



*Collège International
International College
Colegio Internacional
Colégio Internacional
Collegio Internazionale*

Roma, 20-24 Janvier/January/Enero/Janeiro/Gennaio 2009

PRESENTATION FOR THE COLLEGE AND GATHERING

**Maria Carla and Carlo Volpini
Roma, January 21st, 2009**

Introducing a College is never easy. Although there may be a programme for the College and, at least in the minds of those responsible for organising it, an objective, we all know that it has a life of its own, and that what comes out of the College will be whatever is generated by the meeting of the participants, by their thoughts, their conversations and their life experiences.

We are now about to experience the third College since the Lourdes gathering in 2006. At Durham we studied the text "*If you knew the gift of God*" (Jn 4,10) and at Fatima we worked on the text "*Sir, I see that you are a prophet*" (Jn 4,19). We have decided on a tripartite exploration of the Gospel based on the story of the Samaritan woman. It is therefore important to remind ourselves what happened in previous years in order to tackle the study topic for the current year which will, so to speak, conclude our voyage of discovery: "*I, who am speaking to you, am he*" (Jn 4,26).

At our meeting in Durham we tried to understand how thirst is a common need for the whole of humanity. It is not just a thirst for water, for there are many thirsts in our lives, both past and present. We realised that as Christians we must be aware both of our own needs and of those of our neighbours, and that we must learn to give drink to the thirsty - in other words to respond to these needs in a practical way.

In particular we developed together a deeper understanding of the great gift which comes to us from the word of God, provided we can accept it, make it our own and live it. "*If you knew the gift of God*": beside the well Our Lord was not speaking to the Samaritan woman alone, but to each one of us, as we look for meaning in our lives and in our faith.

At our meeting at Fatima we spent our time together reflecting on the word "prophecy", following the words which the Samaritan woman spoke to Jesus "*Sir, I see that you are a prophet*" (Jn 4,19). We realised that Our Lord is the ultimate prophet, and that we are called to follow in the footsteps of the prophets and to continue to proclaim his Word and his message to the people of our time. We may also have understood that in order to become prophets of the kingdom we must look into the heart of our neighbour with the eyes of God.

We are here today to end this journey by tackling the text which gives meaning to all the others "*I, who am speaking to you, am he*" (Jn 4,26).

We must understand that God is present in human history through men and women who live in faith, love and hope, surrendering themselves into the hands of the Father, and that our efforts are meaningless unless they relate wholly to God. We must always try to live our faith in spirit and in truth, and to cultivate our conjugal spirituality, in order to become a reflection of God's love.

When the Lord speaks to us, do we listen to him or do we listen to our own ideas and preoccupations? When he speaks, do we listen in silence so that his Word may penetrate to the depths of our being? We want this College to be more than a joyful time for meeting, friendship, planning and prayer. We want it to be a high point in our married lives and that when it comes to an end we will be able to say, with Samuel, "*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening*"(1 Sam 3,10).

We have asked three Super Regional couples to share their experiences with us by answering the following questions:

1. What faith experience has been significant in your married life?
2. What faith experience has been important for your country?

And since a faith experience cannot occur unless we listen to the Word of God, we have asked Father Angelo to give us a theological reflection to help us to understand how this Word can become life. Finally we ourselves must come to this Word without trying to understand it, but simply to let it lead us, to see where it will take us. If we cannot listen like this, how shall we be "*Teams welcoming today's couples*", and how can this the third of the Lourdes orientations come to life?

This will certainly be a shorter College than usual, but no less important for that. Three years ago we set out together on a journey of exploration, and our efforts are now rewarded by arriving at the finishing line. It is no accident that we have chosen Mary as the conduit for the prayers of this our time together: Mary, the mother who listens; Mary, the woman who prays; Mary, the mother who sacrifices herself. She, the Mother of God, knows how to lead us to Him.

In addition this College must prepare our hearts for the coming gathering of Regional Couples, so that we may live this important meeting which awaits us as an opportunity and a gift. It is the gift of appreciating, through the presence of so many couples, the value of the international dimension and the importance of the task which we are called on to perform. It is the gift of an opportunity to enable our Movement to grow in spirit through the exchange of ideas and the pooling of experiences from all over the world.

When the gathering opens we will be able to give you more details of the task before us, but for now we just want to tell you about the goals which the ERI would like you to aim at. We will of course celebrate the joy of meeting again, and of praying in the iconic surroundings of a city as precious and rich in history as Rome, but above all we want this gathering to be like a training session, with plenty of time for couples to come together in mixed team meetings, to share their experiences of their service to the movement, and to explain some of the problems which exist in different countries. It seems to us that while debates are popular nowadays, there is a still stronger need to come together to discuss and explore our experiences, particularly those of our service in Teams.

More than 150 couples have enrolled for this gathering, which is a large number. We are delighted. It confirms our feeling that there is a great need for those who have a responsibility in Teams to come together to compare their plans and methods of working, to get to know each other, to learn from one another, and to have their commitment to our movement reinforced.

The gospel story of the Samaritan woman goes on to tell how the people to whom she recounts her amazing tale reply "*It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world*" (Jn 4,42).

May the Saviour give each of us this gift: that we too may be able to say, at the conclusion of our time together, "*we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world*".