for progress into precise and well-defined actions.

9.2. Means of Spiritual Improvement.

A) Guidelines for life:

Guidelines for life are fundamental principles and important pillars of the movement; they show a way to help couples grow in the love of Christ. The main guideline is the love that Christ came to bring us (cf. Mark 12:30-31).

a) **The permanent guidelines** proposed reflect the movement’s identity as exemplified by the attitude of listening and praying, the practice of mutual aid and hospitality, a willingness for formation and service.

To grow in the love of God is a lifelong undertaking. To help members, Teams of Our Lady offer the following **guidelines for life**:

- ✦ Give prayer a prominent place in your life
- ✦ Listen to the Word of God regularly
- ✦ Constantly deepen the knowledge of faith
- ✦ Take part in the sacraments frequently, especially the Holy Eucharist
- ✦ Live authentic mutual aid in marriage (listening, dialogue, sharing)
- ✦ Have a constant concern for human and Christian education of the children
- ✦ Practice hospitality generously in the household
- ✦ Express in practical ways the love of Christ, through one or more concrete commitments in the Church or in society.

b) The movement’s orientations proposed during Gatherings

At the time of an International Gathering [usually held every 6th year], the movement proposes orientations that become priorities for the subsequent years. These “orientations”, which are based on observations of the realities and needs of couples, provide a common direction for all members, thereby contributing to a path of unity.

B) Endeavors:

The endeavors are an essential characteristic of the movement. Teams of Our Lady sometimes call them “Concrete Points of Effort” (CPE), from the French designation, which can also be termed as “precise points of application”. These endeavors are not obligations, nor are they specific actions one might accomplish to complete a checklist. Instead, endeavors are intended to lead us to new attitudes to better communicate with God, our spouse and everyone else. These attitudes will allow us to assimilate and implement a new, more Christian way of living. Of course, the endeavors will require some effort, both individually and as a couple. Members of TOOL proceed freely to take on this new “obligation” to practice the six endeavors:

- a) Listening diligently to **the “Word of God”**.
- b) Setting aside time every day for a real encounter with the Lord in the form of a **“Personal prayer”**.
- c) Praying together every day, husband and wife, in a **“conjugal prayer”** and, when possible, with the children as a **“family prayer”**.

- d) Setting aside time each month for a real marital dialogue, under the gaze of God, called the “**sit-down**”.
- e) Choosing a “**Rule of Life**” to help us remove barriers between God and ourselves so that we may find the truth about who we are and our true vocation.
- f) Taking time each year to place ourselves before the Lord, if possible as a couple, during a “**retreat**” which allows us to reflect and organise our lives in His presence.

C) Team life:

Team life is not limited to the monthly meeting. It is important to maintain contact either by virtual means (telephone, email, whatsapp) or in person, through meetings between couples and with the SC/SA. It is necessary for couples to know each other well and to create bonds of friendship. Members should feel connected to the team as if they were part of a large family.

By practising hospitality, and by opening their hearts and homes to other members, friendship will deepen. The practice of mutual aid, according to the spirit of the movement, will enrich team life in charity.

10 | Presentation of an Endeavor: the Rule of Life



“Without a rule of life, the religious life of the spouses may easily be governed by the whim of the moment and become chaotic. This rule of life consists in nothing else than determining the efforts that one intends to impose on oneself to respond better to the will of God”²

The rule of life consists in setting one or more points on which each spouse personally and freely decides to concentrate his or her efforts, with the aim of making spiritual progress.

a) **Why the rule of life?**

- ✦ To improve our response to God’s love by conversion, spiritual growth, and dialogue with the Lord.
- ✦ To improve ourselves by perfecting a talent or correcting a flaw, by accepting freely new obligations that will contribute to progress humanly and spiritually.
- ✦ To improve our relationship with others: our spouse, our children, our social surrounding, and our professional environment.

b) **How to choose a rule of life?**

- ✦ The rule of life is a personal choice, it makes us seek the will of God.
- ✦ It should be gradual, precise, and practical.
- ✦ It should be demanding but flexible, with ambitious but realistic goals.
- ✦ It requires perseverance and discipline.
- ✦ It is revised regularly: it is changed when sufficient progress is made, or when a new need arises.

The end of the sit-down is a good time to choose a rule of life.

There is no obligation to reveal one’s rule of life. If it is shared, fraternal listening requires special care and compassion.

For those to whom holiness seems difficult to attain, the rule of life is a means of making simple, practical, and reasonable progress. For those who feel fervently called to holiness, it enables them to respond joyfully to that call.

11 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ As a couple, prepare your participation for the next general sharing in writing.
- ✦ Read the next study topic and prepare your ideas for the exchange as a couple, in writing.

². Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2018). Appendix 1 - The Charter of the Teams of Our Lady, pages 120-121.

- ✦ Choose a rule of life as recommended above and try to live it during the month.
- ✦ Prepare your personal participation during the team's spiritual sharing on the endeavors, especially on your experience with the rule of life (without necessarily revealing it to others if you do not wish to do so):
 - How were you able to live this rule of life?
 - What have been your successes and failures?
 - What fruits did the rule of life bring you?

12 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

Let us pay attention to these two verses: “The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” and “He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation”. These two verses are quotations from Psalm 111, which describes the “great things” or wonders of God, and Psalm 103, which could be entitled “God is love”. Mary has every reason to speak of the wonders accomplished in her. But she is not alone; she is part of a great number of wonders that God has accomplished for his people. We are reminded that one of God’s wonders is his mercy, tenderness, and love for his people. To such wonderful love, Mary responds, in the tradition of Israel, by blessing the Lord’s name and by proclaiming his holiness.¹

Let us pray together:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.*

*He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.*

He has shown the strength of his arm,

3. Father Bernard Olivier. Magnificat - from the 2nd chapter - Extracts - 1988.

*he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

**Prayer intentions if not expressed at the end of the prayer (cf. 4)
Blessing of the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor**

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

Father Caffarel devoted much of his energy to convince all Christians, especially Christian couples, of the need to practice personal prayer and conjugal prayer. In 1957, he created the *Cahiers sur l'Oraison* [a bi-monthly magazine devoted to personal prayer published until 1989]. He also launched in 1970 a correspondence course on prayer. During about ten years, he organised prayer evenings and Weeks of Prayer in Troussures [in Northern France], a house belonging to Father Doncoeur who donated it to him and which he trans-



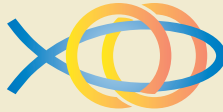
formed into a house for spiritual retreats. His aim was to teach how to pray in complete silence, progressively with individual guidance.

Father Caffarel from the time of Teams of Our Lady to the House of Prayer - 1903-1996 - Book of Proceedings of the 1st Colloquium, page 24, Extracts.

Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples**
Meeting 8

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

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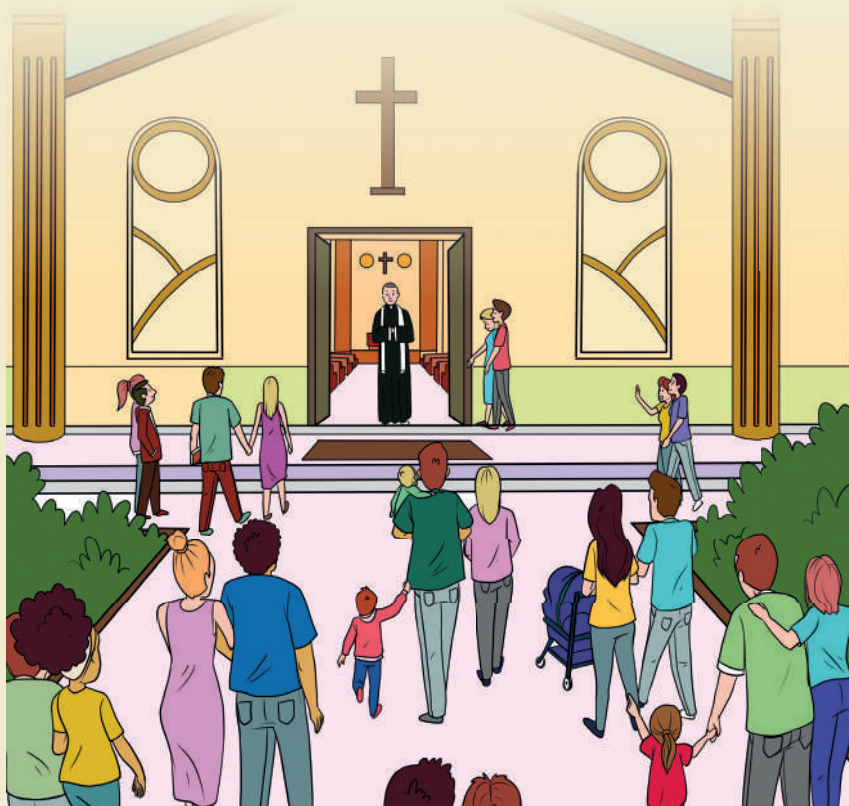
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MEETING

8

A TEAM IN A CHURCH MOVEMENT



Spouses are a cell of the Church... they live the life of the Church: the first task of a small cell, as of the whole Church, is to give glory to God.¹

1. Father Henri Caffarel. Miniature de l'Église [Miniature of the Church]. Monthly Letter of the TOOL (END), March 1962.

1 | Hospitality

May everyone be happy and may the joy of this meeting be in everyone's heart. Being joyful is also a learning process. May we seize the opportunity that God offers us in a team meeting. Joy is a gift that we can offer to all team members. Do not hesitate to offer them this gift.

2 | The Meal

Some of Jesus' last words were: *"I have earnestly desired to eat this Pass-over with you"*. He wanted to tell his disciples that eating together is not just an anecdotal or circumstantial act, dictated by physiological necessity. The verb "to desire" and the adverb "earnestly" express together a greater, intense, inner feeling: the need for a meeting, a gathering, a celebration of a very important moment. When eating together, we become closer to one another, divisions are reduced, trust is increased, we even develop complicity in life.

Let us begin the meal with a prayer and a blessing from the SC/SA.

3 | General Sharing

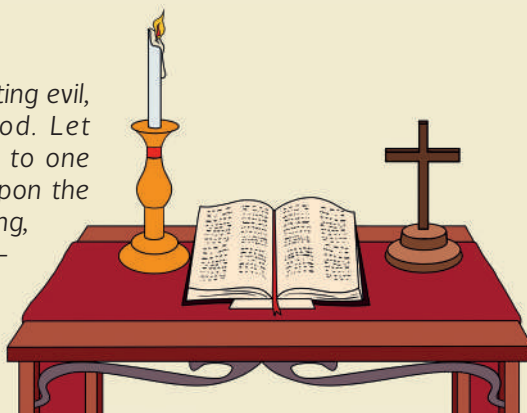
Speaking up during the general sharing is a great opportunity to overcome our natural resistances and to take small steps towards increased trust with each other. It is not good to maintain walls within a community, to be afraid to assume who we really are or to hide our flaws. We should not be embarrassed if we need to ask for support. Let's put aside the idea that success in life only comes when dreams come true, as if sorrows never hit us. This is a time to exercise care for each other, to understand how each other sees life, and to be ready to reach out when necessary or possible.

As with previous meetings, prepare as a couple what you want to share with the team. Remember that this is a time for everyone to speak in turn and for others to listen thoughtfully.

4 | Prayer

Word of God: Romans 12:9-13

“Let love be genuine, hating evil, firmly attached to good. Let brotherly love bind you to one another, each looking upon the others as more deserving, with zeal without nonchalance, in the fervor of the spirit, in the service of the Lord with the joy of hope, patient in tribulation, constant in prayer, sharing in the needs of the saints, eager to give hospitality”.



Meditation

Everyone can say aloud a prayer that the reading inspires. Or repeat the phrase or word that most caught their attention.

Prayer intentions here or at the end of the meeting

Concluding liturgical prayer: Psalm or other

5 | Presentation of a Part of the Team Meeting: Sharing on Endeavors

We need to share to create and build community. Community does not exist simply because a group of people come together. It takes shape and is built when we share our lives, when we seek together, when we help each other, when we share the gift of God that we have received.

In community, the team experiments and puts into practice three Life Attitudes:

a) **A diligent search for the will and love of God**

We are seeking to understand God's will for us, coming to an agreement and letting Him have first place in our lives. This learning process requires consistency.

b) **The search for the truth about ourselves**

We are called to become always more aware of who we really are, without being guided by imagination, alienation and lies.

c) **Encounter and communion**

We must decenter ourselves to seek an encounter with the Lord and our brothers and sisters.

These three attitudes are coherent and form an indivisible whole that loses all meaning if they are practiced in isolation.

At each meeting, usually after the prayer, a special time is set aside for spiritual sharing about the endeavors. Each team member is invited to share his or her experience of the endeavors over the past month. It is a time for listening, for spiritual support between team members and for encouraging us collectively to pursue these efforts. The experiences, progresses or difficulties shared by each person can help others to continue their own journey in faith.

6 | Sharing on Endeavors

As in the previous meeting, each team member is invited to share their experience of the endeavors during the past month (listening to the Word of God, personal prayer, conjugal prayer, the sit-down and the Rule of Life).

- ✦ Let us try to express whether the efforts made have contributed to the search for God's will and the truth about ourselves and whether they have brought us closer to God.
- ✦ Let us share about the benefits and difficulties of living these endeavors since our last meeting.

In conclusion, do we experience an encounter and a communion during this time of sharing?

7 | Study Topic: a Team that Belongs to a Movement and to the Church

Belonging to the movement and to the Church has many implications.

a) **Each couple belonging to the movement accepts its requirements**

Seeing the danger of a declining enthusiasm within the first teams, Father Caffarel proposed a new rule: the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady. Although a third of the first couples refused the rule and quit TOOL in 1947, it became clear after a few years that the introduction of the Charter was very fruitful for the expansion of the movement.

When new members express their desire to belong to the movement, they commit themselves to remain faithful to its spirit and to accept and apply all its requirements.

A picky attitude means that spouses are creating their own movement and therefore are renouncing to membership in TOOL.

b) **Integration of members not only into the team but also into the movement is expressed in several ways:**

- ✦ **By praying the Magnificat daily in communion with the members of the movement**

The team is a small praying church. TOOL have chosen the Magnificat as their community prayer (as mentioned in previous meetings). The Magnificat links each couple to the international community of married couples participating in TOOL and to the universal Church. It is an expression of communion with the whole movement.

- ✦ **By keeping up to date with the life of the movement**, by reading information and newsletters coming from the sector and the Region, by browsing websites, by using social networks, by taking time to learn about documentary databases and the Christian Formation Platform so they may serve when needed.

Close contact between the responsible team in each country [generally called the Regional Team] and the basic teams, however far away they may be, is essential. No less important are the fraternal links between teams, based on mutual knowledge, mutual support, and prayer.

In some regions, a TOOL Newsletter is sent to each couple, thereby establishing, and maintaining vertical and horizontal links. It typically contains news from basic teams, feedback on remarkable experiences, an editorial, prayer texts for the monthly meetings, information, testimonies, etc. In other regions, information may be shared by email or other means. It is important to keep abreast of the various news from the movement because they may help us with our spiritual growth.

✦ **By participating in meetings organised at different levels of the movement**

Participation in sessions and meetings organised by Sectors, Regions, Provinces, and Super Regions are all opportunities of formation. Conferences given during such sessions and meetings are generally part of a programme that includes time for general reflection, prayer, witness, and sharing of experiences. Such participation also contributes to the integration of new members of TOOL.

In general, these meetings are structured similarly to a team meeting, with prayer, listening to a testimony or a lecture, and an exchange between couples on a particular topic considering their own experience. In this way, couples from different teams get to know each other and to share reflections and experiences.

✦ **By participating in the life and apostolic mission of the movement**

c) **Every couple participates in the life and apostolic mission of the movement**

Members of TOOL bear witness to Christian marriage as a source of love, happiness, and holiness, as well as of human fulfilment. By living in the world according to Gospel values, married couples seek to be the leaven in the dough and to be present in various activities of society. By witnessing the enduring love of married couples, other couples may become attracted to Christian marriage and its riches. TOOL couples are called to bear witness to such love through the Christian marriage, a sign of hope for their brothers and sisters.

✦ **By practising hospitality**

The TOOL charter suggests that members “open their homes in a spirit of friendship and hospitality”.

Teams of Our Lady have always emphasised a welcoming attitude and a warm hospitality in the home, both to couples within TOOL and to all those we meet in our daily lives.

✦ By taking responsibility for the service

Members of a basic team are invited to collaborate in the life of the movement and of its structures, and to respond to its calls.

“He who ministers ... does so by the power that God provides” (1 Peter 4:11).

d) **Fidelity to the movement and to the Church**

Team life is not limited to monthly meetings. The deep friendship that characterises TOOL makes members feel connected to other teams as an extended family, beyond the monthly meeting.

From time to time, team members are called upon to renew their commitment to faithfully observe the spirit and methods of the movement. This renewal does not add any new obligations but is simply a reminder of commitments already undertaken as Christians.

TOOL members are committed to make their faith and their lives consistent, seeking God’s will and embodying it in their daily lives. They wish to remain faithful to the Pope and to live according to Church doctrine.

e) **Support the movement through an annual contribution**

The annual contribution is a practical demonstration of the spirit of mutual aid on which the formation of each team and of the entire movement are based. A monetary contribution is in keeping with the tradition of sharing goods that was practiced by the first Christian communities. It is necessary for the material health of the movement to which we belong and from which we receive so much. From the very beginning, TOOL, which has no other source of income, asked its members to make an annual contribution equal to the income of a day’s work for each married couple.



The spirit of the contribution is well explained in the Charter, which makes it a duty for every married couple: *“Offering each year - in the form of an annual contribution - the fruits of one day’s work, helps to strengthen the material life and to ensure the growth of the group, to which members owe their spiritual enrichment in part”*.

These contributions ensure the functioning of several levels of the movement’s structure and provide for the Teams’ spiritual animation and development (such as revision of documents, and the organization of formation sessions, meetings, and gatherings). Contributions also help to transmit and to expand throughout the world the values that Teams are committed to promote. The financial contribution should not be seen as a payment for services or a tax. It should be regarded as a mystique of sharing not only of spiritual gifts, but also of material goods.

Questions for the exchange about the topic :

- a) How difficult is it to be faithful to the demands of the TOOL movement?
- b) How do you understand fidelity to the Church?
- c) Is your house open to hospitality?

8 | Supplementary Texts

8.1. (...) *From the beginning, members of Teams have observed the love and life that mysteriously blossom in what they call “ecclesia”, the small Christian community in which the great Church is born and renewed. They also bear witness to spiritual help, in true love, at all levels: between spouses, between married couples, and between teams.*

To meet every new generation’s challenges, Christians have to rediscover their faith with reaffirmed freedom and focus on the youthfulness of God’s message. When a team forms a happy, vibrant, friendly, honest, and trustworthy community, they are much better prepared to meet these daunting challenges.²

8.2. *“This morning we would like to draw your attention to hospitality, which is an eminent form of the apostolic mission of the couple. When St. Paul wrote to the Romans: “Practice hospitality with enthusiasm and readiness” (Romans 12:13), he undoubtedly addressed the recommendation first to couples. He was probably thinking, when he formulated the recommendation, of the hospitality he received from Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who also welcomed in their home an entire Christian assembly... (Acts 18:2-3;*

2. Letter from the Teams - Resources and pedagogy.

Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19). In our times, so hard for many, what a grace it is to be welcomed in a home, “into this little Church”, according to the word of Saint John Chrysostom. Hospitality makes us enter into the couple’s tenderness, discover its maternity, experience its mercy. Hospitality in a Christian home is “the laughing and gentle face of the Church” (a quote from Father Caffarel’s book “Le mariage, ce grand sacrement”, Paris, Feu nouveau 1963, p. 282). Hospitality by Christian couples is an irreplaceable apostolate which should be carried out generously, especially for the formation of engaged couples, to help for young couples, and to assist couples in distress.³

9 | Testimony: Belonging to a Movement

We joined Teams of Our Lady in our fifteenth year of marriage. Our wedding witnesses were already team members. They invited us several times to join TOOL, but for a long time we hesitated because we did not see what belonging to the movement could bring us. From the outside, a team appeared to us as a group of friends who met in a Christian setting, but above all to spend an enjoyable time to reduce the stress of daily



life. When we accepted to become new team members in the existing team Lomé 5, the hospitality of other members made us feel immediately part of a family. During the piloting period, the study of fundamental documents, including “The Charter of Teams of Our Lady” and “What is a Team of Our Lady”, allowed us to better understand the mission of TOOL and to appreciate the structure and solidity of the movement on the international level. This new understanding was quite different from the impression we had when we were outside the movement. As various topics were discussed during piloting, we realised that we were in the right place. Indeed, we were not looking for a social club by joining TOOL but rather a family of brothers and sisters living the same struggles as us as a Christian couple. We were looking for means to reach holiness as

3. Pope Paul VI. Address to the Teams of Our Lady, Rome, 4 May 1970.

a married Christian couple. By applying various means proposed by TOOL, we were able to strengthen and transform our love by becoming more open to our community.

The WEEN [a formation weekend] was a strong and decisive moment for our involvement in TOOL. We immediately felt like members of the same family because we were welcomed as such by the leaders of the movement and by the other teams. The meetings organised during the weekend reinforced this feeling of belonging to a movement that is always relevant, whatever the time or territory in which we find ourselves. Finally, we understood that as team members, the work that our Lord expects of us is great and our adventure in following Christ with the Teams of Our Lady was just beginning.

(Couple from Togo-Guinea)

10 | Presentation of an Endeavor: the Annual Retreat



*Team members are encouraged to make sufficient time each year for a retreat, as couples if possible, so they can reflect on life in the presence of the Lord.*⁴

Like Christ, who withdrew to the mountains to pray, we must learn to isolate ourselves from the world to give ourselves a chance to encounter God.

Everyone is likely to have experimented various religious retreats. The movement asks each married couple to attend, once per year, a closed religious retreat of a duration fixed by the Region. The purpose of such a retreat is to take a break from one's family life, one's professional life and one's problems to devote this time to God. The fact that we do not give him enough time is a weakness that threatens our spiritual lives. Many people live as if God did not exist. The movement addresses a crucial message to each couple: find time for God (by the personal prayer, listening to his Word, and the rule of life) and find time for each other (by the sit-down dialogue, and the conjugal prayer). The retreat is also a privileged moment to give glory and thanks to God.

The success of a couple's life depends to a large extent on the quality and depth of encounters between spouses. Without meaningful exchanges, spouses are unable to know and love each other. Spending time on a retreat as a couple provides the opportunity for spouses to be touched together by God who offers himself to us. A retreat together as husband and wife is a sign that each member of the couple is taking quality time to meet the other spouse. Another major benefit of a retreat as a couple results from an even greater encounter: the two spouses meet each other, together in the presence of God.

The retreat, carried out in silence, is a blessing that helps spouses revitalise their spiritual, personal, and marital life. It helps put God first and discern how to make his love shine. The retreat contributes to increased humanity and spirituality, making the sacrament of marriage more and more fruitful.

The retreat is a conversion to better understand God's desire for us and to renew our lives. Such a conversion will lead us to more profound prayer, greater respect, more love for our spouse and children, more trust in God, and more clarity in our commitments and services to others.

The testimony of our retreat experience and its fruits is important for the whole team. Our influence is a positive stimulus for the spiritual progress of other team members.

4. Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (2018). Chapter 5 (5.2.6) - The Annual Retreat, pages 40-41.

11 | Preparation of the Next Meeting

- ✦ Note the date, place, and time of the next meeting.
- ✦ Identify the couple in the team who you think is best suited to take on, during the coming year, the role of team leader, also known as “team responsible couple”. The choice is generally made by an individual ballot which will be described during meeting 9.
- ✦ Continue to live the experience of endeavors.
- ✦ Read the following study topic and prepare in writing, as a couple, your ideas for the exchange.

12 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

Let us be attentive to the words of Mary:

“He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty”. God’s tenderness is shown above all in favor of the poor and the humble, at the expense of the rich and the powerful.⁵

Let us pray together:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,*

5. Father Bernard Olivier. Magnificat, from the 3rd chapter - Extracts.

*he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

Prayer intentions if not expressed at the end of the prayer (cf. 4).

Blessing of the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

A few words about the Monthly Letter of TOOL. Originally, information to members was sent out on a mimeographed letter. From 1948 onwards, a Monthly Letter was published by the movement's management team. Father Caffarel regularly wrote an editorial and sometimes a feature article. From December 1945 to May-June 1973, Father Caffarel wrote 175 texts. In the early years, one of the "obligations" of members was to read the editorial of the Letter, providing a subject for reflection.



From the Teams of Our Lady to the House of Prayer - Acts of the 1st Colloquium - page 44.

Father Caffarel's editorials are very important texts and points of reference to know his thoughts on TOOL, the charism, the mystique, as well as the pedagogy and methods of the movement. In Letters currently published by the different Super-Regions, members can read interesting and formative editorials concerning contemporary issues.

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MEETING 9

A TEAM IN AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT



“After the promulgation of the Charter, Teams developed rapidly in France, Belgium and Switzerland. It was clear that the movement was meeting the expectations of many couples. But was it going to leap over linguistic barriers and oceans? Even without publicity, because we were very reluctant to do so, Teams expanded year after year and have reached 19 countries by now (1959): in 1950 in Brazil, in 1951 in Luxembourg, in 1954 in Spain, in 1956 in Portugal, Mauritius, Canada... This unexpected expansion shows that many Christian couples aspire to unite and better live their faith. Such lasting and wide-spread support has marked Church history with so many examples.¹

¹Father Henri Caffarel. Vocation et Itinéraire des END - L'Expansion - L'Anneau d'Or, Special Issue: A Thousand Couples in Rome, May to August 1959.

1 | Hospitality

Welcome to this special meeting. There has been much talk about hospitality, and you have had a chance to practise it at every meeting. Today you are welcomed with open arms by the entire international movement. We hope that you are happy to belong to this movement which is currently established in approximately a hundred countries. As we approach the end of the piloting period, your team will choose a new responsible couple committed to serve and take care of your team. Greet this event as a sign of coming-of-age and maturity of your team within the movement and the Church.

2 | The Meal

In his Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote: *“It is not to know much that satisfies the soul, but to feel and taste things inwardly”*. The meal we eat as a team should be “felt” and “tasted” inwardly. We taste not only the flavors, but especially the pleasure of sharing a meal prepared with love. The taste of everything we experience at the meal and in the meeting satisfies our souls beyond mere appearances. We should appreciate the privilege of such sharing.

Let us not forget to thank the Lord and each member of our team. Let us begin the meal with a prayer and a blessing from the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor.

3 | General Sharing

This part of the meeting, called general sharing, is a time for team exchange. One person speaks while all others listen. At the end, each member can also give another point of view, provide help, share his or her own experiences. It is a time when hearts open, encouraged by the trust and discretion of the team. Careful listening makes it possible for members to share their life, their joys, their sorrows, their difficulties. Such an exchange in trust draws on a strong friendship illuminated by the love of God.

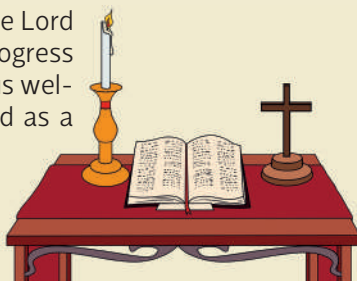
4 | Prayer

The time of prayer is an encounter with the Lord who is waiting for us. A team cannot progress without living this moment intensely. Let us welcome this opportunity to turn to the Lord as a community.

The Word of God: Gospel of John 13:12-17

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes and sat down again, Jesus said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well because I am. So, if I, the Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Truly, truly, I say to you, the servant is not greater than his master, nor is the one sent greater than the one who sent him. Knowing these things, happy are you if you do them.



Meditation

The Word we have just heard touches our hearts in different ways. Each person can either express a prayer inspired from the text, or quote a word or a phrase that most caught his or her attention.

Intentions

The team can decide to continue with personal intentions or express them at the end of the meeting (see point 11).

Concluding liturgical prayer: Psalm or other

5 | Sharing on the Endeavors

At this stage of piloting, each member of the team will have already experienced at least five of the six endeavors (the annual retreat will normally be done eventually). He or she will also have understood that endeavors are not obligations that must be fulfilled in formal obedience to the proposal

of the movement. Instead, endeavors help develop attitudes to be transformed through a true and progressive conversion of life.

Let us therefore share responsibility for each other's spiritual growth by talking openly about our concrete attitudes and progresses with the endeavors. Let us bear witness to our progression, to various approaches we may have used to overcome difficulties and to the practical discoveries that have resulted from the endeavors.

Let us pay attention to what other team members might say and do that can motivate us. Let us acknowledge our shortcomings and occasional lack of attention to required efforts. Let us reveal the steps we have taken that may inspire others; let us also listen to other members' helpful suggestions. Sharing is a fundamental moment in team life; it conveys our efforts during the month and provides a truthful moment of searching spiritual growth together.

Let us transform this moment into a victory of mutual support, of seeking God's love and of sharing that love with each member of the team.

6 | Study Topic: a Team in an International Movement

Shortly after the end of World War II, and especially after the adoption of the 1947 Charter, the movement, which was born in France, underwent a great expansion. It crossed borders, settling first in various European countries, and then reaching the American continent. Gradually, it also spread to Africa, and reached Oceania, the Middle East and even some Asian countries. Eighty years after its foundation, the movement is now established in about 100 countries on five continents. At the very beginning of this extraordinary expansion, the management team and Father Caffarel reflected on the question of whether each country should have an autonomous organisation or whether the movement should remain under a single leadership. After much reflection, it was decided to have only one leadership to preserve and always strive for the most perfect unity. And this is how things have remained.

This is a fundamental aspect of a movement that aspires to be international. Numerous countries, with different languages and cultures, close or far away, strive to remain united by the same ideal of Conjugal Spirituality.

Over time, the international aspect of the movement took on even more vivid colors. Within Christian marriage, the love between spouses and

their journey towards God's love was seen as a universal desire, whatever their country of origin, various components of their culture, ethnic and linguistic differences, etc. Everyone can hear the Good News about Christian marriage which brings together couples from all over the world in an inspiring unity.

Although the movement revolved initially around its cradle in France, Father Caffarel wanted the leadership to be composed of couples from different countries. He even said, "*One of my greatest desires is that non-French priests also contribute to the leadership of Teams of Our Lady*"². The spirit of solidarity and mutual help between countries also shows a progression in the understanding of internationality.

Therefore, internationality is not limited to the composition of the International Leading Team ("Équipe Responsable Internationale", ERI) of the movement. It resides above all in a universal spiritual framework that maintains the essence of the movement. This includes a mixture of good will, mutual help, and exchange of experiences between couples from all over the world belonging to TOOL. Wherever we meet a team member, this brother or sister may speak in a different language but expresses the same desire to love God with his or her heart. Wherever there is a team, members aspire to the same ideal, they use the same means, they follow the same pedagogy, they live the same faith, and they adhere to same conviction, namely that conjugal love finds its source in the heart of God and leads the couple to Him.

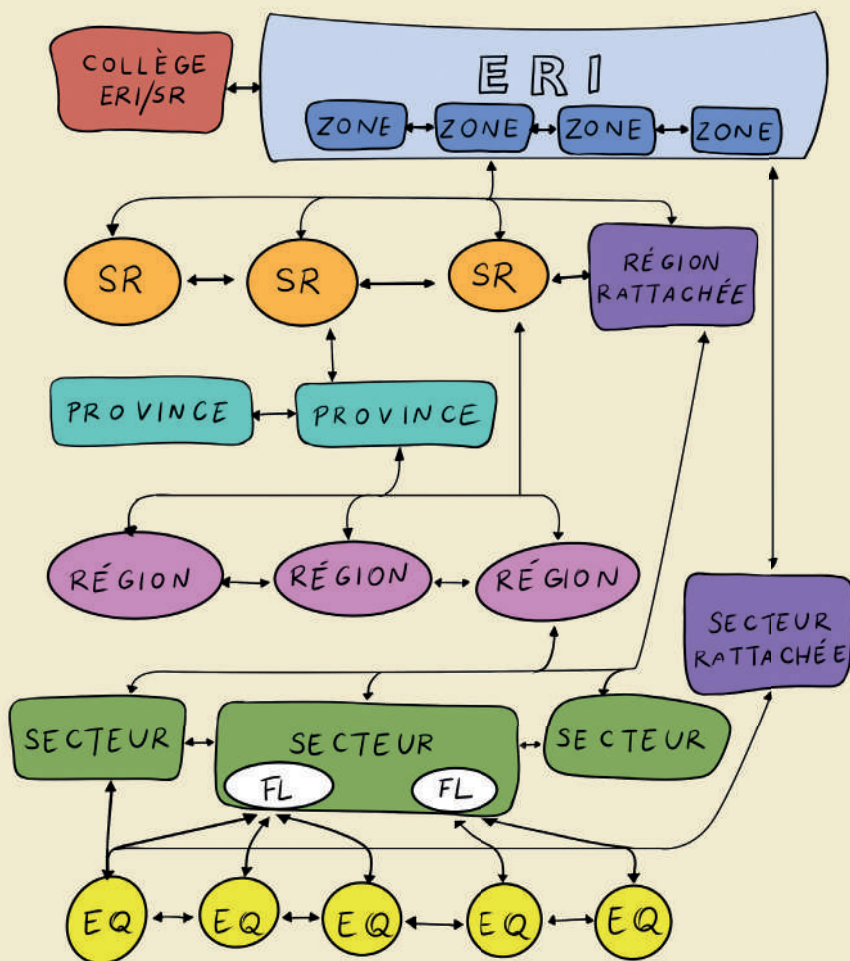
This strong search for unity allows the movement to maintain a well-defined organisation, present in all countries where it is established. The international coordination of the movement is ensured by **the International Leading Team** (ERI), composed of a Leading Couple, a spiritual counselor, and 6 or 7 couples of different nationalities, chosen after consultation with the Super Regions from among couples available in the movement. The couples within ERI are chosen in a personal capacity and do not represent their countries of origin. The ERI is responsible for the general leadership of the movement throughout the world and takes particular care to maintain fidelity to its inspirations and proposals.

The ERI is assisted by an **International College** composed of leaders of the Super Regions and of Regions that are directly attached to the ERI.

The first function that was created within the movement is the **Liaison Couple** whose main task is to establish a communication link between a higher level of responsibility and a lower level, and vice versa. The liaison

2. Father Henri Caffarel. Vocation and Itinerary of the END - L'Expansion, L'Anneau d'Or, Special Issue: A Thousand Homes in Rome, May to August 1959.

couple also ensures a horizontal link between grassroots teams entrusted to them. This liaison function is also present at all levels of the movement's organisation. The ERI is linked to the Super-Regions and attached Regions through the intermediary of the liaison couples (members of the ERI) of each of the 4 identified Zones: Central European Zone, Eurafrikan Zone, American Zone and Eurasian Zone³.



ERI: International Responsible Team; SR: Super Region; FL: Liaison Couple; EQ: Basic Team

For an updated version listing countries and zones where TOOL are established, consult the website: <http://equip-es-notre-dame.com/en/>

The Super-Regions correspond to countries where the movement is very developed and are in turn subdivided into 2 or 3 levels: Provinces (in some countries), Regions and Sectors. At these different levels of responsibility, there is always a responsible couple, their team and a spiritual counselor or advisor who act in a collegial way, seeking consensus in decisions. All these levels are linked together by liaison couples, allowing the lifeblood of the movement to flow easily. Their objective is clear and well defined: to serve and to help each couple respond ever better to Christ's call: "come and follow me".

The liaison couple who is a member of the sector team generally liaises with two or three basic teams. At the end of the current piloting period, a couple from another team and with good experience of the movement will be appointed by the Sector to accompany your team's journey. This liaison couple will provide an outside view and be able to help you in any difficulties you may have. The liaison couple will also act as a two-way link with the Sector, passing on guidelines and information from the Sector to the team, and relaying the aspirations and needs of the team to the Sector.

Every effort is made to encourage good leadership and progress of each team towards its full development. The liaison function is a service of love and not an exercise of power, command, or supervision. During the piloting meetings, you will have noticed that a team is never left alone or isolated. It has the full support of a movement that looks after each basic team to help it to understand the proposals and the way of life of TOOL. Therefore, each team avoids withdrawing into itself, but participates in events proposed and organised by the Sector (monthly masses, formation meetings, celebrations in general, sector day), by the Region or by the movement (national or international meetings). You will also regularly receive a **Letter of the Teams** (which is normally published in each country), and other general publications from the movement and accessible on different media (websites, training platform, etc.). The Guide of the Teams of Our Lady, which will be given to you at the next meeting, will provide more detailed information.

Gradually, each couple will discover the value of the service that we are all called to give to the movement and which has three characteristics:

- ✦ A service that is always free;
- ✦ A service that is always of limited duration;
- ✦ A service of love.

The movement therefore hopes that each couple will always be ready and available to accept the Lord's calls and collaborate for the good of all. A

responsibility in the movement is not accepted for honour or prestige, but as a response to call of love, with the will to serve.

Each year, a team responsible couple is chosen to animate the basic team, to encourage its members, and to support them. This privileged mission is a commitment to help each member live the spirit of TOOL with fidelity to its proposals.

Questions for the exchange around the topic

- a) How do you understand the support the movement provides to each team? Do you feel encouraged to move forward?
- b) What did you discover when you read the supporting documents for each meeting?
- c) Do you feel more available to provide a service when asked? Why or why not? Why not?

7 | Supplementary Texts

7.1. A living movement is built every day, thanks to the actions of its members. Each person, in the basic team and at any other level where he or she is called, assumes a responsibility, generally as a couple, according to their aptitudes, resources, and time availability, with generosity...

A movement withers when its members move from a builder mentality to a tenant mentality!

Many ways are available to work for the progress of the movement.

I will not speak to you today about those who, so generously, devote considerable time to lead the movement, nor about those who go to great lengths to build the "House of Teams". Instead, I want to focus on all those who pray, sacrifice themselves, and make spiritual offerings of great value. They are the great builders of the movement. So many couples in other countries - from Australia to Canada, from Brazil to Lebanon - owe the benefits they derive from belonging to Teams to the prayers and spirit of these persevering couples.

You need to know and think about this. Our movement would not be what it is, or more precisely, it would not be at all, without these discreet workers, often unknown to everyone but how effective in their fidelity to spiritual growth of married couples.⁴

3. Father Henri Caffarel. Builders or Landlords. Monthly Letter END, XIX^e year, n^o 3, December 1965.

*7.2. We must strive for the most perfect unity - this is the answer to Christ's desire, which he revealed to us in his prayer on the evening of Holy Thursday: "that they may be one as we are one". The example of the great religious orders [which have expanded in various countries and in different languages] proves that, in terms of spirituality, there are no borders. You are joyfully experiencing this during these days that you are spending together in Rome [while attending an international gathering]. It is in the name of this fraternity of couples that we wanted to mix nationalities in your teams composed of eight pilgrim couples. And I know that wonderful friendships are already being made. Tell me, isn't it exhilarating for Christian hearts to see all these couples joining hands across borders?'*⁴

8 | Testimony: Structure and Organisation as a Unifying Factor

Even though we are still in our first year as members of the team, we would like to share our experience and participation in the activities of the movement. We have been participating weekly in online rosaries with our team. We always follow the Nights of Prayer, also online. How wonderful to have Mary as Mother... We had a mixed team meeting where we met couples from other teams. We participated in the Mutirão (a meeting to refresh us on proposals from the movement) which greatly enriched us with enlightening content. We have been receiving the monthly Bulletin and much material which helps us to understand the endeavors and the charisma of the movement.



On October 31st, we had our first Teams of Our Lady Mass here in our city. It was an emotional moment of prayer during which we met several couples from other teams, coming from various cities in our Sector. We were recently elected by the members of our team, and by the will of God, to become the 1st team responsible couple. As part of our mission, we participated in the inaugural mass where we met couples who dedicate themselves with much love to advance the movement, each one in their own responsibility. Little by little, we understand the breadth of the movement and discover

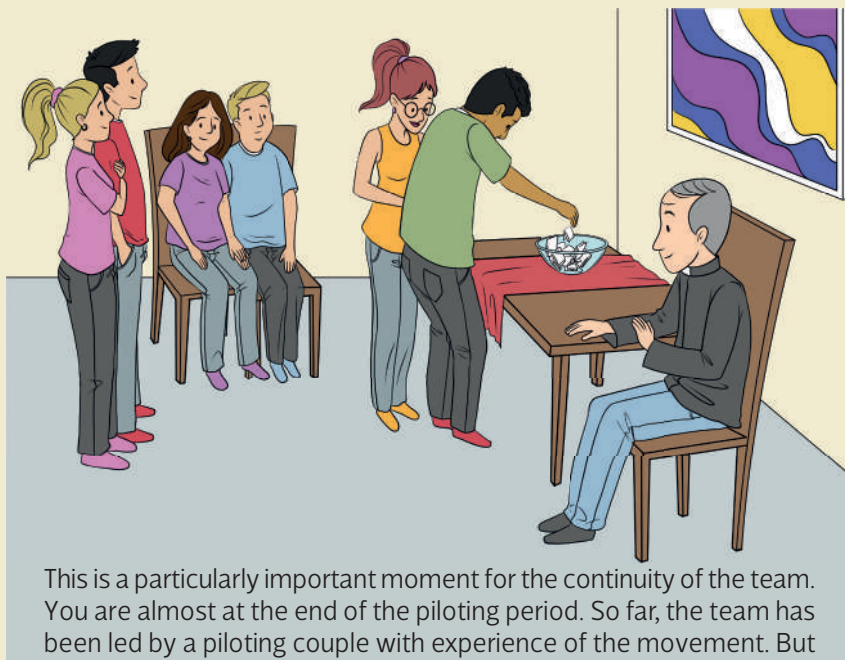
4. Father Henri Caffarel. Vocation and Itinerary of the TOOL (END) - L'Expansion, L'Anneau d'Or, Special Issue: A Thousand Homes in Rome, May to August, 1959.

that we are not alone. We are supported by Our Lady and by many couples who make themselves available to help us in whatever we need. We participated in a specific formation meeting that helped us to understand how everything fits together harmoniously: Team, Sector, Region, Province, Super-Region and International Leading Team - ERI.

We know that we still have much to learn and understand, but we believe that the Teams movement has truly been an inspiration from God for Father Henri Caffarel. We are more and more amazed by the great structure that makes the movement maintain its unity without losing its identity despite its presence in more than 90 countries, with different nationalities. How good it is to know that we are praying for all those team members around the world and that they are praying for us. We are united by the Father's merciful love; we thank God and Our Lady that we belong to a Team. May we never tire of saying like Mary: "The Lord has done wonders for me and Holy is His Name!" and like Father Caffarel: "Let us seek together".

(SR-Brazil couple)

9 | Election of the Team Responsible Couple



This is a particularly important moment for the continuity of the team. You are almost at the end of the piloting period. So far, the team has been led by a piloting couple with experience of the movement. But

as mentioned from the beginning, their participation is temporary and finishes at the end of the piloting phase.

The movement therefore considers that this learning time has enabled you to get to know the pedagogy and methods of TOOL, so you should now be able to apply them by yourselves. The five parts of a regular meeting, the six endeavors and the main aspects of team life should now have become familiar to you and your team members. Your team can now live on its own and become autonomous, while always maintaining strong links with the movement.

This time of fraternal life has also allowed you to get to know each other; you are now ready to go your own way. This new stage begins with the choice of your **first Team Responsible Couple** (TRC). The way this choice is made is fundamental. In a spirit of prayer and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each person votes, individually and in secret, for the couple who appears best suited for the the task. The TRC will lead your team, dedicating themselves to it, caring for its growth, and in short, loving it more. The votes are kept secret, and it is up to the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor to count them and to announce the name of the elected couple, without revealing the number of votes they have obtained. The elected couple will receive this nomination as a call from Jesus Christ himself, who will not fail to endow them with the necessary gifts to fulfil this task well.

Remember that the main role of the TRC is to create a vitality that drives the team forward. So being a responsible couple is not just a formality to meet the requirements of an organisation. It is true that the TRC carries out some administrative tasks, such as organising meetings, participating in meetings with the Sector, representing the team, transmitting guidelines or information received from the movement. But the TRC also assumes a spiritual task of encouraging couples of the team, especially during the general sharing and the sharing of the endeavors at each meeting. Finally, the team responsible couple commits to this particular service for a period of one year, after which another couple will be elected to replace them. Throughout the life of the team, all couples will eventually assume this same mission. It should not be forgotten that the TRC will benefit from the direct help of its spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor, as well as from the liaison couple, thanks to which it will establish solid links with the movement, and with the Sector to which it belongs. The TRC will seek the strength to fulfil this wonderful mission in prayer and in the intimacy of the encounter with Jesus.

Let us now proceed to the election of our TRC, and before voting, let us invoke the Holy Spirit, after which, in a moment of recollection, each person will fill in his or her ballot paper, which will be given to the spiritual counselor or advisor.

10 | Preparation of the next meeting

- ✦ Make a note of the date and place of this meeting and decide on the facilitator.
- ✦ Prepare your participation for the general sharing as a couple.
- ✦ Continue to live the experience of endeavors.
- ✦ Read the next study topic (which is a yearly review) and prepare as a couple in writing your participation in the exchange.

11 | Prayer for the Canonisation of the Servant of God HENRI CAFFAREL

It is a prayer to ask for the canonisation of Father Henri Caffarel and, at the same time, to ask for graces and blessings in favor of those who pray it or for other people in particular need.

Let us pray together:

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 the intercession of Father Caffarel for.....

(Indicate the particular favor being sought)

12 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

Another fundamental theme of the Magnificat is centered on the words “He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy”, We have two main ideas here, which the biblical quotations highlight. First, Mary expresses God’s favor for Israel, a people of beloved children, his servant, chosen to be a witness among the nations. Secondly, God is faithful to his love and promises, He remembers and never gives up. This closeness of Mary to Abraham is illuminating. Abraham was the ancestor, the first patriarch of the people of God. And Mary concentrates the whole people in her, to welcome the fulfilment of the promise. In Abraham and Mary, we have the two extremes of messianic hope. What began with Abraham finds its crowning achievement in Mary. The Magnificat cannot be proclaimed without becoming part of the great movement of messianic hope.⁵

Let us pray together:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Prayer intentions if not expressed at the end of the prayer (cf. 4).

Blessing of the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor

5. Bernard Olivier. Magnificat, from the 4th chapter - Extracts.

TO GET TO KNOW OUR FOUNDER BETTER

Father Caffarel left Equipes Notre-Dame (Teams of Our Lady) in 1973 and entrusted the spiritual direction of the movement to Father Roger Tandonet. His retirement was accompanied by speeches and writings that resembled a testament. In his penultimate editorial (“Reprenre Souffle” or “Taking Another Breadth”), he wonders which of the many important topics he should write about. He decides to write about the Christian meaning of a team meeting, recalling Christ’s words: “For let two or three be gathered together in my name, and I am with them” (Matthew 18:20).



The team meeting is the heart of TOOL. He said: “There, in the midst of these couples gathered in a room, is the intense presence of the Risen One, alive, attentive to all, loving each one as he or she is, with evil or good, and eager to each one become according to the will of God.

Father Caffarel also urged members: “To those men and women who, at the end of a hard day, often arrive exhausted and burdened by worries, the Spirit communicates the twofold Passion of Christ: Jesus’ impatience to see the glory of the Father, and his burning and gentle pity for the crowds ‘who are like sheep without a shepherd’. What I have just said here is not what always happens, but it is what should happen. Indeed, a team meeting that is not first and foremost a common effort to meet Jesus Christ is something quite different from a TOOL meeting.

Jean Allemand - A Man Seized by God - page 161/162 - Extracts - Brazilian Edition)

Teams of Our Lady
International Responsible Team

**Piloting
Manual
for Couples**
Meeting 10

Paris, July 2023



Équipes Notre-Dame

The International Responsible Team does not authorize
no group of couples who are not admitted to the
Movement to name “TEAMS OF OUR LADY”

This document is for internal use by the
Movement of the Teams of Our Lady.

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MEETING

10

REVIEW AND COMMITMENT



The team is not an end in itself. It is a means at the service of its members, enabling them:

- ✦ *to live intense moments of communal prayer and sharing;*
- ✦ *to help each other to come closer to the Lord and to bear witness to His presence.*

Three main moments punctuate team life:

- ✦ *with Christ, the team looks up to the Father to welcome his love;*
- ✦ *in Christ, the team shares his love: “[Those who believed] were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32);*
- ✦ *driven by the Spirit of Christ, the team sends its members into the world to reveal this love.¹*

¹ Father Henri Caffarel. *Les Equipes Notre Dame, Essor et Mission des Couples Chrétiens*. Chapter “What is a Team of Our Lady (1976), A Journey, Team Life, page 171.

1 | Hospitality

You have just spent 9 months discovering team life as proposed by Teams of Our Lady. The piloting period is coming to an end; it is time to take stock of this experience together under the eyes of God.

This meeting is tantamount to a team sit-down. It is a moment of exchange and mutual help under the gaze of God, which can only be lived in a fraternal climate of prayer, listening, truth, and communion.

Our team is already a living and united church community.

For this meeting to be fruitful, it requires prior personal and couple reflection, as usual in the form of a written preparation.

2 | The meal

When the team meets, the meal is made up of bread that you share, that feeds you, and that is equally distributed among all. This meal will never run out from the team's table. Love experienced within the team is a source to multiply the bread that is needed to continue your journey together. Trust that the shared bread will never cease to meet your needs.

3 | General sharing

You will share the important events of the month, without getting lost in the details.

Then you will review the past year's general sharing:

- ✦ How did you experience these moments? Did you feel comfortable during this sharing?
- ✦ Did you feel listened to?
- ✦ Did the events experienced by others provide you some increased inner meaning?
- ✦ Have you managed to share your joys and sorrows, your commitments, your work and its difficulties, your family life?
- ✦ Is this time too short or too long at the expense of other parts of the meeting?
- ✦ Was the general sharing prepared as a couple?

4 | Prayer

May the Lord help us open our hearts to sharing and listening in truth.

✦ Come Spirit of holiness, come Spirit of light!
Come Spirit of fire, come and set us on fire!

Word of God - Gospel according to Saint Luke 6: 47-49.

“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock; and when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But he who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation; against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”



Meditation

As at every meeting, everyone can share and pray aloud what this text inspires.

Prayer Intentions

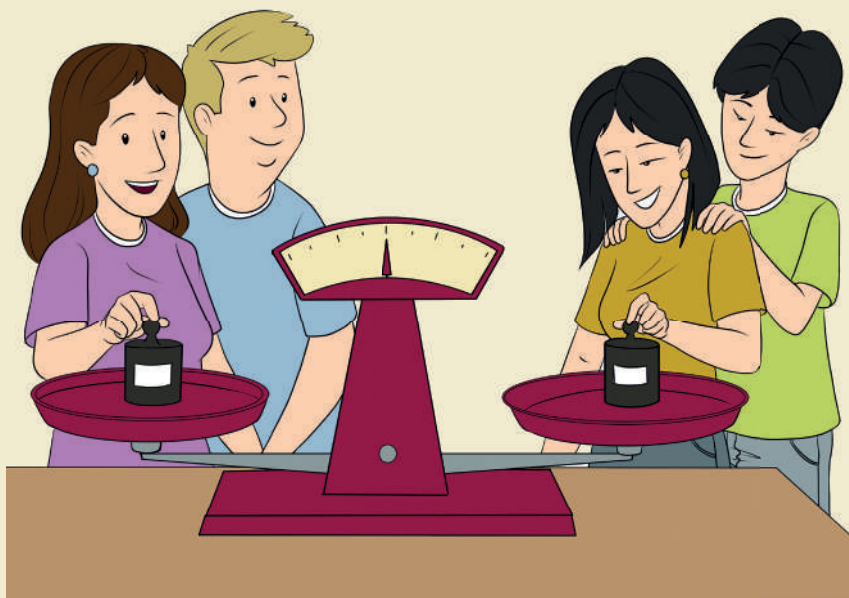
Concluding Liturgical Prayer

Finally, the following prayer should be read:

“We are gathered in the name of God and in his presence. Lord, give us the grace, during our exchanges, to listen carefully to the words of other members, and especially those of our spouse, so we may grasp what is essential for each person and what comes from the Holy Spirit.

Open our hearts and minds so that our team becomes ever more a fraternal community at your service.

5 | The year in review



5.1. There will be no usual sharing time during this end-of-year review; instead, the meeting is conducted as a team sit-down. It is very important for each couple to review in advance the following questions and to prepare your answers in writing. These questions will be addressed during the collective review.

- Did you come to the meeting happily or dragging your feet?
- What deep links between couples and with the SC/SA have been created? Did you hear from each other between meetings, and did you have friendly get-togethers between meetings?
- Did the SC/SA feel comfortable? What did you expect of him or her? Did he or she feel part of the team?
- Did you feel comfortable communicating and sharing during the meeting? Do you think that you yourself listen carefully and sufficiently to others? How could listening be improved?

- e) How did you experience prayer time at the meeting? What can be improved?
- f) Were the endeavors a help or a hindrance for your spiritual life (knowing that it takes time to fully incorporate them in your life)? Which endeavor did you incorporate best and which seemed most difficult to integrate in your life?
- g) Has belonging to TOOL changed your life as a couple? Your relationship with God? Your relationship with your spouse, your children, and others?
- h) Has the deepening of your marriage sacrament made your love grow?
- i) Did the different meetings and topics proposed help you to discover the TOOL movement? What do you think of the booklets [documents used for each meeting]? Were the complementary texts useful?
- j) Did the pilot couple help you discover TOOL and Father Caffarel, founder of the Teams? What did you expect from the pilot couple and above all what more could be done to better accompany a new team?
- k) What can be done to improve the functioning of the team so that it is a fraternal community of the Church in service to one another?
- l) In the end, does the TOOL movement meet your expectations? What were your greatest satisfactions? What were the shortcomings?

5.2. Based on the assessment you have made as a couple and your answer to the last questions, you will be asked to tell others whether you would like to continue with them on the path proposed by TOOL next year. The movement would be delighted if you continued to work with it as a team because *“In Teams of Our Lady, we do not commit ourselves to success but to progress, each at his or her own pace”*.

5.3. Normally, piloting of a new team ceases at this meeting. It is strongly recommended that the team meet during a specific weekend, organized by the Sector or the Region, for new teams and new team members. As much as possible, try to register all together as a team to this weekend formation.

5.4. What will your study topic be for next year? Depending on the Super-Region or Region to which you belong, you will have a variety of topics to choose from. The piloting couple will give you all the necessary information on this subject.

5.5. Remember to set a date for the first meeting of the next year.

6 | Testimonial: Evaluation of Piloting



We found the piloting experience very encouraging, its objectives clear and we felt guided throughout the introductory process. We felt that coming together as a group offered a unique opportunity to explore our faith and share our lives, thoughts, and prayers in a mutually supportive space. The teams enabled us all to grow spiritually as individuals, couples, and families within the wider parish.

The piloting approach worked very well, with advice from a couple already part of an established team, giving an insight into the benefits of being part of a team. The piloting led us to discover and put into practice all the endeavors, to set up the format of our meetings, and to recognize the importance of each moment.

We had no experience of the TOOL approach prior to joining our group, so we had no specific expectations, other than the understanding that we would be able to meet with like-minded couples within our parish. Our initial idea of spiritual benefits became concrete through several unexpected avenues which, of course, are part of our faith journey.

At the end of the piloting period, we felt as a team that we were ready to move forward. A continuing focus on endeavors, each one in turn, will help us to find them increasingly beneficial. We are enjoying our meetings, getting to know each other better, and savoring a newly discovered friendship. For the time being, we are still a fledgling team, and we need to consolidate our progress before confidently taking on wider responsibilities. But of course, once we reach that stage, I'm sure we will welcome the opportunity to support other team members.

(SR-Transatlantic couple)

7 | Handing over of the Guide of the Teams of Our Lady

To mark the end of this year of piloting, you will be given the Guide to the Teams of Our Lady, which includes the Charter of the movement as well as other documents relating to the life of the movement such as:



- ✦ What is a Team of Our Lady?
- ✦ Father Caffarel's speech in Chantilly (France);
- ✦ The Second Wind;
- ✦ Vocation and Mission at the Dawn of the Third Millennium;
- ✦ The Decrees of Recognition of Teams by the Church;
- ✦ The Canonical Statutes.

The TOOL Charter is the basis on which the movement, launched by Father Caffarel in 1939, was solidly built and has continued to grow throughout the world. Written in 1947 and revised in 1976, it remains the fundamental reference for the couples that meet as a team and are part of the movement. It expresses what each of its members is invited to pursue to live fully the vocation of a baptised person in marriage.

The Charter recommends reading and meditating on the Word as well as regular prayer. The means proposed help team members to deepen their faith and to adapt their lives to the demands of Christ. It encourages fraternal friendship and mutual spiritual, moral and material support within the team.

The 1976 review (entitled "What is a Team of Our Lady?") focuses on life guidelines for couples, the endeavors (including sharing during the meetings) and the rules for a fruitful team life, the same rules that were proposed and experienced during the 10 months of piloting.

TOOL couples use the Gospel as the charter for their family. Their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, is intended to be a praise to God.

8 | Prayer for the canonisation 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. Amen!

9 | Guidelines from the Pilot Couple for the future

10 | Final Prayer and Blessing

Magnificat

During the piloting time, we felt how much we are loved by God. Each of us has experienced the joy of receiving a special love. If you analyse your journey so far, you will see how God has done wonders in your personal and married life. Together, we will sing or pray this Magnificat with a heart full of joy and especially full of thanksgiving for the experience of seeking God’s love in the company of our brothers and sisters in the team and in the movement. The Mighty One did wonders for each of us, Holy is his name!

Let us recite the Magnificat together to thank God for all the graces received during this pilgrimage.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Prayer intentions if not expressed at the end of the prayer (cf. 4)

Blessing of the spiritual counselor or spiritual advisor



