

***TEAMS OF OUR LADY  
STUDY TOPIC  
2017-2018***

***THE MISSION OF  
LOVE***

***ERI***  
*(International Leading Team)*

## ***FORWARD -by the International Leading Couple***

This study topic offered by the International Responsible Team in preparation for the XII International Gathering at Fatima 2018 is both a beginning and an end. It is important to understand this, because the road that the Movement has travelled since its foundation (and this year we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Charter) is not a set of separate stages, but a continuous journey and always leading towards an ever-deeper meeting with Christ and, consequently, with ourselves.

It is a beginning of a very intense period that began after the Brasilia Gathering 2012, culminating in Pope Francis' address to the Teams in Rome in September 2015, a moment of grace framed by the Synod and *Amoris Laetitia*.

We are convinced that in this current time, the Movement has been strongly challenged by the world and by the Church; and yet it is determined to "dare to live the Gospel." The experience that we have lived since the internationalization of the movement is that the Teams of Our Lady Movement is and will continue to be a place of dialogue, of tolerance, without bitterness or naivety, where the demands of the world we live are present. We have all finally understood that we are not in Teams to defend ourselves from the world, but that, with Christ, we will go to the world to proclaim the Gospel.

"**The Mission of Love**" is the title of this study topic prepared by a team from the Spanish Super-Region. It completes a period of deep reflection and opens a period in which opportunities of welcoming and fellowship are increased - via the Gathering in Fatima 2018, which itself is inspired by the parable of the Prodigal Son. Team members will remain firm in unity and fidelity to their charism, but also, they will be open to the world and the signs of the times, with increased passion, vigour and a new outlook. *"If the Teams of Our Lady are not a seedbed of men and women ready to take on courageously all their responsibilities in the Church and in society, they lose their raison d'etre" [reason for being]* (Henri Caffarel).

It is not only the institution of marriage and the family, according to God's plan, that are often undervalued today, but it is the very idea of love (as it is beautifully told in chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia*) that is seriously threatened by increased self-centeredness that has spread throughout the world. Thus, "**Love is our mission**".

We are prepared for it, to carry the testimony of the values in which we believe, through active and merciful involvement. In union with Christ, supported in his Word and in prayer, let us proclaim the fidelity of our love, which in the end is our vocation. We know that answering it will be a commitment, it will involve revealing our life plans, revealing our hopes for this society in which we live in, which in the end is ours and will have its place in the history of Salvation.

In summary, all parts of Love serve Love; this is the background message of the Study Topic that you have in your hands. And our message is this: **More openness, a stronger mission, more love**, should be the priority for Teams of Our Lady.

**-Tó and José MOURA SOARES, International Responsible Team**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This course, in which the Movement is preparing for the **XII Teams International Gathering Fatima 2018**, “*Renewing the Covenant in the Strength of the Spirit*”, is asking us to begin our pilgrimage taking into consideration the ecclesial moment we have been living during the last years, along with the great documents Pope Francis has given us.

A journey in which we have been immersed since Brasilia 2012 and which had an essential milestone in the 2015 meeting of Regional Couples in Rome and the audience with Pope Francis, in which he confirmed our charism for the world today and pointed the objectives that as a Movement we must follow in the next years. For this reason, we believe important that the Pope’s proposals in this Address should constitute the fundamental thread of some of the chapters in this study. The titles of these chapters are actions, because they imply an ongoing mission with no limits in time. In fact, we could see how some of them have been considered in the most recent meetings of the International College, where the responsible leaders of Teams from all around the world come together for formation, prayer and celebration, reflection and also to share initiatives as well as experiences, which give concrete answers to many challenges.

In this journey to Fatima 2018, we must bear in mind two great events that the universal Church has experienced in the last years:

- The year of Mercy, especially the apostolic letter, *Misericordia et Misera*, produced at the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year.
- The Extraordinary Synod of 2014-2015, with the beautiful apostolic exhortation of the Holy Father, *Amoris Laetitia*, is without any doubt a call to everyone, but especially to movements with conjugal and family charisms, to reflect on our mission and to give a clear response to the hopes and needs of those who we have been sent to.

Ultimately, we are conscious that to deepen the charism and mission entrusted to us, requires us to study the texts of Father Caffarel, who with his writings knew how to delve into aspects previously new to the Church and that today continue to be the foundation in which the essence of Teams of Our Lady is based. For this reason, the chapters are complemented with essential texts from Father Caffarel about the mission of marriage.

## OUTLINE

The study material/topic has four main sections. It begins with **Giving Thanks** for the gift of the sacrament of matrimony and sacred orders. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> section we **recognize this mission**, this gift that cannot stay as an exclusive gift to individuals or couples, but because of its own dynamism is a missionary vocation, which is the nucleus of the topic. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> most extensive section, we try to **understand this mission**. We recognize that our first mission is to have depth and truth in marriage, and truly from this reality, we must be attentive to the diverse aspects related with the work for marriage and the family. Last, we recognize that we do this by **being faithful** to the charism received in the Movement which we are part of, Teams of Our Lady.

1. To give thanks for the gift of the marriage / priestly vocation:  
GIVING THANKS (Chapter1)
2. To recognize and revive our missionary vocation:  
GOING FOWARD (Chapter2)
3. To solidify our mission:
  - a. To understand the endeavours as tools for our first mission:  
BEING MARRIED (Chapter3)
  - b. To recognize the mission in a simple and ordinary way:  
WITNESSING (Chapter4)
  - c. To welcome, form and accompany the youth:  
ACCOMPANYING (Chapter5)
  - d. To help heal the wounds:  
HEALING (Chapter6)
  - e. To welcome failed marriages:  
WELCOMING (Chapter7)
4. From the received charism:  
BEING FAITHFUL (Chapter8)

Afterwards, we suggest an evaluation meeting. (Chapter9)

## GENERAL STRUCTURE - 9 Chapters

(incorporating 9 months of personal / couple reflection and 9 Team meetings)

Chapter	OBJECTIVES	Quote
1. Giving Thanks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanking God and the Church for the care of our vocation through Teams of Our Lady.</li> <li>• Recognizing the concrete good that every couple and priest has meant for the Movement and the team.</li> <li>• Recognizing the complementarity of vocations.</li> </ul>	1 Cor 13:4-7
2. Going Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing that being a missionary is an essential part of the vocation of Teams of Our Lady.</li> <li>• Moving beyond of our comfort zones.</li> <li>• Committing ourselves to live in a missionary spirit, which comes from within and is open to others.</li> </ul>	Lk 14:12-14
3. Being Married	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing that our first mission is to live in fullness the vocation we have been called to.</li> <li>• Giving thanks for the concrete means which are at our disposal to live marriage and family as the project God has intended for us.</li> <li>• Renewing our marital commitment.</li> </ul>	Tob 8:4-9
4. Witnessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being conscious that it is by living our vocation that we announce to the world the joy of marriage.</li> <li>• Looking for ways to show in our surroundings the real good news that the Gospel has for couples and families.</li> </ul>	Jn 13:34-35
5. Accompanying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remembering the call by the Pope to all Team members to commit to helping young couples during their engagement and first years of marriage.</li> <li>• Finding out what is already being done by the Teams movement.</li> <li>• Looking for new ways to support and accompany engaged couples, commit to support married couples and the institution of marriage.</li> </ul>	Is 62:1-5

6. Healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remembering the call by the Pope to all Team members to commit to helping with wounded families.</li> <li>● Asking for the capacity to recognize and embrace those who are suffering.</li> <li>● Recognizing that the wounds of the families around us are God's call to get involved and connected.</li> </ul>	Lk 10:30-37
7. Welcoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remembering the call from the Pope to all Team members to commit themselves to support and help those whose marriages have failed.</li> <li>● Discerning concrete ways in which all Team members can live out this call by the Church.</li> </ul>	Mt 9:10-13
8. Being Faithful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowing, valuing and giving thanks for the charism the Holy Spirit has given to the Church in and through Father Henri Caffarel.</li> <li>● Discerning what it means as couples, families and teams the call to a greater faithfulness.</li> <li>● Committing to the cause of Father Henri Caffarel's beatification.</li> </ul>	Jn 15:12-17
9. Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sharing and reviewing our personal journey as individuals and couples throughout this year's study material.</li> <li>● Sharing and reviewing the team's journey throughout this year's study material.</li> </ul>	Mt 11: 25-30

## STRUCTURE FOR EACH CHAPTER

Each chapter begins with an introduction. Next, we find a reading from the Word of God, the endeavour by which the Movement encourages us to move deeper into the study material. In this part, we present formative commentary introducing the biblical text followed by the reading. It is our first approach to this biblical reading from which we will meditate during our team meeting and we would like this Word to accompany us throughout the month.

Then, we have a presentation of the texts that form the central nucleus of each chapter. As mentioned before, they come from the Address that Pope Francis gave to Teams, the apostolic exhortation "*Amoris Laetitia*", which was taken from the conclusion of the Family Synod, as well as texts from Father Caffarel according to each topic.

Next, we offer some ideas to prepare for the monthly meeting as well as the assignments of the topic throughout the month. There are questions to prepare as a couple for the meeting, some reflections to help us with the meditation during the meeting, some ideas to deepen our participation, placing emphasis on the endeavours and the sit-down. There follow some questions that might help us to focus on the topic. There are also, references to the Fatima Gathering to consider during the month, which can be shared at the team's meeting.

This Study topic, as all the study topics from Teams, intends to be practical, challenging and to help up us in our lives as a couple.

Let us embrace this study topic, that will bring us together in Fatima. Let's discover the mission of Love in our lives and what this mean for each one of us, for our team and for the Movement of Teams of Our Lady.

## FIRST CHAPTER - GIVING THANKS

### Objective

- To thank God and the Church for our vocation through Teams of Our Lady.
- To recognize the concrete good that every marriage and priest has meant for the Movement and the team.
- To recognize the complementarity of vocations.

### 1. *GENERAL INTRODUCTION*

We begin this study topic with the Pope's invitation to recognize how the Church in general and teams in particular have cared for our conjugal spirituality and our family life.

It is not coincidence that we are invited to begin with giving thanks, since it is with ease that we get used to our lives and we become complacent. We see things as trivial, carry on day to day and believe things are "normal". But if we stop for a moment and look back, we can recognize the gifts we have received from so many people and situations that have helped us persevere.

He who does not pause and be still, who does not make time to remember and reflect, who does not recognize himself as small and fortunate, will hardly be thankful. Thanks? Why? To whom? And he who is not willing to be thankful is not capable of love, because he has not been able to let himself be loved first.

This is Saint Paul's experience, who recognized God's love in his life. If there is something he must be thankful for is the fact that he was loved, not in any way but in a special way that later on, from his own experience, will develop in him the "Hymn to Love." When we talk about love, we are talking about this LOVE: the love that God has manifested in his Son Jesus.

For this reason, this first topic invites us to recognize what we have lived, to tenderly be thankful for what has been gifted to us, to know that we have been loved throughout our real lives. It seems easy, but we all know that letting someone love us, letting someone "wash our feet" is harder than what we would like to believe.

### 2. *THE WORD OF GOD*

## Introduction to the Biblical Text

Saint Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia at the beginning of the Christian era in a Jewish family from the tribe of Benjamin. He was educated in Jerusalem, with Gamaliel, under Pharisaic doctrine and he was a great persecutor of Christians until his conversion, due to an encounter he had with the Risen Jesus on his way to Damascus. From that moment on, he dedicated his life with much passion to announcing He who had “taken hold” of him (Phil 3:12), and from whom he had received the mission of evangelizing to the gentiles (Acts 9:3-19).

The letters from Saint Paul are timely writings by which he tries to give answers to concrete situations. Their content varies according to the circumstances and the audience which he directs it to, but gathered under one central doctrine in the person of the risen Christ. The apostle evangelizes the Greek city of Corinth around the year 50 AD. In this famous port, he founded a flourishing community. The diverse pagan streams of thought and religion collided with the faith of that young community, whose difficulties the apostle tries to resolve through the various letters he writes to them. In the first letter, many aspects and problems of early Christianity are detailed in relation with their own community and the world that surrounds them.

The text we are about to listen to is from the “Hymn to Love”. This hymn is a response to the internal tensions that the community of Corinth suffered due to the greater or lesser importance given to each charism and service within the community, tensions that made coexistence difficult.

In this hymn, we can distinguish three parts: the first part shows the superiority of love, above any other great and valuable act (vv. 1-3), the second part describes which are the concrete characteristics of love by Saint Paul (vv. 4-7), and the third part declares the perpetuity of love, which never ends and that is above faith and hope (vv. 8-13). We will focus on the second part because in it love is described. This is done through the appeal of the personification of love, which enables us to understand in a simple and clear way the kind of love we are called to. The hymn is an exhortation to all the community of Corinth to discover the superior charisms and to not be content with a mediocre life, but to live a full life from that perfection that the Lord calls them to through the apostle. Always turning to these superior charisms, that desire of perfection, through the filter of love, that places others, the community, before oneself.

## Biblical Text

*“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 light. Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. “(1 Cor 13:4-7)*

### **3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION**

#### **Presentation**

This presentation of the study topic will maintain a similar structure to all the other chapters. We will present three texts that will guide our way and that will help us guide the reflection throughout the study material. We will begin by going over the message from the Pope directed to all Teams of Our Lady in the International Gathering of Regional Couples from all the world gathered in Rome on September 10th, 2015. We will follow with extracts from the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which can be broadened with further reading as indicated. We will always finish with the words of Father Caffarel, taken from his editorials, letters, conferences...of extraordinary relevance today.

In his first words, Pope Francis, invites us to recognize our own charism – conjugal spirituality – at the centre of the Church, in a time in which he has made especial emphasis on the family. From the first paragraph, recognizing marriage as the fundamental base for families, we acknowledge the call to a mission. We are not only couples in our teams, but we are also couples sent to bring support to other couples, to other persons...we will find in his words how he makes this call concrete. This will be the running thread of the entire proposed topic. From our sacramental reality, we recognize and give thanks, and go forth to serve others.

The Pope reiterates other essential traits of our charism which is the fecundity/fruitfulness that comes from joining two sacraments: Matrimony and Holy Orders. This is something that we know, that we have heard many times, but in a very special way in this text it is asked from us that couples support the priests, thanking them for their labour and their ministry.

This quote from *Amoris Laetitia*, is taken from the fourth chapter: Love in Marriage, central nucleus of this Exhortation in which the Hymn of Saint Paul, on which we have meditated, is explained. It is worth reading the whole chapter: the commentaries are based on the etymologic and profound meaning of the words that compose this hymn of love, and will help us recognize the kind of love we have been called to, with a language easy to comprehend, made tangible in attitudes in our daily lives as spouses and family. To give thanks for the experience of all these attitudes will make possible for us to predispose ourselves to the mission we are called to.

Last, is a text from Father Caffarel published in the magazine, *l'Anneau d'Or*, n°14, in the year 1947. In this writing, he recognizes this mutual affinity between marriage and the spiritual counsellor, and in which we are asked to be grateful and pray for the priests that accompany us. Like Father Marcovits, O.P, presented in his conferences about Father Caffarel, during the gathering in Rome in 2015, *“this bond between the couple and the priest is essential to the future of the Church: the way we live this bond between these two sacraments, may be the source of equilibrium, dynamism and renewal for the Church.”*

a) ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*“...Naturally, a movement of conjugal spirituality such as yours fully express the attention that the Church wants to have for families, and it does so both by promoting the maturation of the couples who participate in your teams, through the fraternal support given to other couples to whom they are sent.”*  
(...)

*In this regard, I emphasize the mutual fruitfulness of this encounter experienced with a priest who supports you. I thank you, dear couples of Teams of Our Lady, for being a support and encouragement to the ministry of your priests, who always find priestly joy, fraternal presence, emotional balance and spiritual paternity...”*

b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

*(...) In a lyrical passage of Saint Paul, we see some of the features of true love: (...) (1 Co 13,4-7). Love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of couples and their children. (...)*

*Throughout the text, it is clear that Paul wants to stress that love is more than a mere feeling. Rather, it should be understood along the lines of the Hebrew verb “to love”; that is “to do good”. As Saint Ignatius of Loyola said, “Love is shown more by deeds than by words”. It thus shows its fruitfulness and allows us to experience the happiness of giving, the nobility and grandeur of giving ourselves overabundantly, without asking to be repaid, purely for the pleasure of giving and serving.*

*(...) My advice is never to let the day end without making peace in the family. “And how am I going to make peace? By getting down on my knees? No! Just by a small gesture, a little something, and harmony within your family will be restored. (...) Today we recognize that being able to forgive others implies the liberating experience of understanding and forgiving ourselves (...) All this assumes that we ourselves have had the experience of being forgiven by God, justified by his grace and not by our own merits. We have known a love that is prior to any of our own efforts, a love that constantly opens doors,*

*promotes and encourages. If we accept that God's love is unconditional, that the Father's love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us."*

c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL

*"Returning to my room later and closing the shutters, I caught a glimpse of lights through the trees. "They have gone home", I thought, remembering the couples at the retreat, "And in those homes tonight, there is certainly more ardent human tenderness and a greater love of God than before." An unexpected thought hit me and I was stuck by the obvious affinity that exists between marriage and priesthood, the link that unites the priest to the Christian family. How beautiful those couples are! And it is this happiness, this fullness that Christ asks his priest to sacrifice... How wonderful is the gift of the disciple to his Master! How is it that the person who has given up love and paternity is precisely the person who has the power to kindle the flame in the hearth of the home? What is this paradox? ... No, it is not a paradox, but a mysterious correlation between Orders and Marriage. Indeed, it would be very superficial to believe that the priest holds back from founding a home through contempt for love and the family. It is not disdain but devotion: he is the lamb marked for the sacrifice, so that God may bless the entire flock. Thus, the renouncement of one explains the pure and fervent love of the others... Looked at in this light, it seems obvious that priest and couple should understand and support each other. Is it not appropriate for the couple to have fervent gratitude towards the priest, realizing that his sacrifice is in direct proportion to the happiness and intensity of their family life, and that the couple pray that Christ's friendship transfigures the loneliness of the apostle?"*

Henri Caffarel, L'Anneau d'Or, n° 14, Le foyer et le prêtre, p. 6

#### **4. IDEAS TO PREPARE FOR THE TEAM MEETING**

- a. Welcome
- b. General Sharing

In addition to commenting on significant events of the month, we are invited to recognize the moments in which we have felt loved and accompanied, in which we have given our heartfelt thanks and in which we should have given them and have not dared to.

- c. Prayer
- Reading of the Word (1 Cor 13:4-7)**

When you place yourself before the Hymn to Love, one can experience a kind of vertigo when we note the disproportion between what is being asked of us and what we are actually willing to do. Therefore, we are invited to feel blessed, to discover that everything we are and have, are gifts from the Lord. It is He who has been patient, and is still patient with me, who has treated me with kindness, who has not unloaded his anger despite my continuous infidelities and setbacks, He who does not focus on my wrongs but sees the good in me, however small, and discovers the possibilities hidden in my poor and needy heart.

We enter into silence and try to remember what the Lord has done for each one of us, everything he has given us, the times we have felt His love and healing, allowing a deep and sincere gratefulness to flare up inside of us.

- Lord, I give you thanks because You have been especially patient with me, because through specific people You have showered me with your care as instruments and signs of your love.
- I give you thanks...

#### **d. Sharing**

At the beginning of a new study topic we could share with the team the concrete benefits of living the “endeavours” in our lives.

We suggest for this month a Sit-down in which thanksgiving is the principal theme of dialogue:

- Thanking God for His constant presence and companionship in our lives. How do we live this? Do we recognize it?
- Thanking our spouse. In this Sit-down, there is no room for reproaches, only for the “good in the other”. Let us recognize some attitude of the other person that makes us grow, helps us, and for which we are especially grateful.
- Thanking our team. We can give value to those aspects of our team for which we are especially thankful.
- Thanking the presence of our spiritual counsellor.

The sharing during this month could have a particular emphasis on this endeavour and the Sit-down on thanksgiving.

#### **e. Questions for General Reflection**

At this moment, we are not asking for a theoretical reflection on love or discussion about how to live it, but a recognition of this love. In this way, each one can choose from the whole theme some personal experience of that love to share...from Team life, particular people, shared situations, difficult moments...

- Have we felt the love that St. Paul invites us to live in our team?
- When? With whom? Have you recognized it? Have you accepted it? Have you given thanks?

**f. Towards Fatima**

During this first month of the study topic (September) the registrations for the International Gathering-Fatima 2018 will be opened. Do we really know what this is? Do we recognize its importance? How do we consider this Gathering? Is it something we have reflected on? Are we planning on attending personally? If by any circumstance, we cannot physically attend, how can we be united in heart to it?

**g. Magnificat**

## CHAPTER TWO - GOING FOWARD

### Objective

- To recognize the call to the Teams to move beyond our comfort zones.
- To be conscious that the mission is an essential part of our vocation and of the charism in belonging to Teams of Our Lady.
- To commit to live with a missionary spirit, which comes from oneself and opens to others.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the conference directed to all the Regional Couples gathered in Rome in September 2015, Tó and Zé Moura Soares, International Responsible Couple, emphasized us being missionaries:

*“Therefore, the main aspect of the mission of a Christian couple should be to show the world the novelty of their experiences, without great formulas or methods, but with the testimony of a responsible commitment and with a renewed will to open themselves with generosity and humility to a fruitful life (...) In this regard, Pope Francis affirmed in his address to the Council of Europe that “those who dialogue only within the closed groups they belong to are left only belonging half way.” The answer to these disturbing statements, either according to the Pope or according to Father Caffarel, can only take place through the fruitfulness of our Movement, witnessing the wonders that this sacrament produces in couples and not limiting ourselves just repeating words already worn off by what others say better than us.”*

-Tó and Zé Moura Soares, “The Changing World Challenges Teams of Our Lady”, III International Meeting of Regional Couples, Rome, 2015.

This missionary reality has been lived since the beginning of Teams of Our Lady. The Founding Charter in 1947, recognized the urgency of witnessing to conjugal love and fraternal mutual help: *“The Teams of Our Lady feel that today, as before, non-believers will be won over for Christ, if they can see Christians truly loving each other and helping one another to seek God and to serve their fellowmen. Such brotherly love goes beyond mutual help and bears witness to Christ.”* We cannot be satisfied with a restrictive vision of what we are as a Movement, with our conjugal spirituality, since there are occasions in which this idea has been used to reassure consciences. Now more than ever, this is not possible. We must bring up to date and be attentive in this specific moment of our history, on how to live with a deepened sense of our mission. The mission, as an essential part of our charism, must be understood as something “more”, a

plus that you can take or leave it, but with an inevitable consequence for your own essence and your spirituality.

## 2. **WORD OF GOD**

### **Introduction to the Biblical Text**

The proposed text is from the Gospel of Luke. The word Gospel comes from the Greek and means “good news”. It is not any kind of news, but one that is capable of transforming our life. The good news is Jesus Himself who comes to encounter us as Saviour.

Since the end of the second century, Christian tradition has attributed the third Gospel to Luke, one of Paul's companions, who probably wrote it between the years 80-90 AD. According to Col 4:10-14, Luke was not a Jew and is known as the “beloved physician”. It is probable that he lived in the south of Greece and that some Christian missionary announced to him the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. As a result of his encounter with Jesus he joins the Christian community and decides to write a Gospel that he directs to Theophilus for him to know how reliable are the teachings he has received (cf. Luke 1:1-4) The name Theophilus means “the beloved by God” or “friend of God.” You may refer to an individual by this name but also to any person who is loved by God.

The selected text (Lk 14:12-14) belongs to the teachings of Jesus to his disciples on their way to Jerusalem. This story presents Jesus being invited to dinner at the home of one of the Pharisee leaders. Jesus, during the banquets, comes to encounter many people. In them, He found an occasion to share His life, to get to know them more profoundly, and to let them ask Him questions regarding concrete themes, including becoming the victim of provocations.

Jesus never avoided these occasions and He participated in these encounters, observing attentively, and then spoke out freely what He believed. In this case, He has words for the guests and the host. Our text only grasps the words addressed to the host of the house. Jesus invites him to change his ways and schemes and to learn to live from what he has received freely.

### **Biblical Text**

*“He said also to the man who had invited him: “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be*

*blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Lk 14:12-14).*

### **3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION**

#### **Presentation**

The Pope, in his words addressed to Teams of Our Lady, leads us to recognize that everything lived and shared in our marriage, in our priesthood and in our teams is not for us. *“God thinking of all of us, chooses a few”* (Lk 6:12). This is why we cannot afford to live Christianity behind closed doors in a world that needs our witness. From our vocation of marriage and priesthood we must announce and proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, this missionary impulse is realized in care of the vocation of marriage (which we will reflect in the third chapter) and by the joyful and lively witness of Christian families who don't deny their reason of being and who in their everyday lives offer a family spirit of attentiveness and openness to the needs of others (which we will reflect in the fourth chapter).

Far from enclosing ourselves in our comfort zones, Christian marriages and families must become a sign of the love of Jesus for the most needy, for the most vulnerable (which we will reflect in the fifth and seventh chapters), and this cannot remain just words but must be realized in our daily life.

The text from Father Caffarel is from an extraordinary edition of the magazine, *l'Anneau d'Or*, n° 111-112, titled *“Marriage, the Great Sacrament”* from May-August 1963. This extract was taken from an article about *“Priesthood of Marriage”* in which Father Caffarel reflects about the priestly role of the *“chosen”* couple, *“called”* from God to participate in the mission of the Church, which offers and proclaims before the world their service to God and humanity.

#### **a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY**

*(...) Indeed, I would like to insist on this missionary role of the Teams of Our Lady. Every committed couple certainly receives a great deal from its team experience, and its conjugal life is deepened by refining itself through the spirituality of the Movement. However, after receiving from Christ and from the Church, a Christian is irresistibly sent out to witness to and pass on what he has received. “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120). Christian couples and families are often best placed to proclaim Jesus Christ to other families, to support, fortify and encourage them. What*

*you live as couples and as families – accompanied by the very charism of your Movement – the profound and irreplaceable joy that the Lord enables you to feel in domestic intimacy in joy and sorrow, in the happiness of your spouse’s presence, in the growth of your children, in the human and spiritual fruitfulness that He grants you, all this is to be witnessed to, proclaimed and communicated outside so that others, in turn, may set out on this path. In the first place, then, I encourage all couples to put into practice, and to live in depth, with constancy and perseverance, the spirituality the Teams of Our Lady follow. (...)*

#### **b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA**

*183. A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of “domesticating” the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters. “An attentive look at the everyday life of today’s men and women immediately shows the omnipresent need for a healthy injection of family spirit... Not only is the organization of ordinary life increasingly thwarted by a bureaucracy completely removed from fundamental human bonds, but even social and political mores show signs of degradation”. For their part, open and caring families find a place for the poor and build friendships with those less fortunate than themselves. In their efforts to live according to the Gospel, they are mindful of Jesus’ words: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Mt 25:40)”. In a very real way, their lives express what is asked of us all: “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed” (Lk 14:12-14). You will be blessed! Here is the secret to a happy family.*

*184. By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in society.*

#### **c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL**

*“The sacrament of marriage gives the couple a role in the Church, which has an undeniable, original apostolic mission. Irreplaceable. The couple has a specific apostolate that no one can supply” (...) The “prophetic” apostolate of the couple.*

*In a biblical sense of the term, the prophet is the man who speaks in the name of God. By his life, by his example, by his behaviour, the Christian couple should proclaim the doctrine of marriage. It is not enough that priests teach theology and the morality of marriage, it is necessary that Christian couples who live marriage in all its fullness, show it. In other words, it is necessary to see how a Christian marriage lives, that all men and woman who aspire to human love understand that Christ has come to save love, which has given him greatness and new splendour.”*

*-Henri Caffarel, The Priesthood of Marriage”, l’Anneau d’Or, n°111-112, May-August 1963*

#### **4. IDEAS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING**

##### **a. Welcome**

##### **b. General Sharing**

At this point, in addition to sharing the significant events during the month, we are also invited to share the “call” we have had to come out of ourselves and how we have responded to them. Perhaps, we have not even noticed that call, maybe we have sensed it but we have been “slackers”, maybe we have received the grace to respond to the call.

##### **c. Prayer**

##### **Reading of the Word (Lk 14:12-14)**

In the Gospel that has helped us throughout the month, the response of Jesus to the host of the banquet is an invitation for us to live with gratitude, that is to say, the capacity to love without expecting anything in return. Jesus invites us to come out of ourselves to enter into this dynamic of giving from what we have received freely.

We are limited in our humanity, and, usually our acts of generosity are not as generous as they appear. At heart, behind every nice gesture, we usually expect something in return: gratitude, acknowledgement, correspondence...

In the previous chapter the invitation was to recognize and be thankful for all the good things God has done in us. This is the first step to living with

gratitude. Only someone who has received something freely can give it away freely. Only he who has been deeply touched by God's mercy can set out and come out to do the same for others without expecting anything in return.

We enter into silence and ask for this gratitude that can guide us in our lives, as individuals, couple and team. A profound gratitude that may help us to come out of ourselves to go and encounter the most needy.

- I give you thanks, Lord, for every gift received. I ask that you grant me the ability of being grateful, to be attentive, to come out of myself, and to learn to love gratuitously, without expecting anything in return, specially...
- I give you thanks...

#### **d. Participation**

We could say that sometimes it seems like the endeavours are part of our conjugal "sanctification", without considering the fact that without the mission, the endeavours can become a mere way of perfectionism which is far away from the truth of the Gospel. This is why we must share with our team how the endeavours are helping us to come out of ourselves, to live the sanctification in terms of the mission.

Resuming the objectives at the beginning of the chapter we make the following suggestions for the Sit-down:

- Are we living our marriage as a vocation that leads us to grow, or is it a pleasant routine in which we have fallen?
- As we stand before a disoriented and disappointed world about the expectations of marriage, are we willing to commit and be willing to come out of ourselves and leave the safe bubble of our team?
- How can we offer other couples an appealing testimony of our matrimonial love?

#### **e. Questions for General Reflection**

After reading the study topic, after prayer and general sharing and participation, we could ask:

- In what measure does belonging to Teams of Our Lady help us live our marriage and family life as a mission?

- What specific means have helped us to recognize and welcome this mission?
- As a team, do we share and encourage each other in the mission? In what ways? How can we improve it?

#### **f. Towards Fatima**

We ask during this month to reflect upon our solidarity, which is part of the mission, towards the Gathering in Fatima. Have we thought of ways we can help others attend, -from our team, our sector, our region, our SR, other SR and other regions? This help can be specified in many ways: financial, personal; with the care and attention of family members from the team's participants during the Gathering, with prayer, in support...

#### **g. Magnificat**

## THIRD CHAPTER - BEING MARRIED

### Objective

- To recognize that our first mission is to live fully the vocation we have been called to.
- To give thanks for the specific means which are at our disposal to live our married and family life according to the plan God has for us.
- To renew our conjugal commitment.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*“In the historical context of our Movement, what always remains new in its treasure is the focus on conjugal sanctity, on conjugal love lived according to God, that is, that one spouse loves the other for what he is, and not for what he can give. But what is it that allows us to define what the other is if it is not the love God has for that person? What is the basis of the divine command to love even the enemies, if it is not the fact that they are also creatures and children of God, loved by a love that precedes them and that our kindly love for them should help them discover it? We have here, dear couples, a great plan of life and excellent rule of life: to recognize that the other is loved by God just as I am.” Father Jacinto Farias- Homily at the International College Closing Mass- Swanwick, July 28, 2016.*

In order to carry out this proposal, lived in a world in which the institution of marriage is in crisis, and where the reality of the daily life does not help to live our vocation, it seems necessary that the first mission of marriage is to guard this given gift. As Pope Francis states in his Apostolic letter *Misericordia et Misera*: *“The gift of matrimony is a great calling to which spouses, by the grace of Christ, respond with a love that is generous, faithful and patient. The beauty of the family endures unchanged, despite so many problems and alternative proposals.”* MM 14

We are all conscious that today, to let ourselves fall into the routine or the many alternative proposals the world offers us, does not help us to live the decision to mutually love and respect each other for the rest of our lives, to be able to receive with love and responsibility the children God will send us, and to raise them according to the law of Christ and the Church. This is why if we are committed to live the promises we made on our wedding day, we need tools that in the middle of our weakness and the “counter culture” experience will help our marriages remain faithful to the received vocation.

For this reason, all the pedagogy of the teams, all the endeavours, meetings, formation, gatherings...become essential means so that in a world that is moving in the opposite direction, we can live the specific mission of being married.

## 2. *THE WORD OF GOD*

### **Introduction to Biblical Text**

The book of Tobit is a family story. The names of Tobit and his family (Tobiel, his father and Tobit, his son) have the same Hebrew root (tob) which means good, and refer to the goodness of God manifested in this account. This book is an attempt to teach the Jewish people from the diaspora a model of conduct to be able to be faithful to the Lord in the middle of the circumstances they have come to live. The book presents, from a narrative style, the Jewish believer's interpretation of life, containing moral guidance, brief offering prayers, historical expectations, and religious motivations. The characters of the story, learn to be faithful to the Lord in the midst of great difficulties. The Lord does not take away the suffering from their life but He is close by and helps them overcome it. The archangel Raphael, (whose name means "medicine of God") that cures Tobit and Sara of their illnesses, represents the divine providence that takes care of us. The account offers an advance vision of marriage, which is presented, not just as a family institution in which the in-laws intervene, but as a commitment that the couple freely takes before God.

Tobit and Sarah go through hard times and they understand that their marriage and their union will not be possible unless it is based on prayer. That is why they direct their prayer to God from the moment they decide to unite their lives forever. Their prayer begins with a blessing, continues with an invocation in which they remember the will of the Lord when he created man and woman, and concludes with a request. Their prayer is not for them just a means to deepen their conjugal intimacy, but, above all, a way to open themselves as a couple to God's will. Praise, remembrance and petition could be a key outline for our conjugal prayer.

### **Biblical Text**

*"When they had finished eating and drinking, they wanted to retire. So they brought the young man out and led him to the bedroom. Tobit, mindful of Raphael's instructions, took the fish's liver and heart from the bag where he had them, and put them on the embers intended for incense. The odour of the fish repulsed the demon, and it fled to the upper regions of Egypt; Raphael went in pursuit of it and there bound it hand and foot. Then Raphael returned immediately. When Sarah's parents left the bedroom and*

closed the door behind them, Tobit rose from bed and said to his wife, “My sister, come, let us pray and beg our Lord to grant us mercy and protection.” She got up, and they started to pray and beg that they might be protected. He began with these words: “Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors; blessed be your name forever and ever! Let the heavens and all your creation bless you forever. You made Adam, and you made his wife Eve to be his helper and support; and from these two the human race has come. You said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a helper like himself.’ Now, not with lust, but with fidelity I take this kinswoman as my wife. Send down your mercy on me and on her, and grant that we may grow old together. Bless us with children.” They said together, “Amen, amen!” Then they went to bed for the night.” (Tobit, 8:4-9)

### 3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

#### Presentation

*“The Endeavours are the pedagogy that makes conjugal love become real and prepares us to go forth in our mission, together and more open to His call and with hope. This pedagogy does not ask us to do something extreme that would increase the list of responsibilities we already have in the complexity of our life, but it is a simple plan to assimilate deep attitudes, attitudes that give cohesion to life.”* (Álvaro and Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer, III Hispano-American Gathering, September 2016.)

The Pope in his Address recognized the concrete means that Teams of Our Lady has placed in our hands, as privileged tools to live our vocation.

The text from Father Caffarel proceeds again from an extraordinary edition of the magazine, *l’Anneau d’Or*, nº 111-112, entitled “Marriage, the Great Sacrament” from May-August 1963. In particular, from his article The Couple, Apostle. For Father Caffarel, to help to know God, proclaim His love, is the first mission of marriage and the human couple reveals better than any other creature that God the Father is a community of persons that love each other. *“Man and woman united by love, are the living parable of the divine community.”* This aspiration, so high, is made concrete in our daily living if we stop and realize, if we are conscious of what we want to do with our life. Father Caffarel said: *“I would like everyone to ask: How can I be of any use in this great venture of the renewal of Christian marriage in the world?”* The pope, in *Amoris Laetitia*, indicates the same in numerous occasions. We have chosen several quotes in which it is recognized the ability of the family to face an increasingly individualized society, proposing a place where no one feels alone, and where we can be participants of the same creative and fruitful work of God.

a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*(...) “I think that the proposed “endeavours” are truly effective aids, which enable couples to progress with confidence in conjugal life on the way of the Gospel. I am thinking, in particular, of couple prayer and family prayer, a beautiful and necessary tradition that has always supported the faith and hope of Christians, unfortunately abandoned in so many regions of the world. I am also thinking of the time for monthly dialogue proposed to the spouses – the famous and demanding “duty to sit down”, which runs so counter to the habits of the frenetic and agitated world pervaded by individualism – a moment of exchange lived in truth under the Lord’s gaze. It is a precious time of thanksgiving, of forgiveness, of mutual respect and attention to the other. I am thinking, lastly, of faithful participation in Team life, which brings to each one the richness of learning and of sharing, as well as the help and comfort of friendship.”*

b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

*33 “On the other hand, “equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one’s personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute. The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families. Here I would also include today’s fast pace of life, stress and the organization of society and labour, since all these are cultural factors which put at risk the option of permanent decisions.”*

*9. “Let us cross the threshold of this peaceful home, with its family sitting around the festive table. At the centre, we see the father and mother, a couple with their personal story of love. They embody the primordial divine plan clearly spoken of by Christ himself: “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?” (Mt 19:4). We hear an echo of the command found in the Book of Genesis: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gn 2:24)”.*

*321. “Christian couples are, for each other, for their children and for their relatives, co-operators of grace and witnesses of the faith.” God calls them to bestow life and to care for life. For this reason the family “has always been the nearest ‘hospital.” So let us care for one another, guide and encourage one another, and experience this as a part of our family spirituality. Life as a couple is a daily sharing in God’s creative work, and*

*each person is for the other a constant challenge from the Holy Spirit. God's love is proclaimed "through the living and concrete word whereby a man and the woman express their conjugal love." The two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace. For this reason "to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone."*

#### c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL

*"There is a word that underlines the reciprocal mission: "to minister". Because you are ministers, not only of your sacrament on the day of the celebration of your marriage, but, if not otherwise, every day. A minister is a person acting in the name of another for a specific task. Or more accurately: that other acts through it. In marriage, that other is Christ. Husband and wife, Christ has entrusted you with a mission to your spouse. Christ works through you and with you in the other who has been entrusted to you: giving to each other, He wants to give himself, He asks from each one of us to welcome Him, by receiving the gift of the other (...)*

*But you must understand this ministry well and how you must act in your sanctification of one another, not as two preachers who teach one another pious proposals, but essentially through the exercise of your vocation as spouses and parents. It is not a question of "doing good" to your spouse, but to help him, love him, love your children and support each other in the exercise of your paternity-maternity." Henri Caffarel, The Couple, Apostle, L'Anneau d'Or, May-August 1963.*

#### **4. IDEAS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING**

##### **a. Welcome**

##### **b. General Sharing**

The purpose of the general sharing, which is to communicate events of the month which have touched us and may be of interest to others and to the life of the team, may this month focus especially on some concrete means or experience that has helped in your conjugal and family life like in the highlighted texts.

##### **c. Prayer**

## Reading from the Book of Tobit

As indicated in the text from Father Caffarel, *“you are ministers, not only of your sacrament on the day of the celebration of your marriage, but, if not otherwise, every day.”* Every day before God we are called to renew our mutual commitment and to be for the other the presence of God’s love.

For this reason today, in the presence of the spiritual counsellor and the Christian community represented in the team, you are invited to renew your vows:

Husband: Blessed be the Lord, because it has been His gift to receive N. as my wife.

Wife: Blessed be the Lord, because it has been His gift to receive N: as my husband.

Both: Blessed be the Lord, because you have lovingly assisted us in our joys and sufferings throughout our life. We ask that you help us to guard faithfully our mutual love so we may become faithful witnesses of the covenant you have established with humanity.

Priest: (spouses join hands) The Lord may guard you all the days of your life. May He be your comfort in adversity, companion in prosperity and may he pour lavishly His blessings over you. Through Christ our Lord. R/Amen.

### d. Participation

During this month we are invited to share the endeavours which have helped us in our daily lives to live our vocation, and which ones had no real impact on our vocation.

Sit-down proposal:

It is important to recognize and utilize all the means that the Teams offer us and for us to be able to review with honesty our conjugal commitment, for us adapting it to the moments and situations we are living, and renewing the decision to love each other.

In truth,

- Do I look forward to conjugal prayer as a privileged time to share with my spouse?
- Do we participate in the Sunday Eucharist as a routine or as an opportunity for grace?

- Has our dialogue turned into a time to discuss family activities, or is it a time of profound renewal of our life plan? ...

#### **e. Questions for General Reflection**

- Have we discovered that living our vocation to marriage/priesthood is the first way to realize the mission to which we are called?
- What endeavours help us the most? Which ones should we strengthen?
- What can we do as a team to help each other live out this mission?

#### **f. Towards Fatima**

In order to desire something, it is necessary to know it. If we don't consider it as something of our own, it is very difficult to feel part of the International Gathering. The proposal for this month is for us to be attentive to all the information we at our disposal: letters, bulletins, websites, social media...

#### **g. *Magnificat***

## FOURTH CHAPTER - WITNESSING

### Objective

- To be conscious that it is by living our vocation that we announce the joy of marriage to the world.
- To look for ways to make explicit in our surroundings the real Good news that is the Gospel for marriage and family.

### 1. *GENERAL INTRODUCTION*

As we were able to see in the previous chapter, the mission to which we are called by the sacrament of marriage or priesthood begins by using all the means to faithfully live the vocation we have received. From our reality, living deeply what we are, we can radiate and be signs of God's love.

It is this experience of fidelity, in the midst of our difficulties, that in the first moment will convert our specific vocation into "light and salt" to illuminate everyone and become the presence of Jesus wherever we are. But it is also true that there will be moments in which we must explain our faith, proclaiming the joy of marriage. If the love between spouses is forever, it is because it participates by the sacrament of marriage in God's own love, which is eternal. God's plan is that man and woman love each other with His own love, that they may be a sign and presence of His love to the world, in such a way that if someone wants to know how the love of God is, they can see it reflected in marriage. The Gospel calls Christian couples to convert their lives into a sign of the love of God, who knows how to forgive, help, challenge, surrender without return, and all this without losing one's personality. The indispensable condition is to live trusting in He who has sent you in this commitment: God. He is the only guarantor on this adventure.

For this reason, after recognizing that our first mission is to live our vocation to the fullest, we are asked during this month to reflect, pray and share, on how to continue materializing it. Our vocation cannot be something abstract, it must be incarnated in our lives and daily responsibilities, in which we are called to irradiate with joy, optimism and hope.

### 2. *WORD OF GOD*

#### Introduction to Biblical Text

The passage we are going to hear is found in the first part of the farewell speech of Jesus within the context of the Last Supper according to the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John is divided into two major parts, preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue: the first part (1:19-1 2:50) is centred on the signs conducted by Jesus during His public ministry. The second part (13:1 - 20:30) is centred on the mystery of redemption (the Last Supper, the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus). Jesus gives the new commandment of love within the context of intimacy of the Upper Room, after the Last Supper. His disciples want to follow Him, but Jesus tells them that the way they are going to follow Him is not physically with Him right now, but initiating a journey of discipleship, whose fundamental distinction is love. Living the commandment of love is the way the disciples of Jesus follow their master.

### **Biblical text**

“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (*Jn 13:34-35*)

## **3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION**

### **Presentation**

The Pope invites us to live what we are, family, as God wants, beyond proposals that deform the testimony of the family that, by following the example of Nazareth, shows the Trinitarian love. It recognizes our missionary spirit in the radiance before others, in our immediate environment, but also in places that are not as close. *Amoris Laetitia*, helps to specify this mission, it encourages us to not be afraid to affirm marriage to society, to proclaim through our lives its value. All theories, norms, are worthless, and words can be empty, when we are invited to explain the motivations that led us to opt for Christian marriage and that keep us persevering in it. We are invited to witness by our lives.

In this sense, the words from Father Caffarel written in the editorial “Monthly Letter to Teams of Our Lady,” dated June 1950, come into play also in this mission of living in the world radiating before others the marvel of being Christian couples. At a time when Teams were just beginning and it was possible to fall into the temptation of thinking these were “spirituality groups’, with a restrictive sense of the term, Father Caffarel insisted with special zeal of the need of giving the word spirituality an integral sense, a complete meaning: one that cannot detach the aspects that we can initially identify as spiritual, such as prayer and interior life, our everyday life, a commitment to live our Christian being fully. In the place where we are, where we live, in our family, home, workplace, leisure activities, etc. We must have Christ as an example, and specially, serve as He would serve. This is the valid witness of life.

a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*“...I invite couples, fortified by team meetings in the missionary commitment. This mission which is entrusted to them, is all the more important inasmuch as the image of the family – as God wills it, composed of one man and one woman in view of the good of the spouses and also of the procreation and upbringing of children – is deformed through powerful adverse projects supported by ideological trends. You are certainly already missionaries by the radiance of your family life to the spheres of your friendships and relationships, and also other areas. In fact, a happy and balanced family, inhabited by the presence of God, speaks in and of itself of God’s love for all men...”*

b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

35. *“As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor it is helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them.”*

201. *“This effort calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, one that is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people’s real problems”. Pastoral care for families “needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one’s dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. This consists not merely in presenting a set of rules, but in proposing values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularized of countries.” The Synod Fathers also “highlighted the fact that evangelization needs unambiguously to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors - such as the excessive importance given to market logic - that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be fostered with societal structures and encouragement given to lay people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields.”*

c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL

*“Without any doubt it is necessary to clearly state what the word spirituality means. Spirituality is the science that relates to the Christian life and the resources that lead to its fullness. Now, the Christian life in its totality is not just adoration, worship, asceticism, effort at interior life. It is also serving God, in the places He has assigned us: family, profession, city... This is why, couples that come together to be initiated in spirituality, far from searching for a way to evade the world, make efforts to learn how to serve God, in all their lives and in the midst of the world as an example of Christ.”*  
Henri Caffarel, Monthly Editorial Letter, June 1950.

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS TO PREPARE THE MEETING**

##### **a. Welcome**

##### **b. General Sharing**

During this moment, in addition to sharing the significant experiences that we have been able to live throughout this month, we are invited to share the people who have been role models in our lives and to recognize the moments in which we have been role models in the lives of others.

##### **c. Prayer:**

##### **Proclamation of the Word (Jn 13:34-35)**

The commandment of love is what makes the disciples of Jesus different. There is no doubt that this is also true for the Christian spouses who have committed themselves to loving each other forever. From this promise, the spouses declare that love is not a matter of feelings or impulses, neither is it “for them” in a way that closes them off in an idyllic setting away from others.

The love between spouses is the reflection of the love of God. You are a sign, and the way you love is a sign by which others may recognize the love of God.

- Lord, I give you thanks for the spouses whose love has reflected Your love, especially...
- Lord, I ask that You may grant us to be a sign and presence of Your love to our family members that don't understand it, our friends that don't believe, our co-workers that live without meaning, our neighbours that seek without knowing, to all who are sad and empty... We can say aloud the places or persons that we feel especially called to witness.

We pray together St. Francis prayer:

*“Make me a channel of your peace,  
Where there is hatred let me bring your love,  
Where there is injury your pardon Lord,  
And where there’s doubt true faith in you.  
Make me a channel of your peace,  
Where there’s despair in life, let me bring hope,  
Where there is darkness, only light,  
And where there’s sadness, ever joy.  
O Master grant that I may never seek,  
So much to be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love with all my soul.  
Make me a channel of your peace,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
In giving of ourselves that we receive.  
And in dying that we’re born to eternal life.  
Make me a channel of your peace,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
In giving of ourselves that we receive.  
And in dying that we’re born to eternal life.”*

#### **d. Participation**

This month especially share how we allow the Word of God to challenge us and renew our mission.

- Do we pray for those who need it the most?
- At the Sit-down, do we share on our mission and how we are living it?
- Is the rule of life encouraging us to live out our mission?

We recommend for this month a dialogue during the Sit-down around the following theme:

- How are we living our mission? why patience without hope is just resignation, forgiveness without reconciliation is just neglect, a journey met halfway, surrender without joy is just servitude...
- Are we before the men and women of the world, an appealing icon of God’s love? Do we transmit tenderness, compassion, respect, joy, love of God?

#### **e. Questions for the General Reflection**

In *Amoris Laetitia*, the Pope in addition to calling us to witness to our marriage and family, invites us to a “*healthy auto-criticism*” and to be *humble and realistic, to recognize that sometimes the way of presenting our*

*Christian convictions, and the way we treat other persons, have in a way helped to bring about what we regret today.” AL 34*

In this general reflection, we are invited to share, not the theory of what we should do, but our experience of having been able to help with our testimony, with our attitudes or our words to live through complex situations in our surroundings.

- What situations have you lived in which you have been called to witness your marriage vocation?
- How have you responded? What were the consequences? Did it help others to recognize the joy of marriage and the love of God? Would you do the same again?

#### **f. Towards Fatima**

During this month, we ask that you keep mind all the people who participate in the different teams that are preparing for the Gathering and that we may entrust them to our prayer. We invite you to visit the website for the International Gathering ([www.endfatima2018.pt](http://www.endfatima2018.pt)), so you may put a face, name and real presence to all the people who are selflessly working to organize this event.

#### **g. Magnificat**

## FIFTH CHAPTER - ACCOMPANYING

### Objective

- To remember the Pope's call to the Teams of Our Lady members to committing themselves to helping young couples during their engagement and their first years of marriage.
- To find out what is already being done by the Teams of Our Lady Movement.
- To look for new ways to support and accompany engaged couples, married couples and the institution of marriage.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the Address to Responsible Couples, the Pope pointed out the mission of the Church, through the mouth of Peter, entrusting it to the Teams of Our Lady as a Movement. In the following chapters we will be exploring these possible missions in order to reflect, pray and commit ourselves as a Movement, each one as called by the Spirit, in this work that the Church requires of us.

When Luiza and Miguel Horta, from the Super Region of Portugal, presented to the International College in Swanwick in 2016, their experience in the Marriage Preparation Courses, they noted that: *“members of teams are blessed with so many graces, that we must not keep them to ourselves, looking out for our own good and happiness. What we receive is to be shared. In Portugal, the majority of young people have no family role models to help them form a well-balanced family, united, living Christian values, putting God at the centre of their lives. In this social reality that surrounds us, we cannot be content with just being an example or role model. This is fine, but not enough...Our lives-with its deeds, failures, efforts, joys and sadness-lived in faith and hope must become a witnessing.”*

It is refreshing to see how this experience is materializing in the Church through team members: many accompanying the Marriage Preparation Courses in their parishes and dioceses; others by accompanying the Teams' young couples; others encouraging teams in the Tandem journey, *“a conjugal pastoral proposal for young couples, married or not, initiated by Teams in France in 1995 in light of the French Bishop's request”* also explained at the International College in Swanwick by Brigitte and Gil de Guerry. There is also the accompanying of couples, independently of their sacramental status, like the project *“+pareja”* which was born at the SR Hispanoamericana, and the *“Experiencias Comunitarias”* from the SR in Brazil; both projects constitute not just a great pastoral mission but also a source of growth for Teams. More recently new

proposals like “Equipos de Novios”, a long-term marriage preparation course that SR Spain presented in 2016.

Thanks be to God, the list of initiatives promoted and sustained by Teams of Our Lady is long and varied. There are many people from Teams in different parts of the world who are accompanying, in a very real way, couples in different situations of status and age.

In this theme we are invited to recognize the role we could develop in this specific mission and in what way we could accomplish it.

## **2. WORD OF GOD**

### **Introduction to Biblical Text**

The book from the prophet Isaiah, is one of the most important in the Old Testament and one of the most quoted in the New Testament. This is a book of immense theological richness and important historical facts about the people of Israel. The book can be divided in three big sections which probably were written by different authors. This text belongs to the Third Isaiah (chapters 40-55), it reflects on the return from Exile and the difficulties that this posed. The text expresses an environment of hope and promise, since it announces the coming back of the exiled and the splendid future of Jerusalem, which reconstructed and enriched, will become the spouse of the Lord. Without any doubt, this environment is the one lived during the engagement, a time of hope and promise, which announces an eternal covenant.

### **Biblical text**

*“For Zion’s sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep still, until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her salvation like a burning torch. Nations shall behold your vindication, and all kings your glory; You shall be called by a new name bestowed by the mouth of the LORD. You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No more shall you be called “Forsaken,” nor your land called “Desolate,” But you shall be called “My Delight is in her,” and your land “Espoused.” For the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be espoused. For as a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.” (Is 62:1-5)*

## **3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION**

### **Presentation**

In his Address, the Pope specifically invited us to commit in an increasingly concrete and creative way in the project of accompanying young couples in a context, that as underlined in the text of *Amoris Laetitia*, is very difficult. As Father Caffarel indicated in the magazine *L'Anneau d'Or*, n°73, January-February, 1957, after a meeting in Versailles in the Centre of Pastoral Liturgy, he wanted a change in the way engaged couples are prepared for the sacrament of marriage, presented from a more positive and realistic vision of love and not a large list of prohibitions and theoretical considerations. A renewed and relevant language is needed, a clear knowledge of the realities of modern life which it is part of, to present a plan that does not lose its demands but that tries to respond to the different approaches to life, to devise formulas to accompany these couples who begin a journey together... Ultimately, we must not conform to what we already know is not working but must know how to renew this approach to the young couple who may be planning a life together.

a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*“(...) I also invite you to commit yourselves, if possible, in an ever more concrete way and with ever renewed creativity, to the activities that can be organized to welcome, form and support in the faith young couples in particular, before and after wedding. (...)”*

b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

40. *“At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family.” In some countries, many young persons “postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic.” We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage. (AL 40)*

c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL

*(...) There are two conceptions for the pastoral work of courtship:*

*a. The first conception is intellectual and moralizing. Provides abstract knowledge, without any links to practical life, and when it addresses some practical issues, generally formulates negative laws, with an overabundance of clarifications that parody the concrete, without even getting close. It proposes a theoretical ideal of a perfect marriage, and it seems to impose on the engaged couple a path of codes, a penal code. (...)*

*b. The second is realistic and dynamic. It supposes that the experience of loves is a full human experience, in which the human person fully commits, in body and soul. This coexistence of the strength of love...requires the engaged couple to be faithful to the profound dynamism of their love. It helps them take conscience and be responsible of their destiny.*

*This second conception is profoundly theological: if there is faith in love it is because it is founded in faith, because it engraves completely in the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church. For this it merits to be called "mystic". We must unify the catechism of engagement to this notion of the sacrament, from an evocative mystery and carrier of grace, where human love and the love of God call each other, sustain each other and march to the beat.*

*-Henri Caffarel, About Engagement, L'Anneau d'Or, n°73, January-February, 1957.*

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARING A MEETING**

##### **a. Welcome**

##### **b. General Sharing**

In addition to the significative events, if there were any, which we feel convenient to share with the team, we could share the experiences we have had with engaged couples or recently married couples that we know. How are they living their engagement or their first years of life together? What is their point of reference? What proposals do we know that are being carried out? What can we do?

##### **c. Prayer:**

##### **Proclamation of the Word (Is 62:1-5)**

The relationship of God with the people of Israel has been outlined on different occasions as a relationship between a husband and a wife. God is like the husband that loves His wife. Israel is like the wife that loves her husband, but with frequency forgets this love and is unfaithful. The history of

Israel has been described like a love story in which God never gets tired, one time after another, of seducing His wife despite her infidelities. The painful events of the people of Israel have been interpreted as negative consequences for neglecting God and love first. The text from the prophet Isaiah makes reference to the return from exile. It is announced to Israel that God has made her return, He restores her, and she shines again because she is profoundly loved by God, who loves her with a renewed love, like a groom loves his bride.

The prophet uses the image of the groom and bride to express the love of God for His people. We must not ignore this detail.

In this moment of prayer, we thank God for never abandoning us, and we ask Him to help us to commit.

- Thank you Lord because in our marriage and our family, especially when .....we did not feel “abandoned or discouraged.”
- Lord, I ask you to help me not to be silent, not to stop until I have radiated like light your mercy, help us to commit to...

#### **d. Participation**

Starting with this theme we will get closer to the different and specific realities surrounding our marriage and our family: engaged couples, hurting families, failures...we invite you during this month that your conjugal prayer be specially for engaged couples, young married couples, for those we know near to us regardless of their situation.

At the time of sharing you may communicate what has motivated the goal of prayer during this month.

During the Sit-down this month we could reflect on the call from Pope Francis to work with the young couples during their engagement and in the way in we witness to our own vocation of marriage. To our own children, brothers, family members, are we helping them to see this vocation as worth pursuing, by the way we live our marriage and our life as a couple?

#### **e. Questions for General Sharing**

- How did you live your engagement time? What helped you? What was difficult? What did you need?
- How do you see couples living their engagement today? What helps? What is difficult? What do you think are their needs?

- Do you know the proposals that Teams of Our Lady are implementing to accompany engaged couples or young married couples? Do you think they are enough to respond to the call by the Pope?
- What do you think you could do?

#### **f. Towards Fatima**

The International Gathering will take place at the sanctuary in Fatima. This month we could inform ourselves about what will happen in Fatima, and of the importance and its meaning to the Church.

#### **h. Magnificat**

## SIXTH CHAPTER - HEALING

### Objective

- To remember the call by the Pope to all Team members to commit themselves to helping hurting families.
- To ask for the capacity to recognize and embrace those who are suffering.
- To recognize that the hurting families that surround us have been called by God to involve us and make our lives complicated.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The suffering in marriages and families cannot be alien to us. It could be that we understand that it seems impossible to act, and that many attitudes and situations are incomprehensible. We demand action from those who should act, that we think that they pursued or deserved their sufferings...but as we will see in the prayer text, there is no excuse to pass by. Today as always, the Lord invites us to stop, mount off, get closer to the wounded and assist him, because at the end, in the face of the battered we will find the face of Jesus Christ. To live like this is a risk. A risk for those who are too worried about measuring up, to succeed, to not get out of the way, worried they might have to mount up the wounded and risk bringing a foreigner into their inn.

As Pope Francis said in his Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*: “*The experience of mercy enables us to regard all human problems from the standpoint of God’s love, which never tires of welcoming and accompanying. (MM14). “Another face of mercy is consolation (...). The drying of tears is one way to break the vicious cycle of solitude in which we often find ourselves trapped. (...) A reassuring word, an embrace that makes us feel understood, a caress that makes us experience love, a prayer that makes us stronger... all these things express God’s closeness through the consolation offered by our brothers and sisters. (MM 13).*

In this chapter we want to reflect upon our attitudes in the face of suffering and how to become instruments of healing in the midst of the pain of so many families. We want to dare ask the question without the fear of what it will mean for us and for our Movement to “Go and do likewise” which Jesus commands us to live.

## 2. THE WORD OF GOD

### Introduction to Biblical Text

The parable we presented was told by Jesus during His journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51 - 19:28). The parables were brief stories that Jesus used to convey some teaching. Usually, they were based on concrete facts observed in nature and in the simple things of daily life. Through them, Jesus presented the simplicity of the Kingdom of God and how we could enter into this dynamic. Jesus used the parables to explain His message in a simple way. Nevertheless, to be able to understand you must be humble and open your heart to God's action. This is why, so many of the parables were not understood and it was necessary to explain them again so that His listeners could understand.

The parables touched different aspects of the Kingdom of God. One of them was the theme of mercy, and because of the Jubilee of Mercy we were able to live it and celebrate it. Mercy, is the capacity to empathize with the sufferings and miseries of our brother, it is one of the favourite themes in the Gospel of Luke (cf Lk 15:1-31). The parable of the Good Samaritan is another clear example of this interest of Luke, who puts in Jesus' lips a surprising and moving parable to show who my neighbour is, or better yet, how can I be a neighbour to those around me, especially those who suffer the most.

### Biblical Text

*Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbour to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (LK 10:30-37)*

## 3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

## Presentation

The following texts bring us closer to many difficult situations that families go through. The Address by the Pope remind us that we must get closer to the families that suffer due to diverse circumstances related to economic difficulties, social exclusion, loss of loved ones, separations that force the search for jobs, illnesses, worries about children and problems of all nature. *Amoris Laetitia*, extended a whole set of complex situations in families that are not so far away from us and those that we find it difficult to approach, to which we prefer not to look at, because ministering to them will complicate our lives. Upon enumerating emphatically, without euphemisms or metaphors, these painful situations are placed before us so that we don't look away. A direct and clear language that places us before the suffering of so many people before whom we cannot and should not remain passive.

Father Caffarel, in a thought that accompanied him throughout his life and in many of his reflections, places us before a reality that allows no room for excuses. He reminds us that the action of the laity it is not at odds with spirituality, both need each other and one without the other cannot be sustained. People strengthened by prayer will be able to set out on an action that will take on its full meaning, because it will be an action grounded in prayer.

### a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*"(...)I also exhort you to continue to be close to wounded families, who are so numerous today, due to unemployment, poverty, health problems, mourning, worry over a child, the imbalance caused by an estrangement or absence, a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they are most vulnerable. (...)"*

### b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

"44. ... **Economic constraints** prohibit a family's access to education, cultural activities and involvement in the life of society. In many ways, the present-day economic situation is keeping people from participating in society. Families, in particular, suffer from **problems related to work**, where young people have few possibilities and job offers are very selective and insecure. Workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family

members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships each day.”

46. *Migrations* “are another sign of the times to be faced and understood in terms of its negative effects on family life” (...) “The **persecution of Christians** and ethnic and religious minorities in many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, are a great trial not only for the Church but also the entire international community.

47. ... **families of persons with special needs**, where the unexpected challenge of dealing with a disability can upset a family’s equilibrium, desires and expectations... Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired.

48. The **elderly** who are vulnerable and dependent and are at times unfairly exploited simply for economic advantage...

49. Here I would also like to highlight the situation of families **living in dire poverty**, punished in so many ways, where life is lived on the edge. If everyone has problems, the problems faced by poor households are often all the more trying.

50. In many cases, parents come home exhausted, with no energy to talk, and many families no longer even share a meal together. This makes it all the more difficult for parents to hand on the faith to their children.

51. Drug use was also mentioned as one of the scourges of our time, causing immense suffering and even breakup for many families. The same is true of **alcoholism, gambling** and other addictions... We see the serious effects of this breakdown in families torn apart, the young uprooted and the elderly abandoned, children who are orphans of living parents, adolescents and young adults confused and unsupported.

54. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic **violence** and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union.

55. The father “plays an equally decisive role in family life. Their absence may be physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual. This absence deprives children of an appropriate model of paternal presence.” [44].

*Sometimes we are faced against two frequent errors when we deal with the apostolate, word without action and action without word. The Bible helps us to see it clearly. All along the Old Testament, God speaks and acts at the same time. He speaks to make known His thought, His will, His love. He acts: free the Hebrews from Egypt, He helps them in many different ways. And He reveals Himself both by His deeds and by His words (...) Jesus Christ does the same, He speaks and He acts. (...)*

*This is how a Christian must be. Meanwhile, Christ's disciple must speak and act. He must be the first one to help those suffering, those afflicted, oppressed; he must dedicate himself to the great human works, surrender unto suffering; but also by means of the word, he must reveal the secret of forgetfulness of himself and that gift to the others, the love and grace of the God in whom he believes. He has to give reason of the hope that is in him.*

-Henri Caffarel, *L'Anneau d'Or*, n° 109, The Laity, Bearer of the Word, January-February 1963

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARING A TEAM MEETING**

##### **a. Welcome**

##### **b. General Sharing**

In addition to any significant events, if there were any, which we think it is convenient to share with the team, we can share some experience with suffering realities of families in our environment, if we are aware, if we become involved, if we tend to think that we can do nothing...

##### **c. Prayer**

###### **Proclamation of the Word (Lk 10:30-37)**

The story of the man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho who was assaulted, stripped and beaten is, in reality, our history. How many problems, difficulties, crisis, moments of suffering that appear, in diverse forms, in our lives as robbers steal our peace, our joy, our capacity to love, our desire to live... We perceive the blows of so many things that have happened to us and the wounds that only the Lord can heal.

The priest and the Levite walk by. Many people have promised to help you during moments of suffering, but have taken a detour. There are those who have not even wanted to approach.

Never has Jesus, the Good Samaritan, walked on the other side. There has not been one single painful circumstance in your life that He has ignored. He has shown mercy. He is not afraid of touching your poverty and your nakedness, your wounds. Jesus has the time to stop and get close, because there is no one more important. He lowers Himself to pick you up. When He sees your wounds, He tends and bandages them, He touches them, one by one, and anoints them with oil and wine. In addition, He sets you on His own saddle and takes you to His inn, the Church, and from there He continues to care for you through the hands of those who live in this home. This is the Church, the inn where you find, not the pure and perfect, but the wounded healed by Jesus who share with joy and humility the experience of being healed by the Master.

*“Go and do likewise”*. Only those who have experienced their own salvation history who have been looked at and touched, cared, bandaged and redeemed, will run to the rescue of others. Thus, He has taught us to love and give ourselves: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (Jn 13:15).

- Take a moment of silence to bring to memory the hard moments in which we remember clearly Jesus being by our side. On some occasions through specific persons, other times through prayer, the Word, the sacraments...
- It is possible for a reproach, a doubt, a dilemma to emerge... if God is so merciful, why did He allow this moment of darkness and storm in my life? Do not forget: “God does not save you from the darkness and the storm, God saves you in the midst of the darkness and the storm.” Remember this and give thanks for all those moments of presence and accompaniment.
- There are occasions in which we resist recognizing our ailments, and we close ourselves up. Let yourself be anointed with the healing oil, the merciful oil, and you will become merciful, and you will receive the capacity to discover the one that suffers, that you may get close without taking a detour, to touch their wounds and accompany them in the path of life. Ask the Lord to give you this grace.

#### **d. Participation**

To think of the endeavours as means to “achieve” an individual sanctity, which has more to do with our “perfection” than with a call to live in love, can become a great obstacle to advance as a member of the team.

Whether or not we live our personal and conjugal prayer depends on our sensitivity to the suffering of others. To live the Sit-down will depend on the

possibility of letting God question us about "our neighbour." Having a rule of life will depend on not seeing as "normal" some ways we live and be willing to change them ... and so on with the rest.

In this meeting, in addition to sharing on our endeavours, we are invited to recognize the "consequences" they have for others if we live or if do not live them.

Suggestions for the Sit-down:

- Do we fear getting close to suffering and pain? Why? Do we shield ourselves under discretion and prudence to not intervene and do nothing?
- Do we get involved even if this means that doing so will complicate our life? In these situations of crisis and pain of others, are we the balm of consolation, or on the contrary, are we are dedicated to judging and gossiping?

#### **e. Questions for General Reflection**

- What are the most common suffering realities that we find around us?
- How do we respond to them?
- What is the Pope's call in his Address to Teams?
- How can we respond in a more Gospel way as a family and as a team?

#### **f. Towards Fatima**

The International Gathering of Teams of Our Lady has this vocation of unity in diversity, of encountering people from different countries with whom we share common experiences and concerns. We could try to inform ourselves in more detail about the life of the Church in general and in particular of the life of the Teams of any specific country that is participating in the Gathering. We could focus on those who we know have more difficulties and for those who participation poses a major effort. Perhaps you can prepare a small presentation to the rest of your team members about some of these realities that you know better or that you are more interested in some reason.

#### **g. Magnificat**

## SEVENTH CHAPTER - WELCOMING

### Objective

- To be conscious of the call the Church has made to Teams of Our Lady to welcome and accompany the reality of those whose marriages have failed.
- To discern concrete ways in which Teams of Our Lady can live this call by the Church, in the Church and as part of the Church.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

On November 28, 1997, during the celebration of the 50 years of the founding of Teams of Our Lady, St. Pope John Paul II sent a letter to the responsible leaders in the Super Region of France, which included, among other things, couples in difficulty, separated, divorced, divorced and married again, and he pleaded that *“they may find in the Church couples willing to help.”* From this demand, the “Reliance Teams” were born, as Nathalie and Christian Mignoat explained at the International College in Swanwick, 2016.

These teams are accompanied by couples from Teams of Our Lady that we prefer to call “companion couples” because it is part of the logic of accompaniment as is defined in the Family Synod of 2015: an encounter and a “walk together” to discover the Risen Christ. These teams respond to what Timothy Radcliffe said in Brasilia: *“If you listen, if you put yourselves in their shoes and in their skin, the Lord most likely will provide you with the right words.”* Furthermore, they respond to the hope of Pope Francis (EG 169): to find *“members of the Church that will participate in this art of accompanying so that everyone learns to take off their sandals before the sacred ground of others.”* It is essentially an incarnated sign of welcoming by the Church and a sign of the bond between Reliance Teams and Teams of Our Lady.

### 2. WORD OF GOD

#### Introduction to Biblical Text

The Gospel of Mathew is attributed to one of Jesus’ apostles, known as Mathew Levi, whose vocation is narrated in the three synoptic gospels. He was a civil servant (tax collector) who converted after an encounter with Jesus. It appears as if his Gospel is directed to those Christians who converted from Judaism. His work is structured in seven large sections: the first section gathers the infancy narratives, then we have five sections that alternate narratives and discourses, and the seventh section narrates the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus.

The passage belongs to the third section (Mt 8:10), which gathers some miracle stories, especially those of healing, some stories about vocation, and the last called the apostolic discourse.

This particular story takes place in the city of Capernaum (cf Mt 9:1; 4:13), mentions the vocation of Mathew, who was a civil servant, dedicated to collecting Roman taxes. These officials had a bad reputation because they collaborated with the Romans, they dealt with impure products and people and they cheated in the collection of taxes. It was with this kind of people that Jesus sat down to eat. The surprise and scandal of the Pharisees is due to the fact that in their culture, a meal meant much more than sharing food. It was a way of sharing life. To welcome the guest meant to enter into communion with that person, a result intolerable for the Pharisees, since they considered this type of people impure and not to be dealt with. This passage, positioned in a context of healing, presents Jesus as a physician of the body and soul who, in order to fulfill His mission, approaches with a compassionate attitude, showing that what heals the human heart is not the rigorous practice of the law but mercy.

### **Biblical Text**

*While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." (Mt 9:10-13)*

## **3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION**

### **Presentation**

The Pope, in the words addressed to the Team's responsible leaders gathered in Rome, called us to a very concrete mission, a mission based on mercy and on the welcoming of those persons who suffer as a consequence of a failed marriage.

It is time to take a look at the reality that surrounds us and to ask ourselves how can we continue to materialize the call that St. John Paul II made to us and which we must continue to deepen as a Movement. Father Caffarel's reflection on hospitality, may help us to achieve this. We are invited to welcome, that our homes are places of welcome, in which people may feel loved and not judged.

The answer is not easy: the Pope calls us to an “ecclesiastical discernment” with an approach that “carefully discerns situations.” We know that no “easy recipes” exist (AL 298), in fact, it talks about integrating, avoiding scandal, accompanying... *“It must remain clear that this is not the ideal which the Gospel proposes for marriage and the family (AL 298) ... “it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible, personal, and pastoral discernment of particular cases.” (AL 300)*

And all this with the clarity that by no means the Church should renounce “in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church’s teaching” (AL 308) on the full ideal of marriage, the plan of God in all its greatness.

a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*“... I cannot but encourage the couples of the Équipes Notre Dame to be instruments of the mercy of Christ and of the Church towards people whose marriage has failed. Never forget that your conjugal fidelity is a gift of God, and that mercy has been exercised on behalf of each one of us. A united and happy couple can understand better than anyone else, as from within, the wound and the suffering caused by abandonment, betrayal, failure of love. Therefore, it is necessary that you be able to bring your testimony and your experience to help Christian communities to discern the real situations of these people, and to accept them with their wounds, and help them to walk in faith and in truth, under the gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd, to play an appropriate role in the life of the Church. Nor should you forget the unspeakable suffering of the children who experience these painful family situations: you can give them much...”*

b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

*242. The Synod Fathers noted that “special discernment is indispensable for the pastoral care of those who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Respect needs to be shown especially for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together.*

*To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral care must necessarily include efforts at reconciliation and mediation, through the establishment of specialized counselling centres in dioceses”.*

*At the same time, “divorced people who have not remarried, and often bear witness to marital fidelity, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life. The local community and pastors should accompany these people with solicitude, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty.”*

*Family breakdown becomes even more traumatic and painful in the case of the poor, since they have far fewer resources at hand for starting a new life. A poor person, once removed from a secure family environment, is doubly vulnerable to abandonment and possible harm.*

#### c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL

*Another ministry of the couple is hospitality. Many times Christian couples have not taken this into consideration, by way of not conceiving it as an important mission of the Church. Even though the apostles constantly said it: “Practice hospitality”. (...)*

*For many of our contemporaries, to be welcome in the heart of a family, is fundamental. The discovering of family love, –conjugal, paternal, maternal, filial, fraternal–introduces them to a new world where they can find interior balance which is precisely what they lack, because they were not able to grow in the irreplaceable environment of a happy family. (...)*

*We must think that in God’s Plan, the Christian home is an “area of rest” in the journey of the Church, without knowing the non-believer has his first contact with the Church, the sinner experiences mercy, the poor and abandoned discover its maternity. They do not fear this discovering of the Church, because as an old friend said: “the home is the smiling and kind face of the Church”. (...)*

*-Father Caffarel, “Do Not Forget Hospitality”,  
L’Anneau d’Or, n°107, September-October, 1962*

## 4. IDEAS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

### a. Welcome

## b. General Sharing

In addition to any significant events worthy of sharing with the team, we can share the experience of family breakdowns in our surroundings. We can share how we lived them, what feelings they created in us, what have we done...

## c. *Prayer:*

### Proclamation of the Word (Mt 9:10-13)

We present a text that could help make palpable the experience of total and absolute welcome of who is our “brother.”

Encounter of Jean Valjean with the Bishop of Digne:

*-"Monsieur le Cure," said the man, "you are good; you do not despise me. You receive me into your house. You light your candles for me. Yet I have not concealed from you whence I come and that I am an unfortunate man. The Bishop, who was sitting close to him, gently touched his hand. "You could not help telling me who you were. This is not my house; it is the house of Jesus Christ. This door does not demand of him who enters whether he has a name, but whether he has a sorrow. You suffer, you are hungry and thirsty; you are welcome. And do not thank me; do not say that I receive you in my house. No one is at home here, except the man who needs a refuge. I say to you, who are passing by, that you are much more at home here than I am myself. Everything here is yours. What need have I to know your name? Besides, before you told me you had one which I knew." - "Les Miserables", Chapter III, by Victor Hugo.*

We are all familiar with failed marriage situations, many times close to us, that surpass us. Each one of them is a story of suffering, wounds, broken lives. This is why at this moment we can place in the Lord's hands all these situations and ask for His help to have the opportune gesture and word.

- Lord we pray for...
- Help us...

## d. Participation

Accompanying failed marriages can help us recognize the fragility in which we live. There are failed marriages in which you can see it coming, but there are others you would never imagine. This traumatic experience of rupture could have its beginnings in small things.

This will be a good moment to share how the endeavours help our marriage and our family, and how they can become antidotes to failure.

During the Sit-down this month we could reflect and dialogue on how we have experienced the failure of close marriages. How this experience makes us experience the fragility of love, and thus the need to care for it. We could spend a good amount of time in the Sit-down to bless our spouse, acknowledging the good he/she has brought to my life, and give thanks for it. It is the right moment to choose one another again with the certainty that we are not mistaken in what one day we saw clearly.

**e. Questions for general reflection**

- How do we perceive the reality of failed marriages in our midst?
- Where do we find ourselves responding personally?
- Do we believe that as part of the Church we should give another response?
- Which one?

**f. Towards Fatima**

In addition to the apparitions that occurred in Fatima, which we have learnt about in the previous chapter, Pope St. John Paul II always believed that the mortal attempt on his life from which he was saved was by the grace of Our Lady of Fatima. In fact, he placed the bullet that wounded him in her crown. We invite you to learn more about this and in line with the chapter discussed for this month, to present to Our Lady of Fatima the specific people that we know who have lived or are experiencing difficulties related to their marriage.

**g. Magnificat**

## EIGHTH CHAPTER - BEING FAITHFUL

### Objective

- To know, value and to give thanks for the charism that the Holy Spirit has given to the Church in Father Henri Caffarel.
- To discern what is meant by the call for greater fidelity in our marriage, our family and Teams.
- To commit to the cause of the beatification of Father Henri Caffarel.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A charism is a gift from God that the Spirit inspires in a person or a group of persons to respond to a need by making present the Love of God in that historical moment. A gift of God is something you cannot manipulate. A gift, a present, must be thanked, respected, deepened and shared. Our Movement has received a charism of the Spirit: to announce that conjugal love is a journey to God as a couple, and that this journey, with the grace of God and journeyed along with other couples, will be easier thanks to the mutual help. The Movement prepares us to deepen that understanding, to live it and present it to the world.

This is a huge project, a large mission that is neither surpassed nor finished. On the contrary, given the reality of today's state of marriage, its validity is more urgent and necessary than ever. Only by being what we are, with creativity and fidelity, can we be fruitful in the Church and contribute our part in the building of the Kingdom.

In Father Caffarel words spoken to the members of the International Responsible Team (ERI) in 1981: *“There is no new renovation if it is not faithful to the charism of its origin. Renewal of the Movement is only achieved by deepening the charism which is a gift of the Spirit and as such cannot be manipulated. To renew the Movement, we must join together with the internal growth of this charism. There is no need to search elsewhere. It is as if, after finding a source flowing with abundant water, and we feel it is beginning to run dry, we decide to search for water elsewhere else. What we need to do is to go deeper right there where for sure is the spring of water.”*

We are therefore convinced that the intuition of the Holy Spirit is still present and that the only renewal we can do is to renew our fidelity to the same, with greater vigour than ever. As indicated in the Founding Charter: *“Couples do not consider their entrance into Teams of Our Lady and their adherence to the Charter as an end but as a starting point.”* The law of the Christian home is charity. And charity has no limits, charity knows no rest.

## 2. WORD OF GOD

### Introduction to the Word of God

The words of Jesus we are about to hear were also listened to by His disciples in the intimate atmosphere of the Upper Room, and written in the Gospel of John. It addresses the second part of the farewell discourse delivered by Jesus during the Last Supper. In this impressive discourse, Jesus opens His heart and shares with His friends His thoughts and feelings, and what He desires for them. One of the fundamental themes of this discourse is the commandment of love. Jesus proposes this commandment and presents a clear model: love “*as I have loved you.*” The love of Jesus is an endless love that leads to giving His life. It is a love that brings us out of slavery and turns us into His friends, that has a concrete mission in life. Our mission is not the consequence of a whim but the fruit of God’s choice who has chosen us to give lasting fruit.

### Biblical Text

*This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name He may give you. This I command you: love one another. (Jn 15:12-17)*

## 3. TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

### Presentation

The Pope in his text, recognizes the great intuition that Father Caffarel had to found Teams of Our Lady, and he encourages us to continue to be attentive to its process. Faithful to the gift entrusted, we must constantly improve it. Recognize that this charism is a gift and what we must do is deepen it, delve into it and give it full meaning. If we feel tired, discouraged, immersed in routine, we must not look away, but strive to put all resources to seek a renewal at the source. It is our job as members of Teams to try to live more fully, which is no other thing than to live love to the fullest, as Pope Francis said: “*Even recognizing we are imperfect families, with faults and weaknesses, we cannot stop trying the call to communion.*”

Father Caffarel's text is a quote from a chapter entitled "*If you hear His voice Today*", from his book "*At The Crossroads of Love*", which brings us to live out the vocation in our life. It implies special attention to see what we are being called to, being alert, attentive, probably somewhat uncomfortable because it will make us change and get going. Willing to respond, and not to be lukewarm. To be faithful to the vocation received through Teams of Our Lady brings up a series of consequences in our lives, which each one of us must respond.

a) ADDRESS FROM POPE FRANCIS TO TEAMS OF OUR LADY

*"... Dear Teams of Our Lady, I renew my confidence in you and my encouragement. From the moment that the Cause of Beatification of your Founder, Fr. Henri Caffarel, was introduced in Rome, I have prayed that the Holy Spirit may enlighten the Church in the judgment that she will have to pronounce in due time in this regard. I entrust your couples to the protection of the Virgin Mary and of St. Joseph, and I impart to you my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing...."*

b) APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

*325. The teaching of the Master (cf. Mt 22:30) and Saint Paul (cf. 1 Cor 7:29-31) on marriage is set – and not by chance - in the context of the ultimate and definitive dimension of our human existence. We urgently need to rediscover the richness of this teaching. By heeding it, married couples will come to see the deeper meaning of their journey through life (cf. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio (November 22, 1981), 44: AAS 74 (1982), 136. Ibid., 49: AAS 74 (1982), 141. For the social aspects of the family, cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 248-254). As this Exhortation has often noted, no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven. Our contemplation of the fulfilment which we have yet to attain also allows us to see in proper perspective the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection, a purity of intentions and a consistency which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come. It also keeps us from judging harshly those who live in situations of frailty. All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is*

*greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.*

**c) TEXT FROM FATHER CAFFAREL**

*“The call from God can make itself heard more than once in the lifetime of a person. I am not referring to progress in the spiritual life, to an interior surrender each time more generous, total, but to the call of the Lord to a new service, a call that may bring a change of profession, adopting a new direction in life, more austere, apostolic and contemplative. That “come and follow me” of Christ is in each occasion imperative and demanding because it always implies a “leave.”*

*The true children of God not only answer the call when this is evident, but impatient to serve Him, live in an attitude of readiness. We must not mistake this attitude with the one that seeks spectacular gestures nor with the predisposition to constant instability. (...) It is true that we must distinguish between the true and false vocation. The authentic call must not be confused with a momentary enthusiasm. It must pass through a filter of profound reflection, a humble prayer, an experienced advice. Once this is done, how easy it is, maybe too easy, that the alibi of considering it an illusion will excuse our cowardice.*

*I have seen so many persons make a good start, that even twice, or three times, they have answered God’s callings and finally, have stalled in mediocrity, lukewarmness, comfort... Luckily, the Lord is faithful, is faithful par excellence, and does not allow us to remain in that dullness and stagnation. He wants us alive. To live is to love, to give, to give oneself. To get us out of the stalemate that has stalled us, to wake the sleeper, He often allows trials. He allows them because anything is better than the death of His children’s hearts, even suffering. There is one last question: After the trial, will the call be better understood?*

*“If you hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Psalm 95:7-8; Acts 3:7). Keep alert before the guile of the spirit and the heart. Be true children of God, honouring Him by believing He does not ask us absurd things. Always be ready to answer and go, without claiming rights, requesting shortcuts, or arriving late.*

*Happy are those, who, throughout their earthly life, the divine calls have found them ready to walk again. For them, even death is a new departure, more alert and joyful than any previous one, in response to the new and last call of the Lord: “Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.”*

-Henri Caffarel, "At the Crossroads of Love",  
If You Hear His Voice.

#### 4. IDEAS TO PRPARE THE MEETING

##### a. Welcome

##### b. General Sharing

In addition to significant events, if there were any, which we believe should be shared with the team, we can share how we are true to the spirit of belonging to Teams.

We could share how during this month we addressed the difficulties of being called to deepen our vocation, when we have tried and have not been able to, in which moments have we succeeded, what things have helped us.

##### c. Prayer:

##### Proclamation of the Word (Jn 15:12-17)

Love accepts the other as he/she is but helps him/her be better. Mercy is the ability to accept the weakness of the other, for when he/she feels loved, he/she can change. This is how God treats us. We are that clay, but a beloved clay that, in His hands, can become a precious instrument. Mercy sees in weakness a possibility. Clay is that possibility. You have to know how to find the balance between: be aware but allow freedom, correct the other but always with affection, know how to approach and give space, accept the other as he/she is but to help him/her be better.

*You must love the clay in your hands.  
You must love its sand to the madness.  
And if not, do not undertake as it will be in vain:  
Only love illuminates what endures,  
Only love turns the clay into a miracle.  
You must love the clay in your hands.  
You must love its sand to the madness.  
And if not, do not undertake it as it will be in vain:  
Only love illuminates what endures,  
Only love turns the clay into a miracle.  
You must love the time of the attempts.  
You must love the hour that never shines.  
And if not, do not pretend to touch the truth:  
Only love begets the wonder,  
Only love manages to light the dead.*  
Song: "Only Love" (Silvio Rodríguez)

During this moment of prayer, we thank God for the gift of being members of Teams and how much it has meant to us, we also ask the Lord to help us to be faithful to the charism and our given vocation.

#### **d. Participation**

By participating in the meeting on the endeavours, we propose to place special emphasis in the rule of life, as something that helps us recognize that “we are clay” and we need to continue to progress.

During our Sit-down:

- Do we appreciate Father Caffarel's intuition in seeking God by joining the two sacraments together?
- On the other hand, can we show that the commitment to the cause of beatification of Fr. Henri Caffarel is not simply to make a donation (See [www.henri-caffarel.org](http://www.henri-caffarel.org)) If we truly believe that his sanctity made him a prophet of marriage, we should attend to, know, meditate and let ourselves be overtaken by his message. Are we willing to do so? Or do we settle for recognizing his image in old photographs and reading without interest some writings that are adding up years?
- Do we pray for his cause?

#### **e. Questions for General Reflection**

We invite you to reflect on the years you have been in the Movement with the history of what God has been doing in your marriage thanks to the Teams.

- What moments of the team do you remember with more intensity and gratitude?
- In what concrete ways has the team helped you to move forward?
- What crisis do you remember in the team? How did you overcome it?
- After remembering this, what is being asked of us as a team?

#### **f. Towards Fatima**

The Gathering in Fatima will mark the plan of action for the following six years of the Movement, so whether we are going to be physically present or whether we are going to be present with our hearts from where we live, it affects each of us individually. Are we conscious of this? How are we preparing for the Gathering? Do we feel close, do we consider it to be something “for us” or “for others”?

**g. Magnificat**

## NINTH CHAPTER - EVALUATION OF THIS YEAR TEAM'S JOURNEY

### Objective

- To share and review individually and as a couple our journey throughout this study material.
- To share and review the team's journey as progressed through the study material.

### 1. *GENERAL INTRODUCTION*

This chapter has a structure different from the rest of the team meetings we have had throughout the study material. Its purpose is to review the personal, couple and team journey in the light of what we have experienced. This evaluation meeting is considered a time of reflection of the past year together and under the gaze of God. It is like a Team Sit-down, the moment to share and help each other in an atmosphere of prayer, truth and communion.

### 2. *WORD OF GOD*

#### Introduction to Biblical Text

This passage of the Gospel is the only time we see Jesus refer to God as: "Lord of heaven and earth." On other occasions, Jesus has spoken of the Father, his Father, our Father, with an intimate family accent, but now it is pointed out that this Father is also the omnipotent Creator, the Lord of the world.

It is this solemn address which gives a special meaning to His revelation to the humble. Indeed, this great God has sought the humble, the small, the despised ones of the world, the illiterate ... to revealed Himself, and mysteriously the wise and knowledgeable have gone empty.

At the conclusion of this course, we might ask ourselves where we ourselves have got to? Have we been the small and humble to whom the good and glad news of the Gospel of the Family has been revealed this year, or have we been the wise and knowledgeable, that have come out "empty"?

On the other hand, Jesus invites the tired and burdened to give them relief, an experience that the Pharisees and Scribes were not able to live: for them everything was difficult, complicated, overwhelming. Jesus discovers that they have transformed the mandates of God to His people into an unbearable burden from which He wants to free them, because the real mandates of the Lord, lived in simplicity, are a yoke that fits well, tightly adjusting and easily moulds around

the nape and, although it has many demands, it is useful and liberating for every person.

We can ask ourselves if our “endeavours” have been during this year an easy yoke and a light burden that has provided us with rest and a real sense of wellbeing.

### **Biblical Text**

*At that time Jesus said in reply, “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.” (Mt 11:25-30)*

### **3. TEXT FOR GENERAL REFLECTION**

Father Caffarel in his text entitled “*There is no Life Without Demands*” applies the topic of living in truth our encounter with Jesus to the specific situation of our team meeting. It comes from a letter published in L’Anneau d’Or; May-August 1956.

*“...A team meeting that is not first of all a mutual effort to encounter Jesus Christ, is something entirely different from a Teams of Our Lady meeting. Being demanding, with the demands of love, is not so much a matter of making every effort to correct the faults of someone else (as every educator knows), as it is to stir in someone’s heart, a growing generosity towards God and one’s neighbour, as one would fan the flames of a fire.*

*... So, let your love be patient with the patience of a farmer who trusts the seasons. Then your demanding love will bear fruit.*

*Your love without demands diminishes me. Your demands without love discourages me. Your demanding love makes me grow...When couples practice mutual help and fraternal love, little by little their hearts expand. Then stage-by-stage, their love spreads to the home, to the neighbourhood, to the country ... until it reaches the most distant shores ...*

*Where Christians love each other, there is the Church. Provided that this small community feels part of the Church, dedicated to the service of the Church.*

*The power of intercession of Christians when assembled is enormous. Fraternal love has an exceptional fruitfulness. Near fraternal love, evil retreats, and the desert flourishes.*

*A fraternal community is a message from God to humanity. It is His most important message as it reveals the intimate life of God - his Trinitarian life. There can be no more eloquent and persuasive discourse on God, than the spectacle of Christians who “are one” as the Father and the Son are One.*

*Nothing glorifies God more than these united Christians. It is the great masterpiece of divine grace with which God is well pleased, as it is a reflection of his life in the Trinity. “The heavens sing of the glory of God”, fraternal love sings of eternal Love.*

*So, let this be your obsession: Make your team a success in charity.”*

#### **4. IDEAS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING**

##### **a. Welcome**

##### **b. Mutual Sharing - Being a Team**

*“A Team of Our Lady is not only a human community, it gathers in the name of Christ and wants to help its members to progress in the love of God and in the love of neighbour.” (Letter of the Teams of Our Lady). The following questions can help us reflect in our mutual sharing:*

- How have we listened, respected, supported, encouraged each other along the year? Have all members been able to share, have we felt able to communicate truthfully?
- How have we lived the time of prayer in the team?
- How have we lived the study topic throughout this year, has it helped us to realize our mission?
- How have we lived our relationship with the rest of the Movement? Have we participated in the events of our Sector or Region? Have said “Yes” when asked to serve the Movement in different capacities? Have we read the newsletters (Sector, Regional, Provincial or Super Regional), kept up with National and International websites, social networks, etc.?

Of everything lived this year:

- What should we do the same?
- What should be changed?

### c. Prayer:

#### Proclamation of the Word (Mt 11:25-30)

Let us try to present in an atmosphere of prayer what has meant for each of us, for our marriage, for our family and team this study on the Mission of Love.

#### Prayer

- We acknowledge and thank God...
- We ask forgiveness for...
- We ask the Lord to grant us...

The election of the responsible couple for the next study topic could also be made in this atmosphere of prayer.

- The responsible couple for the study topic can comment on how they have lived their responsibility.
- The team can comment if it expects any particular "encouragement" from the new responsible couple.

#### *(Election of the new responsible couple can follow)*

We can end praying together:

*"Lord, we are in the presence of God and we are gathered together in your name. We are next to the person with whom we are joined by the sacrament of marriage. We are together with the couples and the spiritual counsellor of our team to be attentive to each other and to bring them also into our prayer. Lord grant us the grace to recognize what is essential to our life of faith and open our hearts and minds so that our team is more and more a fraternal community at your service. Amen.*

### d. Participation

Has the participation in the endeavours aided us to help each other? How have we lived the Reading of the Word, which we had as main endeavour for this study topic?

Has it helped us to better live our mission? To live it with joy and hope? To reflect on our attitudes?

And in this last Sit-down of the study topic, about to enter the summer break, we remind ourselves that summer is not a time-out, but a privileged time to

ripen the experience, so we propose that you reflect on: What three ideas have made an impact and made us think to change some opinions and points of view? What plans or commitments, fruit of having lived the study topic, we will keep going?

**e. Towards Fatima**

Do we have again in mind that during July 15-21, 2018, the International Gathering in Fatima will take place; in what way will we be united to it and do we commit ourselves to be especially in communion with all the Movement during those days, to follow it and to pray for it.

**f. Magnificat**