

Study **theme**

“ *The Mystique
of the Endeavors
and the Sharing*



International Leading Team

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PRESENTATION

Sharing on the endeavors is one of the least understood; most undervalued, and consequently least well practiced aspects of Teams in spite of being considered “the heart of the team meeting.”

That is probably due to a “lack of a true understanding of the mystique (spirit) of sharing which can motivate and stimulate the teams to truly embrace it.” Another factor which may contribute to a partial misunderstanding of the Endeavors and Sharing about them is a lack of vision of the whole, “of an internal coherence which is the common thread that orients us toward a path of continual learning and conversion.”

In response to this problem, the Satellite Team of Pedagogy was invited to develop a Study Theme on this subject. In this way we are trying to reach all teams, in order to help all the couples to reflect on and consider in depth the subjects presented each month, and to share about them during the team meeting.

Let us try to understand the significance and spirit of the endeavors, and how to share about them at the meeting, as well as to suggest ways to respond to difficulties encountered. These suggestions are offered in light of the Word of God, from the thoughts and writings of our Founder and from documents of the Movement- and in a special way from the personal reflections of Mercedes and Alvaro Gomes-Ferrer, former Responsible Couple of the International Team (ERI).

In order to reflect the mystique of the sharing, one must first of all discern in its depth the true meaning of each of the endeavors and the ties that bind them.

Throughout the eight chapters, one for each meeting, we will strive to clarify the “internal coherence” which unifies these endeavors, which gives them their meaning, and which offers to us a path of conversion, and consequently a means to more beneficial sharing during the meeting.

The first two chapters are dedicated to “The Mystique of the Endeavors” and to “The Mystique and the Practice of Sharing.” The following chapters study each of the six Endeavors.

- 1° - The Mystique of the Endeavors
 - 2° - The Mystique and the Practice of Sharing
 - 3° - Hearing the Word of God
 - 4° - Personal Prayer
 - 5° - Conjugal and Family Prayer
 - 6° - The Sit-down
 - 7° - The Rule of Life
 - 8° - The Retreat
- The Evaluation Meeting.
- Appendix: A plan for the monthly meeting



Each meeting will have a clear objective; an invitation in order that, throughout the month, each couple, aspiring to progress and spiritual enrichment, will be able to better understand the means toward these goals. The contents of each chapter will include a life experience, a theme for study and reflection, support texts, questions to share as a couple and with the team; orientations for hearing the Word of God, prayer, the sit-down and the rule of life, as well as a text for meditation during the team meeting and suggestions for the sharing on the endeavors.

In order to develop this work we will follow the classic methodology of “See - Judge - Act.” Fortified with the spirit of a critic we will try to renew and revitalize understanding of the practice of the Endeavors and of the Sharing about them.

Recalling the words of our founder, we hope that this Study Theme can awaken in each couple in our teams, *“a mysterious reality which exists in Teams, which they can become more aware of,” and, from that moment on that “the quality and influence (irradiation) of their team meetings will be greatly improved this year, if, from meeting to meeting, their gatherings truly become living ‘Ecclesias’!”*

ST Pedagogy, January 2011

FIRST MEETING

THE MYSTIQUE OF THE ENDEAVORS

"The decision to make the endeavors part of one's life comes from the heart and is a specific effort of will."

Guide of the Teams of Our Lady

A. Objectives

To deepen the understanding of the mystique of the Endeavors by considering the following ideas:

- ✓ The Endeavors have an “internal coherence” which unites them and gives them meaning: they give life to the experience of developing very basic positive habits;
- ✓ The practice of the Endeavors results in changes in attitudes which lead us to a real and profound meeting with God, indispensable for conversion and life changes.

B. To work on during the month

Life Experience

This month we are invited to reflect individually and as a couple on new attitudes that we have developed and embraced while members of Teams of Our Lady through our practice of the Endeavors.

Let us evaluate our situation, dividing it into two parts:

- ✓ Review our successes and give thanks for them;
- ✓ Try to recognize what may hinder our progress, try to determine the causes and ask Our Lord’s help in overcoming the difficulties.

Study Theme and Reflection

Whether at the beginning of our path in Teams, or perhaps too accustomed to the Endeavors, it is possible that we no longer perceive their deeper sense, their true value. We devote ourselves to them, even very conscientiously, and yet may fail to integrate them to the point that transformation takes place: **from old man into new man.**



The Mystique of the Endeavors

Mystique¹, the spirit which gives meaning to concrete life situations, the intuition which “opens” what is hidden from human understanding, the orientation which makes everyday life a continuous search for communion with God.

In this specific case, the mystique is the support and the spirit which moves us forward in the Endeavors in Teams.

There are two ideas which complete each other and which are the basis of this mystique:

- ✓ Attitudes toward life
- ✓ Deep-seated understanding

Attitudes

The Endeavors are instruments meant to awaken in us attitudes that, little by little, lead us toward a more Christian way of life. They are not ends in themselves, nor are they obligations to be fulfilled.

To search for union with Christ, to live with Him and like Him, that is the primary objective of the Teams of Our Lady, as presented to us by Father Caffarel (The Monthly Review, French, of February 1950).

The Endeavors are practices, concrete exercises that, practiced daily with commitment both personal and as a couple, can lead us to a true meeting with Our Lord.

“The Endeavors, therefore, are quite demanding. They call for an effort on the part of the individual and the couple: an effort of discernment, creativity, and fidelity that embraces our entire being; an effort we assent to inwardly, not one that is imposed on us from without; an effort that begins with the acceptance of some minimum requirements.”

“These are calls to extend ourselves even further. They open up for us the possibility of realizing for ourselves a true meeting in our lives with Our Lord, which is the point of departure for true conversion.”

Coherence

The Endeavors have no specific order, nor arbitrary choices of action. There is a

¹ . “Mystique comes from mystery. Mystery does not mean limited knowledge. It’s the unlimitedness of knowledge. To come to know more and more; to gradually understand the reality around us more fully; to go beyond the known and experience the mystery... Mystery... bursts forth like a voice inviting you to hear more and more the message coming from everywhere, like a seductive call that leads one closer to the heart of the matter... It keeps us in awe, surprised... Thus, mystique signifies the capacity to move one to be open to the mystery of all things. It is not thinking about things, but feeling things in such a profound way that we come to perceive the fascinating mystery that is part of them... It reveals the depth of its importance when we grasp the mysterious thread that unites and binds them. It is the originating source from which everything emanates...Mystique is therefore not just to think about “the subject of” God, but to sense God in all his being. Mystique is not to speak “of” God, but to speak to God and to enter into communion with God. (Leonardo Boff, “Mystique and Religion”)



teaching that unites them in a search for a more Gospel-centered way of life. There is an internal unity to the Endeavors that is the basis for the whole methodology of Teams, on all levels: a logic which links them together and gives them integration with the whole.

From the moment they are embraced, the Endeavors are going to affect us into a new way of thinking, feeling and acting, creating life changes.

We are constantly called to:

- ✓ Foster attentiveness and perseverance so that we may be open to the will of God and to His love;
- ✓ Broaden our capacity for truth;
- ✓ Broaden our capacity for encounter and communion with one another and with God.

These are basic attitudes of a Christian, but in Teams of Our Lady they have a very special nuance: they are lived as a couple.

To foster attentiveness and perseverance to God's will and to His love

We must constantly seek to know God's will for us and for our lives. In order to do so, we must imitate Mary who was always aware of the presence of God in her life. To do this, two things are necessary:

Knowing how to listen – A good listener is not preoccupied with himself; otherwise, he cannot listen. The difficulty is that it is difficult to suppress "me."

Knowing how to listen is to know how to keep silence inwardly and outwardly so that we can hear this call of God which comes to us mainly through his Word, but also through nature, through others, through events, and in silence.

Taking time regularly to seek God's will – This is a long-term apprenticeship in perseverance. It is also a call for generosity of our free time, that time which is ours alone and not shared with others. We must allow the One who has priority in our life to be given recognition, not just when we want to, but **every day**.

These two things constitute the goal of listening to the Word of God. The same perseverance and the desire to know God's will are necessary for personal prayer: a daily period set aside; and also for conjugal prayer, which is asked of us each day. The amount of time spent in prayer is not as important as praying regularly.

The same is true for the sit-down which is nothing more than to understand God's plan for us as a couple, and for the yearly retreat, in which we seek to encounter God and evaluate our lives before Him.

Broadening our capacity for truth

The Endeavors are also directed toward helping us become increasingly aware of who we are, of fully accepting the truth about ourselves rather than upon unfounded dreams, half-truths, or lies.

That is the goal of the "Rule of Life" which we must "draw up" or "adopt" or "revise" on a regular basis. Before adopting a rule of life we must first come to know ourselves, our weaknesses and hurts, those points that we need to work on. Others, our spouse or team, can help us choose this rule. What better way to avoid deluding ourselves? Keep in mind that a spiritual journey does not advance smoothly or regularly. Rather, we often have to stop and



assess our progress in order to set out again in the right direction. That is why we must revise our rule of life periodically.

To help us live in truth, Teams asks that our “personal prayer” be a true conversation with the Lord and not a one-way attempt to justify ourselves; that our “conjugal prayer” be a meeting of husband and wife, each bringing his/her own truth. We are asked to make our “Sit-down” a “true dialogue,” not an exchange based on masks, defenses, or manipulation.

Broadening our capacity for encounter and communion

Living a life of communion means living a life that is not centered around oneself but one that is turned towards others, and in particular, towards the Other. This “other” lifestyle requires effort and can only be attained little by little. We must begin by letting others be themselves and then build a relationship based on giving, always aware that we must give not what we want to give but what the other needs.

All the Endeavors lead us toward this **encounter** with Our Lord; in prayer, in His Word, in others, in daily events, because when we allow God to act in us, we allow Him to speak to us, to love us, and to transform us.

To meet as “**husband and wife together**”, not just next to each other, or facing each other, but truly together – this prayer takes effort on the part of both. If we do this together, as a man and a woman who welcome Christ as a couple, each with his own personality, convinced of the value of conjugal prayer, our communion with each other and with the Lord will grow stronger and deeper.

All of these encounters prepare us to live in an atmosphere of communion with the Church and in the world. Furthermore, we believe that it is the duty of each of us, of each couple, of each team, with the help of our spiritual advisor, to strive for this communion.

“The Endeavors are not arbitrary duties to be added to those already incumbent upon us in life. On the contrary, they are the starting point of a profound path of Christian conversion in perseverance, in truth, and in communion. Such a path can truly transform our lives.”

(Alvaro and Mercedes Gomes-Ferrer – Sharing on the Team)

Supporting Texts

Asceticism revisited

“If you know how to love, you know what asceticism is. Those who practice love necessarily practice asceticism. Asceticism, in fact, is not an arbitrary unreasonable demand of an ill-humored preacher, but it is a fundamental demand of love. There is no medal without a front and back, nor a coin without a face and a crown. Love and asceticism are the two faces of the same reality.

I would not grow more deeply in love with another if I did not lessen my self-centeredness, being selfish and demanding. In fact, it is impossible, at the same time, to give and to take, to have a true attitude of self-sacrifice and to give in to greediness, to be generous and to be possessive, to compromise myself and to hold myself back, to consider myself first or the other.



Love your wife, your husband, and wish to love that person more each day, for there is no heartfelt love that says, “That’s already enough,” or which does not always desire a deeper and stronger love. However, it is easy to see that there are many things in yourselves which halt, which prevent, and which slow down your impulse to love. For example, in a conversation there is the urge to not give in, to always be right; when the telephone rings, there is the secret hope that the other will answer it; during your conjugal prayer something prevents you from praying openly; or perhaps it is the “demon of chatter” that makes you concentrate on yourself, while the other becomes more and more anguished about not being listened to. And all those moments of impatience, do they come from the love you have for each other? And throughout the day, which way does the needle of your compass point: toward happiness and the good of the other, or toward yourselves? And what about your sexual relations?

It would be interesting if you were also to ask each other about your relationships with your children. How many reprimands are decided much more in reaction to your wounded self-respect than through loving concern? I am stopping here since that area is too vast...

Have I succeeded in showing you that all love implies a demand for asceticism, and that it is meant to be an ongoing concern, an effort which is courageous, loyal, intelligent, methodical, persevering in order to overcome egotism – which unceasingly and in an open or unnoticeable way is an obstacle to love? Do you see how asceticism can lead to deeper and greater love?

Moreover, if human love requires asceticism, how much more will God’s love demand it!”
Father Caffarel, editorial of May, 1972

“Teams couples practice these means (*Endeavors*) while making use of three spiritual ideas.

Gradualness: *The Lord takes hold of us wherever we are. We do not need to rush ahead or try to “skip a grade.” All we need is a sincere desire to progress from our present situation.*

Personalization: *Each person, as well as each couple, moves forward at a particular pace. The obligations (*Endeavors*) should not serve to discourage us but, on the contrary, they should inspire and assist us our whole life long.*

Determination: *Any long-term effort, be it marriage or personal prayer life, requires determination. We cannot experience an ongoing conversion unless we are determined to take our wishful thinking about progress and express it in tangible ways that will change our lives and shape us little by little.”*

The Second Wind, 1989

Questions to share as a couple and as a team

Let us try as a couple and as a team to deepen our understanding of the mystique of the *Endeavors* and the importance that they have in our life as a couple.

- ✓ Attitudes developed by the practice of the *Endeavors* can be understood through the concept of see-judge-act. How do you perceive this affirmation?
- ✓ Do we truly believe in the six *Endeavors* proposed by Teams of Our Lady as effective means toward personal and conjugal conversion? Why?
- ✓ What are the obstacles that prevent us from living the *Endeavors*, both individually and as a couple, as true instruments of conversion? What can help us?
- ✓ The practice of the *Endeavors* implies an effort, a method and a result. What value do we give to each of these fundamental elements?



Orientations for:

• Hearing the Word of God, personal and conjugal prayer

“But to attain this you will have to do your utmost yourselves, adding goodness to the faith that you have, understanding to your goodness, self-control to your understanding, patience to your self-control, true devotion to your patience, kindness towards your fellow men to your devotion, and, to this kindness, love. If you have a generous supply of these, they will not leave you ineffectual or unproductive: they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(2 Peter 1, 5-8)

• The Sit-down

We propose that during your sit-down this month you reflect as a couple on your practice of the Endeavors and on the graces that you have received through these practices.

- ✓ Has our practice of the Endeavors become simply a ritual? Or do we actually take it upon ourselves to help each other in personal and couple growth (asceticism)? To what extent do we use the Endeavors as instruments of our conversion?
- ✓ Does the practice of the Endeavors help us to become more open to each other? Do they help us to be more ourselves? To share with each other our dreams, our desires, our hopes and our disappointments?
- ✓ Concerning our lives at this time what concrete actions can we take to improve our interaction with each other? What can we do to develop new approaches to greater intimacy and harmony in our marriage?
- ✓ What is the quality of the time devoted to our meeting with God, to welcome His love and to know His will for us? How do we help each other in order to assure that there is enough time for this?

• The Rule of Life

With regard to the reflection suggested for this month's life experience on the attitudes developed by the practice of the Endeavors, each one may choose where he/she will concentrate **effort** in order to overcome any difficulties that have been identified. Each person should look for creative ways to encourage the other. Before the next meeting, they should identify any progress made in their effort and their attitudes.

C. For the Team Meeting

Meditation text (the prayer for the team meeting)

The Endeavors are instruments which help keep us connected to the “True Vine.”

John 15, 5 -11

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is



like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

Suggestions for the Sharing

The proposal for this Sharing is to look for an overview of progress in the practice of the Endeavors.

- ✓ Begin the Sharing with a couple activity: On a sheet of paper make a dot to identify the couple and another to indicate God; draw a line joining the two points representing the path toward sanctity of the couple. Then mark the point along the line where you as the couple estimate where you are. Take a few minutes as a couple to reflect: Why did we select that point, and what has been the contribution of the Endeavors in our life to reach that point? .
- ✓ Share with the team the life experience chosen for this month: the results of our individual and couple assessments of how practicing the Endeavors during our time as Teams members has improved our lives and our marriage.
- ✓ And then each couple should present to the rest of the team their drawing and their reflection on their path toward sanctity and the bearing the practice of the Endeavors has had on this.



SECOND MEETING

MYSTIQUE AND THE PRACTICE OF SHARING ENDEAVORS

"In order to be viable and lasting, the mystique of the teams requires a rule. Mystique and rule, like the soul and the body, cannot exist one without the other. Mystique must be the soul of the rule, and the rule is the support and safeguard of the mystique".

The Charter of Teams of Our Lady

A. Objectives

- ✓ To deepen the understanding of the mystique of Sharing through a deeper understanding of the mystique of the endeavors.
- ✓ To understand the Sharing as a means of community conversion.
- ✓ To understand the meaning and the importance of mutual support through the practice of the Sharing.

B. To work on during the month

Life experience

Each couple is encouraged to reach out more to the other couples, creating opportunities for a meeting:

- ✓ of friendship
- ✓ of study
- ✓ of prayer.

Study Theme and Reflection

The Mystique of Sharing

What sharing is not

Sharing on the endeavors can become one of the weakest points of the meeting if there is only a shallow understanding of the value of sharing.

There are teams which limit themselves to a simple formality of "yes" or "no," without discovering the enrichment of integrating the endeavors into their life as a couple, nor the great spiritual help they can give the team, if each brings his or her deepest inner self to the sharing.



When the negative aspect of the Sharing on the endeavors predominates, certain uneasiness develops. It is especially devastating if the Responsible Couple, or any member, passes harsh or hasty judgment on others, for it inhibits another from sharing openly and honestly.

What sharing is

Sharing on the endeavors at the team meeting flows from our faithfulness to who we are.

Father Olivier affirms: "*Sharing on the endeavors is meant to be in-depth communication concerning life as it is centered in the endeavors. These endeavors are the main supports in the interior life of the couple. They must be dealt with fairly and honestly. However, it is necessary to go beyond them in order to be able to communicate honestly and to be able to support each other deeply. Therefore it is not enough to say simply whether or not one has observed the endeavors, but it is necessary to make the sharing a true sharing of their lives.*"

In this way the Sharing takes place when each one relates to the others in the deepest and most complete sense: a sign that the team wants to be a true community.

The Sharing must be an effort by all of mutual spiritual support on a communal path of conversion.

As with the endeavors, the sharing must be faithful to these three attitudes: **an unceasing search for God's will, a search for truth and a life of encounter and communion.**

Nevertheless, there is a difference: at the time of the Sharing we are trying to **assimilate** these three attitudes into each meeting, **as well as into our team community.** That is why these conditions are considered indispensable.

The unceasing search for God's will

The habit of seeking God's will which we develop in striving to put the endeavors into practice during the month, is reinforced during the Sharing through the mutual seeking, exchange, discernment and brotherly concerns of the whole team. That help and concern need to flow out of love and **be expressed with love.**

Therefore, the following becomes necessary:

- ✓ **Respect for each other:** It is vital to accept differences in each other, different opinions, as well as different paths toward spirituality.
- ✓ **Active participation by all:** What we must not do is keep silent or simply cease to react at all. Whatever is a concern of one must become the concern of all.
- ✓ **Instill hope:** Sincerity can unmask difficulties and lead to a search for solutions.

The search for truth

Love requires knowledge. We love others more as we get to know them better. This knowledge is not intellectual, but intimate, an encounter of heart and reason. Therefore we must:



- ✓ **Be willing to be open about ourselves to each other:** We need to recognize our successes and be able to talk about them. A positive and dynamic attitude can serve to encourage others. It is also necessary to be able to talk about our failings, which we are more inclined to hide. This is often painful and discouraging; it takes courage and humility!
- ✓ **Acknowledge the truth about ourselves:** How we see ourselves is probably very different from how others see us. Others can help us learn the truth about ourselves.
- ✓ **Seek out the truth about others:** We frequently have preconceived ideas concerning others in our team. We must sincerely strive to get to know them better.

We must be able to admit to the team our mistakes, our fickleness, our cowardice. The understanding and solidarity of each team member in this journey of conversion can only produce renewed hope.

Make good the ones we love, value them and promote their good will : God makes good the ones He loves. We must try to do the same. Love can make us better people. May we come to understand ourselves better each time and accept ourselves with simplicity and good humor.

In order to understand others and enable them to reveal themselves to us as they speak, each team member must acquire the ability to listen. An atmosphere of listening and acceptance can transform the Sharing into a dynamic source for growth.

Truth is not mutual admiration nor an automatic excuse. Truth begins with self-knowledge, evaluating one's own capabilities, assuming responsibility for one's own life. Truth is not evading one's problems nor always finding excuses to justify one's omissions. In fact, others can help us learn the truth about ourselves.

Welcome and take to heart “**constructive criticism**”. We must learn not to overreact emotionally to others' remarks, nor to take them literally, but to ponder them in our hearts as we try to discover the truth within their words.

A life of encounter and communion

The first encounter we make in Sharing is to savor the love of God. God's unconditional love is the love with which we are graced and which we, in turn, must strive to show our fellow team members. Throughout the Gospel Jesus insists that we must reform our lives if we are to enter into a **loving relationship** with God and with each other. Since much of our human experience is centered on conditional love, it is difficult for us to know God's unconditional love for us. Yet this is the love with which we are graced and which we, in turn, must strive to show our fellow team members.

It is necessary that there be a transformation in a horizontal dimension: a change in attitude toward others. Each one must:

Move beyond him/her, in order to focus on others:

We are easily ensconced in our own problems, our plans, our choices. We run the risk of closing in on ourselves, in our marriage, in our family. However, it is essential for us to have love, “agape” if the second commandment is inseparable from the first, and it is then that true conversion happens: to live in love with the others in the team.



“Bear one another’s burdens”

It is not enough to take on information and give judicious advice; we must make use of other means to help a couple in their difficulty, and during the month, we must pray for them especially. In all this, there is one absolutely necessary condition; total discretion must be assured. What is shared in the team cannot go beyond the confines of the team community.

To live is to grow; it is to deal with crises, to mature, to overcome difficulties, to grow closer to others while watching, loving, welcoming, and suffering with each other. To experience true encounter during the Sharing is to strive for equilibrium between acceptance and constructive criticism, and we cannot be harder on others than we are on ourselves. While encouraging teammates, we must respect the path and the rhythm of each one; not expecting them to move forward by leaps and bounds. Great changes are rare. When we experience real communion in the Sharing, we experience an energy, a loving acceptance of each other. We enjoy being together and we share that with each other.

To live a life of encounter and communion is to live love in love.

The Practice of Sharing on the Endeavors

The Endeavors and the Sharing about them are practiced through two fundamental dynamics of our Movement: **prayer and communion**.

These are the dynamics of all parts of the meeting, but especially during the Sharing on the Endeavors.

Aided by the **dynamics of prayer** - present at the time of hearing the Word of God, personal, conjugal and family prayer, the retreat, and prayer during the team meeting, we can experience change in ourselves and as a couple.

Only through the **dynamic of communion** - present in the duty of the Sit-Down, in the Rule of Life, in the Pooling, in the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic, and in the Sharing on the endeavors will we be led to succeed in growing in our Christian affection for one another, whether it be in the team or in the world.

The Sharing on the endeavors is the time during the team meeting when, through the endeavors themselves, we share our progress, changes, difficulties, our life as a couple, by questioning ourselves and encouraging others.

What do we share?

At the time of the Sharing, we must:

- ✓ Share on the efforts made to carry out each of the endeavors that have led us to develop the three fundamental attitudes (page 2).
- ✓ Talk about how the fundamental attitudes have affected our carrying out the endeavors during the month

It is important to be well aware that the Sharing is more concerned with the future than the past, in the sense of overcoming regrets and excuses, and turning our aspirations toward a better life beyond the present reality.



When do we share?

Sharing on the endeavors should be done directly after Prayer, as a natural continuation of a prayerful atmosphere and the ambience of sharing.

How do we share?

During this time in the meeting, each couple shares with the other couples and with the spiritual adviser the efforts made during the month to carry out the endeavors. There are many possibilities on how to do this; each team decides. Some suggestions:

- ✓ The sharing can incorporate all the endeavors each time;
- ✓ Each month one endeavor could be covered in-depth and the others in a broader sense;
- ✓ Each month one couple could do an in depth sharing on all the endeavors and the other couples cover them in a more general way.

Everyone must prepare for the Sharing on the endeavors, the Responsible Couple especially must make sure this is well carried out and recorded. The roles of the Responsible Couple and the spiritual adviser are very important. It is up to them to help, to encourage and to keep the couples focused.

Supporting Texts

A community that truly shares

This small community of couples, which is the team, is characterized by sharing their lives. Every community requires this. Sharing one's life is not only a conversation, nor only working together. Sharing lives signifies being open to each other, person to person, couple to couple, with the result that, aside from the spiritual union that develops due to sanctifying grace, between these individuals and among these couples there also develops a true communion.

The community that we know from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2, 42-47) had only one thought, one heart, only one way of envisaging life. Sharing; each one giving to the other. Sharing lives: an aid to growth. Sharing of faith, sharing of intuitions, of things of God, in a way that mutual enrichment results. But not only that: the community of teams will be characterized by mutual support. That is, the couples are inclined to help each other, to support each other in every sense: spiritually, culturally, professionally, and materially. Mutual help through presence, through support, through advice, by being a shoulder to cry on, a support through Christian wisdom which allows us to approach another and say: "In the name of God I have to tell you...."

Sharing lives: a mutual support that includes all aspects of life of the couples... This small church community - the team – lives its team life, sharing, helping each other in a special manner at certain times. Understand well, the teams do not exist to live for these moments. The teams live these moments in order to live as this community continuously day in and day out. The team does not exist for the monthly meeting, nor is the monthly meeting the life of the team. The team meets monthly in order to be able, in fact, to be a team which truly shares life during the whole month. The team meets monthly in order to be able to show, at a set time, this idea of mutual support and sharing of life. Precisely because of the proximity of everyone in



the same place, face-to-face, it is possible to practice this true sharing in a more meaningful way.
(Father Flavio Cavalca de Castro, 2007)

Sharing in the Spirit

The Holy Spirit should guide your sharing, which will then never take on the aspect of a regimented speedy accounting as a kind of control system. It is obvious that the Holy Spirit is missing from the sharing of a team where everything is done with an attitude of joking, or with irony, which absolutely prevents anything from being taken seriously. Just for fun I could cite some examples of sharing on the endeavors that would recall the vanity of the Pharisees, where one after another reveals expressions of mutual admiration and automatic excuses.

(...) To truly share with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to face reality and not live in a dream world. We must evaluate our possibilities, appreciate our courage, do all that in a contemplative way, without false enthusiasm. We must not race through it. The step of a mountain climber is measured, calculated: perhaps a little challenging at times, but he persists until he reaches the summit. What must be accepted is, whether a little hesitant or very determined, that progress is truly desired, because if not, our intentions will be short-lived or unrealistic. That is why we need to be determined, steadfast, yet calm. The ease of the athlete in performing his feats is not achieved by chance nor by nerves of steel. The athlete is at the same time very calm in the execution of his moves and very aware of what he is trying to accomplish. Neither God nor my fellowmen ask that I be a great champion, but they expect me to live in love, accomplishing an assigned task, to which I must give a certain priority.

(...) In order to move beyond what others think of us, we must be humble at the time of sharing on the endeavors, promising to listen without interrupting, to offer help without imposing anything. We do not play the role of a curious bystander or of someone in charge; we are there out of love. We respect each one's individuality and we ask questions because we care. We should always leave our meetings renewed, revitalized, determined to approach the endeavors with a new spirit; we leave a little chastened, conscious of our own shortcomings and self-centered participation, but at the same time confident, more engaged in the building of the Kingdom where the Lord is the Master builder. An authentic sharing of the endeavors never places blame; on the contrary, it gives us great hope in Our Lord. It is a springboard from whence new initiatives (approaches) are created through confidence and mutual support. We may make suggestions, but the final decision is always left to the parties involved. Personally, it is during the sharing on the endeavors that I marvel that the sharing becomes a true celebration. That is to say: a very profound undertaking, in a spirit of prayer and of exchange on a spiritual level, reflecting what has been happening on a daily basis throughout the month.

Michel Legrain

The Mystique of “moving forward”

Christ has told us: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” but he also declared: “It is not by calling ‘Lord, Lord’ that one enters the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is by doing the will of my Father who is in Heaven.”

We must be attentive to the ideal in order to reach our goal, in order to give us the strength to move forward, but at the same time, over the long term we must check and re-check to make sure we are on task, in order to succeed on the path we have chosen, or if, on the other hand, we have stalled in our efforts.

In order to help us to move forward, we have recourse to the endeavors presented in the Charter, They are practical, concrete ways that we are obligated to incorporate into our lives



as Christian couples. They constitute the framework, if you prefer, the directions, that we agree to follow.

For that, there has to be the mystique of “**moving forward**.” On the road which leads toward Our Lord we read on a large and imposing sign at the entrance: “No stopping here!”

At all times and in all circumstances we must face this vital and pertinent question: What steps forward am I taking? If we don’t want to fall into the temptation of a false good conscience, it is essential that each endeavor of the Charter be undertaken in this spirit.

A good meeting is surely not one where the sharing on the endeavors results only in a series of “yeses”, but one in which each one can feel they’ve made progress in some area and are able to share their progress.

... Ongoing practice of “moving forward” inspires ingenuity in us. It teaches us that it is only with effort practiced by all that community is created and friendship deepens.

- The “moving forward” that must be accepted helps us recognize the fact that we can make progress;
- The “moving forward” should be challenging.
- The “moving forward” must be attainable.
- The “moving forward” must be a source of peace and of joy.
- The mystique of the “moving forward,” practiced with great care, is a very effective means of deepening one’s spiritual life.

(Piloting Materials – Super Region Brazil)

Questions to share as a couple and as a team

As a couple and as a team, let us try to deepen our reflection on the spirit of the sharing and its significance in the life of the couple and of the team.

- ✓ Do these texts just read reflect the sharing that takes place in your team during the meeting?
- ✓ What is the greatest difficulty that your team encounters while trying to make the sharing truly reflect what has happened in your lives during the month?
- ✓ Do you find that only one meeting a month is sufficient to form a community willing to share openly? If not, what suggestions would you make?
- ✓ In your team, what has been done to vary the method of sharing on the endeavors?

Orientations for:

• Hearing the Word of God, Personal and Conjugal Prayer

“I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience.”

(Ephesians 4, 1- 3)

• The Sit-Down

In this selection from a conference, Father Caffarel helps us to understand better the spirit of brotherly love, which is a fundamental requirement of the Sharing.



“Loving is not always having loving feelings in the presence of a person, but to promise oneself to spare nothing, to hold nothing back, so as to reveal oneself completely, as a human being and as a Christian. We must help each other to put into action the gifts that we have received and learned to recognize. And for this we must place our faith in each other, accept encouragement, rely on the experience of others. And we must be able to help each other recognize areas in which we can improve, and where we can make changes where needed.”

- ✓ Have we felt compromised by “human and Christian openness” by our spouse? How do we deal with this?
- ✓ Do we create opportunities to speak of the good qualities of the other?
- ✓ How have we responded to acceptance and demands in our marriage?
- ✓ How can Teams of Our Lady help us to improve individually and as a couple?

• The Rule of Life

During this month let us devote ourselves to the preparation of the Sharing of the Endeavors for the next team meeting. The three attitudes mentioned previously should be in the forefront for the couple and shared during the meeting.

C. For the Team Meeting

Text for Meditation (prayer for the Team Meeting)

1 Cor 10, 31-33; 11,1

“Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God. Never do anything offensive to anyone – to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God; just as I try to be helpful to everyone at all times, not out of concern for my own benefit, but for the benefit of everybody else, so that they may be saved.

Take me for your model, as I take Christ.”

Suggestions for the Sharing

Let us try to practice the “horizontal dimension” of our growth in “the experience of coming together and of community” as has been suggested to us in the Study Theme and Reflection, with regard to “Extend yourself, so as to truly involve yourself with others.”

During the sharing let’s try to move beyond ourselves, control the tendency to talk about ourselves, and listen attentively to the sharing of each of our teammates, trying to put ourselves in his/her place, to enter into their lives which we have gradually learned about during the time we have been together as a team.

Then let us try for a change of attitude, cultivating unconditional love for each team member, no matter at what stage they are in their spiritual journey.

THIRD MEETING

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

“The Word of God is alive and active.”

(Heb 4, 12)

A. Objectives

- ✓ To understand the mystique of the Hearing of the Word;
- ✓ To encourage the regular Hearing of the Word of God. In fact, it is the Son and his Spirit who will “*lead us to complete truth*” (John 16, 13)

B. To work on during the month

Life Experience

God has given us his Word so that we can hear it and have new life in us. This month we will have an excellent opportunity to experience this.

We propose the following steps:

- ✓ Every day put aside some time to hear the Word of God in Scripture, if possible together as a couple.
- ✓ Reflect and share how we can apply the Word of God to our daily life and to what changes it invites us.

Study Theme and Reflection

Hearing the Word of God

Father Caffarel reminds us that: *“The evangelists, who offer us so many words of Christ, present us with only three words of the Father. How precious these words should be for us! One of them is a word of advice, the only advice from the Father to his sons. With what infinite reverence and filial respect we should receive it, and with what care we should follow it! This advice, which contains the secret of sanctity, is simple and expressed in one single phrase: ‘Listen to him’, (Matthew 1, 6) says the Father, while indicating his Beloved Son.”* (Letters on Prayer)



The Word is one of the signs of the presence of God, along with the Christian community and the sacraments. Recognizing it as a sign demands that, through the Word, we listen to God who is reaching out to us, who guides us on our way. God speaks to us through means that he, himself, has established: through his prophets, through the intermediary of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and today through the Word of Jesus.

Attitudes concerning the Word of God

Reading the Word of God is the first step toward preparing us to hear the Word. It is the “door” which leads to dialogue, to internalization, to conversation with God.

It is the Holy Spirit which forms in us a “new heart” which makes us capable of listening to God, welcoming His Word, and “storing it” as Mary did (Luke 2:52), and being nourished by it.

Regular hearing of the Word of God brings each team member in contact with the person of Christ, through the Word. This personal contact is the pillar of all spiritual life. The creative Word of God is always an indispensable source of motivation and energy for our personal and couple growth.

That is why Teams of Our Lady invites each one to hear the Word of God every day, setting aside a time to read a passage from the Bible, in particular the Gospels, and then to reflect on the passage, in silence, in order to better understand what God is telling us through the Scriptures.

To listen to the Word of God, in order to live it, demands continuous and persevering effort. That is why the Movement includes it in its methodology as an “Endeavor.” Among the six endeavors, it is the first “effort” which is demanded of the Teams couples, in order to help them, as Christian couples, to put the Gospel into practice in their daily life, in their individual life, in their marriage and in their family.

The effort required is not just that of listening to the Word of God. In fact, we do that with a certain ease; what takes effort is to remain diligent, faithful, steadfast.

Hearing the Word is indispensable for our personal growth and as a couple, because it has an effect on us, leading us to conversion.

The Word of God in the life of the couple

It is not possible to hear the Word of God as a team if we do not have the habit of hearing it individually and as a couple. To hear the Word of God is not to comment on it, but to have the attitude of Mary: to open our heart and let Our Lord speak to us. (Luke 2, 52)

Hearing the Word of God is very personal: it varies according to the inclination of each person. But if husband and wife are dedicated to it, they will benefit and better understand the place of the Word of God in their conjugal prayer, in the duty of the sit-down and in the preparation of the study topic, leading to a more scripture-centered life style.

Conjugal Spirituality, charism of the Teams of Our Lady, will become reality for us, as couples, to the extent that the Word of God is understood as the source of life and renewal in

the sacrament of Marriage. The Word of God is a mirror where the Christian couple can discover its true image, its vocation and its mission.

From the beginning the inspired Word teaches that the couple is the image of God; “*Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves*” (Genesis 1, 26). The Christian couple can only draw near and drink in this nourishment which little by little transforms them into the image of that divine love in the world that awaits its witness. Such a way of life is a difficult task and requires constant renewal, but the Word of God will supply the energy for the journey.

The Christian couple should try to find in the Word of God guideposts for their life and a true guide for their attitudes and their decisions. That couple will enrich their team meeting, whether it be at the moment of prayer, the time of exchange of ideas on the study theme, or in sharing on the endeavors, since they will always incorporate the Word - **way, truth and life** - into everything around them: not only difficulties and injustice, but also joyful family occasions and in their community. It is the Word of God that always enlightens everything.

Father Caffarel, in his writing “The Presence of God” affirms that: “*It is not the same with God as it is with worldly goods. Possession of these is an end in itself, the desire to have them; whereas, the closer we are to God, the more we desire him and actively search for him.*” And in his discourse “Ecclesia”, he adds again: “*In fact, it is not a question of listening to the Word in a more or less distracted way. It is a question of listening in the strongest sense of the word. It is said of King Solomon that he directed this prayer to God: ‘Lord, give me a heart that hears!’ It is with the heart that one hears to the Word of God.*”

Listening to the Word of God **in order to live** it demands continuous and steadfast effort, in the same way that human love is required in building a strong marriage. Besides, from a Christian perspective, the two, the Word and love, are intimately connected.

The Word of God and the team

Our team is a little Christian community founded and built on the Word of God, along with the Eucharist and the other sacraments.

The Church embraced the Word of God to guard it faithfully so that it might bear fruit. The team, as a small Church, should then help all its members to bear fruit.

The team meets together in the light of the Word. Christ himself, who is the Word, is present: “*For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.*” (Matthew 18, 20)

During the team meeting, prayer and the exchange of ideas on the study topic are particularly beneficial to Hearing the Word. In this way, the prayer which begins the meeting is rooted in the Hearing of the Word and the meditation following it.

In the good earth of an authentic Christian community, which the team should be, the Word sown is welcomed and bears fruit: “*And there are those who have received the seed in rich soil: they hear the word and accept it and yield a harvest, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.*” (Mark 4, 20). According to the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “*The Church does not live by itself, but by the Gospel; and it is there that it finds now and forever, the guidelines for the journey. This is something that each Christian must take into consideration and apply to himself; only he who truly hears the Word can later become one who can proclaim the Word.*



He cannot teach his own wisdom, but the wisdom of God, which often seems foolish in the eyes of the world."

After the stage of **hearers**, comes the stage of being **bearers** of the Word for others. According to Father Besnard, after having welcomed the Word and approved its action in ourselves, we offer ourselves "*as the little plant and the gardener, which, through us, may continue in its growth.*"

Supporting Texts

In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), God spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say.

This is the meaning of that passage where St. Paul tries to persuade the Hebrews to turn from communion with God through the old ways of the Mosaic law and instead fix their eyes on Christ. He said: "That which God formerly spoke to our fathers through the prophets in many ways and manners, now, finally, in these days he has spoken to us all at once in his Son." (Heb 1, 1-2) The apostle indicates that God has become as it were mute, with no more to say, because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All, who is his Son.

Those who now desire to question God or receive some vision or revelation are guilty not only of foolish behavior but also of offending him by not fixing their eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty. God could answer as follows: If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on him alone because in him I have spoken and revealed all and in him you will discover even more than you ask for and desire. You are making an appeal for locutions and revelations that are incomplete, but if you turn your eyes to him you will find them complete. For he is my entire locution and response, my entire vision and revelation.

(St John of the Cross: The Ascent of Mount Carmel Book 2: 22: 3-5)

The Church has always venerated Sacred Scripture, as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ. She has always regarded, and continues to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. For, since they are inspired by God and committed to writing once and for all time, they present God's own Word in an unalterable form, and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles. It follows that all the preaching of the church, as the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred scripture. In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life. Scripture verifies in the most perfect way the words: "The Word of God is living and active" (Heb 4, 12), and "is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

(Acts 20, 32; cf. 1 Th. 2, 13)

(Vatican II: Dei Verbum n° 21)

Within the great community of hope which is the Church, they also lived "cheerfully in hope" (Rm 12, 12). Hope is love which awaits what Love has promised.



The Word of Christ is also, and primarily, an acknowledgment of love. Every page of the Gospel reveals that love.

Moreover love sustains love. But, as you well know, you who are married, one needs to hear it said again and again that one is loved, as it seems such an unforeseeable and unexpected miracle to be loved in the midst of this world of sin. He who does not grasp the meaning of the word will easily forget that he is loved by God. On the other hand a couple that reads and rereads the gospel with the same attention that one gives to a love letter in which one tries to perceive all the inner meanings, all the intonations, that couple will experience an endless fountain of love in their life. Thus the word of Christ in the Gospel makes of the couple a community of love... The couple, community of forgiveness, community of faith, community of hope, community of love, this is the action brought forth in the word of Christ present and alive in the Gospel.

In order to justify not reading scripture, a friend wrote to me on day: "After all, books on spirituality are nothing more than the gospel explained and their reading is made more attractive and beneficial, because it is better adapted to our mental level." What a mistake! The most important difference between the gospel and books on spirituality is that the latter convey knowledge more or less based on the gospel, whereas the first is the living word, everlasting, coming from Christ, he himself who at the time, calmed a raging storm, cured the leper, brought the dead back to life, the one who forgave sins and brought forth the sons of God.

As likewise it has not lost its relevance, the word of Christ in the gospels has not lost its force: it remains, it is creative power.

(Father Henri Caffarel – L’Anneau D’Or – 117/118)

Questions to share as a couple and as a team

As a couple and as a team, let us try to deepen our reflection on the mystique of the Hearing of the Word of God and the place that it has in our marriage.

- As active persons, what difficulties do we encounter in making ourselves available for, or being silently attentive to hearing the Word of God?
- How are we living what has been proposed for this month? Have we been successful in living it in our marriage? Do we intend to repeat the experience since it has been positive for us? Or, on the contrary, have we had difficulties in making it happen?
- In the eyes of God we are collaborators in his work. We are important to him, as he is to us. How do we face up to this assertion? What do we do to take on this mission in whom we become more and more responsible to do our part?

Orientations for :

• Hearing the Word of God, Personal and Conjugal Prayer

"Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!" But he replied, 'Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" (Luke 11, 27b-28)



• The Sit-down

The proposal for this month's sit-down is to reflect together on the practice of the Hearing of the Word and the benefits received from this experience.

"Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do." (Is 55:10-11)

- ✓ How successful have we been with regard to hearing the Word of God this month?
- ✓ Is our heart like that fertile soil which is made fruitful by the Word of God, described by the prophet Isaiah? From a positive standpoint, what changes have we experienced in ourselves? On the other hand, what is holding us back from being successful?
- ✓ In what way can reading and hearing the Word of God help us in our conjugal prayer?

• The Rule of Life

Beyond the reflection suggested for this month on attitudes developed through the experience of Hearing of the Word of God, let us try to make it, as well as the changes in attitude that it has encouraged us to make, a regular part of our everyday life.

C. For the Team Meeting

Text for Meditation (prayer for the Team Meeting)

Mt 13, 18-23

"You, therefore, are to hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path. The one who received it on patches of rock is the man who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But he has no root in him, he does not last; let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once. The one who received the seed in thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so he produces nothing. And the one who received the seed in rich soil is the man who hears the word and understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty."

Suggestions for the Sharing

Share the text or texts "heard" during this month which have been most meaningful in your daily life as a couple.

- ✓ How has the hearing the Word of God influenced your way of carrying out the sit-down, the rule of life and each of the endeavours in general?
- ✓ How has the study topic, prepared as a couple, allowed you to come face to face, more or less directly, with the Word of God? What does Christ say in this regard that can enlighten and invigorate your life?



FOURTH MEETING

MEDITATION (PERSONAL PRAYER)

“Reflect on the injunctions of the Lord, busy yourself at all times with his commandments.”

(Ecclesiasticus 6, 37)

A. Objective

- ✓ To examine thoroughly the mystique of meditation;
- ✓ To encourage meditation to allow a deeper encounter with the Lord.

B. To work on during the month

Life Experience

To make meditation (personal prayer) a focal point of this month, developing in us the capacity to listen to and dialogue with the Lord.

In order to be more fruitful, we propose the following:

- ✓ Write down the main idea of your prayer each day;
- ✓ Share with your spouse during this month's sit-down your progress in prayer.

Study Theme and Reflection

Meditation

In its presentation of the Endeavors, the Guide of the Teams of Our Lady describes personal prayer as “to encounter God daily in silent prayer.” This formula, simple and profound, synthesizes the path of the Movement, expressing the necessity for the couples to become “souls of prayer,” as Father Caffarel tells us in one of his letters.

Ever since the International Meeting in Rome in 1970, Teams couples have been invited to devote “a modest minimum of ten minutes” to daily mental prayer. In the Monthly Letter of Teams of Our Lady, in France, November, 1952, Father Caffarel affirmed: “*After twenty years in ministry, I believe I can state with certainty: the Christian who does not dedicate ten or fifteen minutes of his time (1/96th of his day) to this prayer we call interior prayer, will always remain infantile, or, worse still, he will regress.*”



In the document “What Is a Team of Our Lady? (1976), personal prayer is presented thus: “*to find time each day for a true encounter with the Lord.*”

Meditation and Prayer

It is interesting to note that the texts of Teams of Our Lady speak a great deal about meditation and personal prayer. It is important to speak a little more in depth about these two words.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “*Christian tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative*” (2699). A little further it tells us that “*Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking*” (2705). And, in citing Saint Teresa of Jesus, it presents mental prayer to us as “*nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us*” (2709), in which “*words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love*” (2717).

It can be said that meditation is presented as a process of reflection, and mental prayer as a meeting of loving contemplation. However, in both cases we are searching for harmony with God, with His love, and with His will. Both paths lead to encounter with the Lord, which is made clear in the definition of the Endeavor “Personal Prayer.”

Therefore, prayer is meditation when we understand it to be an “*active search for knowledge of Christ, which love demands, stimulates and always undertakes, since the one who loves always wants to know the other better in order to love more.*”

(Father Caffarel, The Unfathomable Riches of Christ, in one Hundred Letters on Prayer)

Encountering Christ

In Teams of Our Lady “*We are called to give time to the Lord for an intimate moment with him and to live in his presence.*” Meditation is “*a time of discovery and of welcoming God’s plan for us.*”

(Guide of the Teams of Our Lady)

It concerns having the experience of the Mother of God, who remembered happenings and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2,19)

We are called to give our time to the Lord for a personal conversation with Him who “*within us, in the heart of our being, present, alive, loves, active. It is there that He calls us. It is there that He waits for us, to unite us to Himself. God is there. But we are not. Our existence takes place outside of ourselves, or, at least, on the periphery of our being, in the realm of feelings, emotions, our imagination, conversations (...). Prayer consists in moving beyond this tumultuous periphery of our being, which I was speaking about, to withdraw from ourselves, to concentrate all our faculties and go out into the arid night in the direction of the depth of our soul. There, in the intimacy of the sanctuary, it is enough to be silent and to be attentive.*”

(Father Caffarel, In the House of the Lord, in One Hundred Letters on Prayer)



In the deepest part of our being we encounter who we really are. Not what others think about us or what we think about ourselves, but the one that God sees and loves: that complete person with his personal history, strong points and contradictions, his thoughts and actions, questions and challenges.

Seeing ourselves through the loving look of God we can discover and welcome God's plan for us and for our life. We give thanks for the blessings he has bestowed on us. We also discover the areas in which we need to make changes. And after our introspective prayer, we can recognize the need for change and can consider how to proceed.

The Practice of Meditation

Each of us is a mystery and a reality. That is why Teams of Our Lady does not propose a rigid rule for personal prayer. *"Each person decides what is appropriate for them in terms of when, where and how."*

(Guide of the Teams of Our Lady)

Sometimes we need the help of a biblical text which invites us to contemplate the mysteries of God in our life. Sometimes events in our life will lead us to lead us to find an answer in God's plan for us. Sometimes our encounter will be short; other times it will last much longer. We can adopt our own personal method, or we can utilize methods already suggested by the Church.

One of the simplest methods consists in reading a text, repeating it again in order to understand its contents, to see what it suggests to us personally, to be able to make necessary decisions, and, the most important step is speaking with God, in order to praise him, thank Him or ask His help.

However, it is not the form that is most important. In order to develop a deep union with God it is perseverance and regularity which are very important. We must pray every day *"as a pilgrim goes to the interior sanctuary to adore the true God."*

(Father Caffarel: In the House of the Lord, in One Hundred Letters on Prayer)

Meditation Enriches the Team Meeting

During the team meeting, after having heard the Word of God, each one is invited to speak to God aloud in order to share with the community the prayer which springs from his heart, as the fruit of the Hearing of the Word and personal prayer.

The more couples practice personal prayer, the richer and deeper will this moment be. The more we are "trained" to personal encounter with the Lord, the more naturally will we live this encounter in community. We will be able to recognize more easily the presence of God who speaks to us in the prayer of another. Silence will be calmer and the words, simpler.

Supporting Texts

"Interior silence is possible. To arrive at that point takes patience and calm. More aggressive attempts have never brought peace. And it is exactly this peacemaking which involves the peacefulness of all our faculties that makes us able to be available to God, quiet, listening. This

last expression evokes a certain quality of silence: peaceful contemplation. It is an awakened awareness, ready to receive an interior voice. Claudel writes: ‘Many of the learned have already told us that in order to hear, it is enough, perhaps, to listen: as if that were true! But today it is no longer just by hearing, nor even with our intelligence: it is with our whole being that we grasp the existence of the One who is.’

Probably you will say, once again, that you despair of ever arriving at an interior silence and this sacred withdrawal. It is only your efforts which are lacking. It is true. Divine grace must intervene. But how can God refuse this grace? What He desires is for silence to permeate your soul, in order that dialogue between the Father and the Son may be possible. Be confident: persevere in prayer, and Christ will calm you and center your mind on Himself, as the shepherd, as Saint Teresa of Avila spoke of him, who at nightfall played the flute to reassemble his sheep scattered throughout the pasture.”

(Henri Caffarel: “L’Anneau d’Or, August 1957)

Mary kept God’s words in her heart, meditated on them and more deeply understood their significance. In affirming that, Luke presents Mary as the source of the tradition, but he shows us also that through Mary was made visible what for centuries has been the mystery of Israel and which will be the mission of the Church throughout history: to be the dwelling of the Word of God, the port where the Word finds its secure shelter amidst the highs and lows of history, its storms, its vicissitudes and its vanity, its gaps and its failures in one sense or another.(...)

Vast fruitfulness, the forces which really fashion and modify history, can only issue from what has been developing for a long time, with deep roots, from what has been proved and meditated on, from what has been lived and suffered. In the same way, the power of the Church, its capacity to transform the world, cannot derive from what, in the short term, promises one thing or another: it consists in offering us an interior dimension in which we can collect our thoughts, be filled with silence and the Word can come to fruition within us.

(Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger: Holy Mary, Mother of Christians)

Life and prayer are completely inseparable: a life without prayer is life which does not know an essential dimension of existence, is life which is satisfied with what is visible, what is close by, but a nearness in the physical sense, a nearness in which we do not discover the immensity and eternity of one’s destiny. The value of prayer consists in discovering, in affirming and in living the fact that everything has an eternal dimension and that, to express it better – everything has a dimension of immensity.(...)

It often seems difficult for us to coordinate life and prayer. That is a mistake. A mistake which comes from the fact that we have a false idea of life, and also of prayer. We think that life consists of stirring things up(constant motion?), and that prayer consists of withdrawing to a place, no matter where, and forgetting everything around us, our human situation.

If we want to learn how to pray, we must first become totally cognizant of the reality of the person, with his destiny and that of the entire world: to assume it in its entirety. In one’s daily life, life and prayer must be one and the same thing.

(Dom Antoine Boom, orthodox bishop, to the youth at Taize)

Questions to share as a couple and in the team

We are going to reflect on the mystique of personal prayer and the place that it has in our life. First we are going to speak of it as a couple. Then we will share as a team:

- ✓ What are the necessary conditions to make prayer a true encounter with the Lord? Have we succeeded in attaining them? What else is needed?
- ✓ How can our prayer help us to carry out the endeavors? How have we been successful?
- ✓ Does personal prayer transform our life? Share about the changes that we have experienced.
- ✓ Have we already realized that our personal prayer can guide our actions in order to build a better world?

Orientations for :

• Hearing the Word of God, personal and conjugal prayer

"For the Lord himself is giver of wisdom, from his mouth issue knowledge and discernment. Then you will understand what virtue is, justice, and fair dealing, all paths that lead to happiness. Then wisdom comes into you and knowledge is a delight to you."

(Prov 2, 6; 9-10)

• The Sit-Down

- ✓ Is our home conducive to prayer? How? What do we need to do to make our home more favorable to prayer?
- ✓ How have our prayer practices transformed our personal life and our life as a couple?
- ✓ At present what are the most frequent themes of my prayer? What have I learned about myself? What life change am I called to make?
- ✓ Does the practice of prayer lead us to a better understanding and a better relationship between us? With the children?

• The Rule of Life

Regarding the different ways of practicing personal prayer, what we propose is that each one choose his own "**moving forward step by step**," toward the goal of true encounter with the Lord.

Some suggestions:

- ✓ set up a regular prayer time;
- ✓ choose a means that will avoid distractions (for example, texts from the daily liturgy, or selections from Scripture);
- ✓ try different ways, methods of approaching prayer;
- ✓ incorporate music or a prayer to help you internalize your prayer;
- ✓ choose an icon (a picture, photo, object) which helps concentration;
- ✓ select a spiritual exercise of St. Ignatius of Loyola or of another spiritual "master".

C. For the Team Meeting

Text for Meditation (the prayer for the Team Meeting)

Psalm 119 (118) 14-16; 24; 26-27

'In the way of your decrees lies my joy, a joy beyond all wealth.

I mean to meditate on your precepts and to concentrate on your paths.

I find my delight in your statutes, I do not forget your word

Your decrees are my delight, your statutes are my counselors.

I admitted my behavior, you answered me, now teach me your statutes.

Explain to me how to keep your precepts, that I may meditate on your marvels.'"

Suggestions for the Sharing

In the course of this team sharing, we are going to explain our own method of personal prayer. That may inspire others who experience difficulty with this endeavor. Likewise, the experience of others in the team may be an answer to a question we may ask. Let's share on:

- ✓ How do we conduct our prayer time? At what time? By what method?
- ✓ What encourages a true encounter with the Lord?
- ✓ What have been the fruits of your prayer in the course of the past month which has been consecrated to deepening our prayer experience?

FIFTH MEETING

CONJUGAL AND FAMILY PRAYER

“Tobias rose from the bed, and said to Sarah, ‘Get up, my sister! You and I must pray and petition our Lord to win his grace and his protection.’ She stood up, and they began praying for protection.”

(Tobit 8, 4- 5)

A. Objective

- ✓ **To understand** that conjugal prayer is very important as a means for the couple to confide in the Lord the most important questions in their life and in their love.
- ✓ To understand that family prayer strengthens family ties to each other and to their Lord. For the children, it is the first place that they learn. It is the mission of the parents to help awaken their faith in them. It is important that their home be a place where they feel confident and encouraged in prayer.

B. To work on during the month

Life Experience

We are called this month to undertake two experiences:

- ✓ Keep this phrase in your heart: “**I am in the midst of them**”, at home, in your relationship with each other. Let us live this presence in a special way during our time of conjugal prayer.
- ✓ Parents often pray for their children. It would be good not only to pray for them, but also “**in their name**”, in their place, as if this prayer came from each of the children reflecting what they are experiencing in their lives at the time.

Study Theme and Reflection

CONJUGAL PRAYER: praying together, husband and wife, every day

“To all of you, Christian couples, who are married and who have children, I issue this invitation: **Walk with Christ!** It is He who leads you to discover the nobility of the commitment that you have made. It is He, Jesus Christ, who can realize through you much more than you could possibly imagine.”

“Prayer – The spirituality of the Pope” – John Paul II.

The couple, husband and wife, place themselves in the presence of God to adore Him, to praise Him, to listen to Him, and to ask for the grace to live the sacrament of marriage and its human love as a reflection of the love of God.

Conjugal prayer re-enforces the bond of love between husband and wife and between them and the Lord. Each one undertakes and develops his personal relationship with God. However, gradually as the couple progresses in its conjugal prayer, it develops its own **“method of couple prayer.”**

The Christian couple is not only a reciprocal gift of husband and wife; it is also a consecration, a gift of the couple to Christ. There is a pact, an alliance in the biblical sense of the term, between Christ and the couple. What Yahweh said a long time ago: *“I will be your God and you will be my people”*, Christ says now to the sacramental couple. Through this alliance each Christian couple is converted into sacrament, as a sign of the love of God for others.

Conjugal prayer is an opportunity to celebrate our union as a couple. It is enriched by the graces that we receive from the sacraments and in particular from our sacrament of marriage.

During conjugal prayer we praise God together, we ask His forgiveness, we intercede for those whom we love and for the whole world, and above all **we strive together to know His will for us.** Our prayer can be very simple, as simple as to pray the Our Father. If the effects of our prayer deepen our conjugal intimacy and increase our mutual understanding of each other, while creating **“a common soul”**, as Father Caffarel said, so much the better, but this is a consequence, and not the goal of conjugal prayer.

Some practical considerations:

Opening ourselves to the presence of God

After a busy day, when we have been apart from each other, it is important that we indicate, by a gesture or a word, our desire to be spiritually together again in the presence of God. For instance, we can start our prayer with the prayer the priest says at the altar: *“Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us and give us peace.”* We can make the Sign of the Cross, or another sign to reveal our faith in this union that Christ has with us.

Reconciliation

Tired or preoccupied, it is not always possible to do something together, and even less possible to come before God together to know Him better and to praise Him. If we cannot face Him, if we are unhappy with our spouse because of something that happened during the day that we haven't been able to resolve yet and that we don't have time to talk about at the moment, we can at least recognize before God our need to forgive each other and ask God to help us later after our prayer.

We can begin our conjugal prayer saying aloud: “*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have offended us.*”

Drawing closer

We are very different from each other and sometimes life even separates us more: two sexualities, two personalities, different professions and occupations. All that often makes our encounters difficult. Without wanting it to be that way, there are times when we feel distant from each other. Conjugal prayer helps us to come back together, if we make the effort, with our hearts aware of our emptiness. We could begin our prayer by saying: “*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.*”

Praise and give thanks

Recognizing the wonders of God in our life we give thanks to God for the story of love that we live, in which His active love is revealed. Let us remind ourselves of the gifts received from the Holy Spirit: “*What do you have that was not given to you?*” (1 Cor 4, 7)

Bring forth and overcome difficulties

For couples who remain faithful to conjugal prayer and who have faith and courage to strive to overcome difficulties, it will not be long before they experience benefits gained and progress realized. Many couples only discover the soul of the other and the aspirations of their interior life after many years of marriage.

Praying in different ways

There are many ways to experience conjugal prayer. They vary over time and according to the interior disposition of the couple. Some read the Word of God and meditate on it. Others spontaneously confide themselves to the Lord and express to Him what is in their hearts. Others follow the prayer of the Church, praying the liturgy of the day. Others prefer the rosary. Whatever option you choose, the important thing is to pray.

Listening to the teachings of Father Caffarel

- May the couple, husband and wife, renew their faith in this pact that Christ, by His presence, has made with them. May they realize that Christ is eager to praise the Father for those who place themselves in His service.
- May they together listen to Christ. In order to listen to Christ, they may begin their prayer by a reading from the Bible and then meditate upon it. Then, only after having listened and understood, they can speak to God. Speak to Him spontaneously, expressing thoughts and feelings with the simplicity of a child.
- At the time of prayer may all discord cease and may peace be re-established.

In theory all that seems easy. How to explain then that so many couples have difficulty with conjugal prayer? It is only after having been devoted to this practice for some time that the graces received will be realized.

FAMILY PRAYER; whenever possible, PRAY as a

“As regards my family and me, we shall serve Yahweh” (Jos 24, 15)

“And Crispus, president of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house”

(Act 18, 8)

“And ye, fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”

(Eph 6,4)

When a couple prays as a family, without excluding conjugal prayer, it transforms family prayer into community prayer. Parents teach their children to pray while praying with them.

As the children grow older, they are certainly going to want some personal time with the Lord. However, it is possible to maintain family prayer; for example, before meals.

Through family prayer, the family grows aware of its spiritual unity, of the love that unites them to each other and unites them with God.

Like the whole Christian community the family needs to pray, and even more so in remembering that this is the only community which has its origin in a sacrament.

It is important to look for forms of prayer that encourage the participation of the children, not only when they are small, but also as they are growing older. Family unity is strengthened when it shares its spirituality.

Supporting Texts

“The couple: the union of two seekers of God”

Married spirituality finds its source, according to Father Caffarel, in seeking the mind of God on the whole of married and family life, and its openness to social or apostolic life. This pursuit will be based, for the couple on the practice of encountering Christ through prayer as a couple.

*YOU WILL BEAR WITNESS TO GOD AS A COUPLE even more explicitly if you are a union of “**seekers of God**” to use the admirable expression of the psalm: two seekers whose minds and hearts are eager to know and meet God; passionate seekers of God impatient to be united with him; seekers for whom God is the great reality in their lives; seekers who are more interested in God than in anything else. In such a couple, everything is seen and conceived in relation to God. I am not speaking theoretically. Numerous are those I know among you who are true “**seekers of***

***God**” in whom a secret cord vibrates whenever God’s name is mentioned in their presence. The home of such a couple is a place of worship in which husband and wife “worship the Father inspirit and truth.”* (John 4, 23)

*I would like to pass on to you my conviction that a couple who are “**seekers of God**” in our world that no longer believes in God are a “theophany,” a manifestation of God as was for Moses the bush in the desert “that was blazing but was not being burned up.” (Ex 3:2)*

(Extract from Father Caffarel’s Conference: “In the Face of Atheism”; Rome, May 1970)

The importance of Prayer

“For twenty centuries Christians have been striving for sanctity. But without prayer nothing is possible. Without prayer one does not advance in knowledge and love of God. This is not a supplementary devotion. It is as essential as eating and breathing, just as they are essential for the tree to send down its roots into the ground so as not to dry out and die.

Human relationships are fragile. Relationship with Christ is also fragile. In the same way that talking is necessary in relating to each other, with one’s father, a friend, a brother, it is equally necessary to do the same with the Lord. If not, the relationship falters.

Our life is not serene when we are immersed in different activities or when we are stressed. Prayer gives us a deep certainty of knowing that we are loved and cared for. Little by little, through prayer, we see ourselves and others, even events, through our relationship with God.

Prayer is not a matter for experts. For Christians prayer should be as natural as breathing, a person-to-person relationship with God throughout our lives.

We cannot do it by ourselves. The practice of prayer is a work of God, a gift of God. But it is also a work of man. Man must collaborate through his perseverance. It is a science which thus has laws and techniques. It is an art, like painting or playing the piano. And as with all the arts, we cannot be satisfied with only learning the theory, we also have to learn by practice.”

(Father Caffarel at Troussures – Hearing the Word of God, notes of Alvaro and Mercedes Gomez Ferrer)

Christian Marriage

Christian marriage is not only a gift of husband and wife to each other: it is also the gift of the couple to Christ. Henceforth, as this couple gives themselves to each other, they open themselves to Christ; Christ is present in them. This presence, it is true, is already verified when two or three are gathered in the name of Christ, but, in the case of the couple, there is more to it: a pact, an alliance, in the biblical sense of the word, between Christ and the couple. What Yahweh said long ago: "I will be your God and you will be my people," Christ in his turn says to the couple. Thus bound to the couple, present to them, Christ aspires to give graces to his Father, to intercede with and through the spouses for the whole world...

Unless one strives for that, one cannot truly grasp conjugal prayer. Its necessity and its greatness can only be explained in the perspective of the sacrament of marriage. In a word, when Christ sacramentally unites a man and a woman, it is to found a sanctuary, that sanctuary which is a Christian couple; there he will be able to celebrate with the couple, through the couple, the great worship of praise, adoration and intercession which he came to establish on earth.

(Father Henri Caffarel, Monthly Magazine of Teams of Our Lady, April 1968)

Questions to share as a couple and as a team

- ✓ Each couple should share one experience from their practice of conjugal prayer.
- ✓ Some couples are reticent about explaining their difficulties with conjugal prayer. If that is the case:
 - Can we together try to understand reasons for this “reticence”?
 - What are some of the other difficulties encountered in conjugal prayer?
- ✓ Conjugal prayer is proposed as a healing path to conjugal love.
 - What experiences have you had in this area?
 - Can you speak specifically of cases where love can be strengthened by prayer?

Orientations for :

- **Hearing the Word of God, Personal, and Conjugal Prayer**

"I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone; the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 4, 4 -7)

A Prayer For Couples

Lord:

*Make our home a place of Your love.
 May there be no misunderstanding since You give us understanding.
 May there be no bitterness since You bless us.
 May there be no selfishness since You encourage us.
 May there be no rancor since You show us mercy.
 May there be no neglect since You are with us.*

*May we know how to walk with You in our daily lives.
 May we arise each morning with greater devotion and sacrifice.
 May each night bring us closer to each other in love.*

*Make, Lord, that the lives You wanted to unite,
 become one with You.
 Make, Lord, of our children, that which you desire;
 Help us to educate them and to set them on a path toward You.
 May we encourage each other in this mutual endeavor.*

*May our love become a motive for loving You more.
 May we give the best of ourselves to create a happy home.
 So that when the day arrives to meet You,
 You welcome us to be forever united in You.
 Amen.*

- **The Sit-down**

We invite you to use the following prayer to begin your sit-down (which is a conjugal dialogue):

“Lord Jesus,

Help us to understand that this dialogue is not a discussion nor a debate about ideas, but a search together for truth.

Help us to understand that we need each other, and that we complete each other, as we both must give and receive.”

“Lord Jesus:

Give us the wisdom to understand that no human being is capable of grasping all truth.

Give us simple hearts to recognize that we can also deceive ourselves about certain aspects of truth, and help us to desire deeper knowledge about each other.

Give us the generosity to think that our spouse is trying to honestly convey the truth and to listen to those opinions with kindness.”

“Lord Jesus:

Give us the grace to speak honestly to each other, since dialogue unties knots, dissipates suspicions, opens doors, helps strengthen each other and the ties that bind us to each other.”

(Inspired by Ignacio Larranaga)

In the practice of conjugal prayer:

- ✓ What have been our greatest joys and failures?
- ✓ And our main difficulties?
- ✓ What procedures have we used in our practice of conjugal prayer, and what benefits have we reaped from it?

At the end of this sit-down on conjugal prayer, spend some time thanking the Lord for His love, for His presence in your marriage and for being the companion on your road through life together.

• The Rule of Life

We invite you as a couple throughout the month to follow the suggestions made here as conscientiously as possible

C. For the team meeting

Text for meditation (prayer for the Team Meeting)

John 17, 22-26

"I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me, and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them."

Suggestions for the Sharing

Sharing life experiences this month:

- ✓ We had proposed that you keep this phrase in your heart this month, "**I am in the midst of them.**" Relate your understanding of how God is present in your home.
- ✓ How have you lived the suggestion of not only praying to the Lord for your children, but also praying to Him "**in their name**".



SIXTH MEETING

THE SIT-DOWN

“...that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception...”

(Phil 1, 9)

A. Objective

- ✓ To deepen our understanding of the purpose and value of the monthly Sit-Down;
- ✓ To make recommendations that may lead to deeper and more fulfilling encounters between spouses through Sit-Downs;
- ✓ To experience the presence of Christ in our Sit-Downs.

B. To work on during the month

Life Experience

During this month we suggest to the couple to review in an unhurried fashion some aspects of their relationship while sharing:

- ✓ what attracted them to each other and led to their falling in love;
- ✓ if this reality is still true, if it has weakened, or if it has disappeared over time
- ✓ in what way God entered into their love story and if He is still part of it

Study Theme and Reflection

Married love

We enter into marriage full of love and trust and hope for the future. But we are vulnerable; our lives, our attitudes are constantly facing challenges. It is an illusion to believe that time alone takes charge of the union of the couple: this union is not built by fleeing problems. On the contrary, it takes courage to face up to difficulties with frankness and by listening attentively to each other.

A couple that marries before the altar of the Lord seems to love each other with a true love, according the Gospel. Their “YES” is meant to be forever, not by the imposition of rules and regulations, but because the couples, accustomed to mutual understanding and affection, will pledge themselves to keep their vows until death separates them.

Nevertheless, this “YES” is human and it can fail. That is why it is so important to find ways to keep the marriage strong, to strengthen love and to encourage its continued growth. If the Lord is truly present at the center of our married love (and it is He who has promised that) every effort, every attempt, every joint prayer will certainly bear fruit, even when it means facing difficulties and roadblocks.

In an article published in L’Anneau d’Or, in 1945 Father Caffarel warned couples:

“There is a “blinding of the soul” which is fatal for love. They look at each other but no longer see the external beauty that won their hearts. Love is extinguished like a flame that has consumed all the oil of the lamp, since, in fact, love is nourished by beauty.

To revive love, it should be enough to rediscover the light of this face, revealing the good will of this heart.

We must remain, or become like children, if one day we want to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but, likewise, so that we will not be excluded from the reign of love. As children we come to know how to let it show in our faces when we encounter those we love. This demands ongoing effort to learn, a tireless curiosity, but not a prying curiosity which is a violation of intimacy, an entrance into the secret of the other, but a curiosity of love....”

Our founder asked for our attention to the reality and necessity of permanent dedication to the path of love that admits neither fatigue nor discouragement. He reminded us that the love of the couple for each other is without a doubt a powerful reality and that the time is always right to gain a clearer and stronger awareness of this reality. If on this path together love has suffered some setbacks, surely it has also attained many riches; every love has a story.

Under the Gaze of God

The decision to invite God to be present in our marriage was made on our wedding day, and it is a decision renewed every day.

The sacrament of marriage, besides being an effective sign of married grace given once, is also a living source from which we must always be nourished to renew ourselves. It is a gift that is always renewed and brought to fruition in the course of our lives, with its joys and its tests.

The couple must depend on faith and on the sacrament of marriage because, even after many years of being married, the different psychologies of male and female still reveal surprises. It is God who has created man and woman, one for the other, with their similarities and their differences, and it is He who leads them to attain lasting happiness if they only remain in the dynamics of divine creation: a love which is received like a free gift and which is going to deepen throughout a long life together.

Through the Sacrament of Marriage the Lord entrusts the spouses to each other. He wants them allied with Him. Man and wife, both are responsible, one for the other, on the pathway toward sanctity.



Father Caffarel, in his book “Love and Grace,” affirms: “*True love is not blind. Its astonishing clarity makes it pass for blind because it sees what no one can, beyond what the beloved reveals of itself.*”

By promising ourselves to each other before God, then He also, becomes part of the building of our marriage, in which He helps us to develop a deep relationship in dialogue and love. It is true. The look of love draws one, beyond a look, into the radiant aspect of the Holy which the couple should become, and which they already are in essence. This look of love is reunited to that of the Creator in this person whom we love.

The Duty of the Sit-Down

Conversing as a couple is not as natural nor as easy as it seems. If we want to be deep, honest, constructive, without hurting the other, it must be done with love.

The Sit-Down is a dialogue in the presence of God when we look at and listen to the other with the love of God; a new look without preconceived ideas, a look that allows us to look at each other as we are, accepting the fact that we are different from each other.

For Teams couples the Sit-Down is an opportunity to stop and evaluate the path we are on whether it be personal, related to our marriage, family or community. It is a privileged time marked by the mysterious presence of a third person, Jesus, who promised to be present each time there are people gathered in His name.

Many times lack of understanding about this valuable Endeavor can prevent couples from the opportunity of living it fully. It exists to fortify love, to encourage growth in the couple and to uplift them, to stimulate them in the love of Christ, so that He may plan with them their married life; the way to “guarantee” hope in the life of the couple.

The Sit-Down allows the spouses to know each other better by establishing between them a communion of thoughts and feelings in greater depth than in their daily dialogues. The husband-wife relationship in its ongoing intensity, but also in its indestructible solidarity, is affirmed and strengthened. The opportunity to listen to the other attentively is one aspect that is so important to the Sit-Down that the couple should feel themselves free to be able to open up without reservation and without fear of recrimination.

Husband and wife should attempt to understand more deeply the concerns and fears of each other and move toward a resolution of their difficulties and consequently improvement in their relationship. It is also very important at the time of the Sit-Down that they recall and emphasize positive aspects of their marriage, those of the family, personal achievements and other moments to celebrate! A marriage full of joy is a happy marriage!

Another benefit of regular sit-downs is that we not only learn to know and understand our spouse better, but we learn more about ourselves. In the deepest sense the couple looks at each other, prays together, talks to each other, exchanges different points of view and through this they grow in love, acceptance and unity.

Developing the habit of a monthly Sit-Down helps to keep the marriage of the couple young and dynamic, regardless of their age or how long they have been married.

There are no magic formulas or outlines to follow for this monthly meeting. Each couple must determine its own way, what best suits them, and be willing to review this each time.

There are couples who at the beginning experience difficulties in coming together in a Sit-Down, whether through shyness, or insecurity, or for some other reason. Undoubtedly we have all already experienced these difficulties or even misunderstandings. All the same, when these initial obstacles are overcome, couples feel themselves pulled toward the difficult art of mutual support which brings them closer in their love for each other and thus to progress in the love of God and to the next level: progress which is made through effort and joys, but equally through mistakes and errors. We will learn in our marriage to recognize our errors, to reconcile with each other, to forgive and to begin again. Our love for each other will be able to be converted into true charity. This is an undertaking that requires great effort. It is then that we can recognize the absolute necessity of personal and conjugal prayer.

The Sit-Down is in fact much more than a dialogue between spouses. It is among three: the couple and God. It can only happen within His gaze.

Plato once said: *"It is toward God that we must look. He is the best mirror of human affairs and it is in Him that we can see and know ourselves."*

The mirror of the couple is Christ, the human face of God. What makes the Sit-Down unique is that God is invited as a principal participant in this meeting. The Sit-Down has as a goal to discover Christ who acts and speaks with the couple. The other is Christ who speaks to us. Each Sit-Down must begin with a prayer inviting God to take part in the meeting in order to bring the couple to be open with each other and in order to create a spiritual climate of charity and humility.

An attitude of love, sincerity and openness is very important. In reality this is not always present, especially in moments of fatigue, frustration or disagreement. Discretion and consideration of the other is necessary. It may be necessary to postpone a difficult or "touchy" subject. At times it may also be necessary to postpone a scheduled sit-down. Willingness to meet and readiness to share, as well as to listen, are prerequisites for a Sit-Down. That is why it is so important to develop a means for a "good" Sit-Down. They may come easily, or they may take time. It is important to keep trying.

If we come to a Sit-Down with an attitude of loving acceptance we will be capable of discussing not only "sure" subjects but also those that we normally consider difficult to discuss. As already stated, there is no magic formula, but we should mention those aspects which ought to be considered.

Usually resolutions, considerations for future Sit-Downs, situations to be explored, develop during the course of our meeting. It is a good idea to keep notes, specifically for the Sit-Down, to jot down resolutions. This also helps you to note progress over time, as well as recognition of a deepening in your relationship with each other, ease in sharing, and most importantly a greater love for and dependency on God in your marriage.

Sit-Downs over time reflect a process of growth. Sometimes that growth seems imperceptible, or even non-existent, or in reverse. But it happens over time. And what we have is time! You are in your team for the long run! Resolve to do your best to schedule a Sit-Down each month, set aside "quiet time," away from the house if feasible, and do your best. Make new decisions since, if the Sit-Down is the opportunity for a review of the couple's month, it cannot stop there. The future is ahead, the couple has dreams, desires, needs, and especially hope, since they know that God is their guide and that there are teammates in the team who are ready to support and encourage them during the team sharing and in the team's life.

There is no better way to end a Sit-Down than to establish proposals for the future, identifying areas for improvement and actions to take, in light of the growth of the couple and



the change in each one. It is the ideal time to determine a personal Rule of Life for the following month, and even a Rule of Life for the couple.

Thus we can conclude that the duty of the Sit-Down is an essential dialogue for the life of the couple when it is undertaken in an atmosphere of true communion, of attentive listening to the other, under the penetrating and merciful gaze of the Lord.

Supporting Text

An Unexpected Duty

It is 1945. Father Caffarel for many years now has been inspiring groups of couples who will become the Teams of Our Lady. He realizes the difficulty husbands and wives have in communicating, especially on a spiritual level. How to promote/facilitate this absolutely vital communication in a couple? Inspiration flashed in his mind while reading St. Luke one day. He wrote this note: “An unexpected duty.”

“Christ, in the fourteenth chapter of Saint Luke’s Gospel (vs. 28-32), invites His listeners to practice “sitting-down.” Today, in this age of speed and stress, it is more important than ever to recommend this little known duty.

Before you undertook to build a home together, you compared your points of view, weighed your material and spiritual resources and elaborated a set of plans. But since you have been at your task of marriage, have you overlooked the need to sit down together, to examine the work accomplished, to rediscover your ideals and consult the Master Builder?

I know the objections and the difficulties, but I also know the house will eventually collapse if no one bothers to inspect the framework. When a couple never takes time to stop and reflect upon their life, very often a kind of material and moral disorderliness sets in and begins to grow insidiously. Family prayer, meals and all family rituals become mechanical routines. The reflexes of irritable parents take the place of real education. The union begins to crack. These deficiencies and many others are observed not only among couples who know nothing of child psychology or marriage spirituality, but even among those who are supposed to be experts in marriage and family life. Not having taken the time to stand back and look at themselves, the couple no longer sees what the visitor notices as soon as he crosses the threshold: the decline in their relationship.

Some couples recognize the danger. They have thought of and adopted various means to guard against it. One of them was telling me recently how profitable it was for them to leave their children for a while and go away together. But you may be thinking as you read this that not

everyone has friends or relatives available with whom they can leave their children. There are other solutions. For instance, ask one of your Team couples to watch the children for a day or two and then reciprocate the favor.

But there is another means by which a couple can avoid getting into a rut, and this is what I would like to discuss further. Take out your appointment book and, in the same way as you record your other engagements (a concert, the doctor, a visit to friends...) make a date with yourselves. Set aside two or three hours that are “taboo” to anything or anyone else—let us say “sacred time,” to be more Christian. Then, do not let any reason prevent you from keeping that date unless it would also prevent your going to the concert or visiting your friends. You must not miss this date with yourselves.



How should you use this time? First of all, decide not to hurry. Leave the shore; set sail for the high seas for, above all, you need a change of scenery. Leave your preoccupations behind. Read together from a book that you keep for this privileged time.

Afterwards, unless you started in this way, spend a little time in prayer. Each of you could try, if possible, to express a personal, spontaneous, vocal prayer. This form of prayer, not to disparage other forms, brings hearts together in a marvelous way. Thus entering into the peace of the Lord, tell each other the thoughts, grievances and confidences that are not easy, nor always suitable, to share during busy and noisy days, but that would nevertheless be dangerous if kept locked in your heart. As you may well know, such silences are the enemies of love.

But do not stop with yourselves, nor with your current concerns. Make a “pilgrimage” to the source of your love; reconsider the ideals that you envisaged when you set out with nimble step on the journey together. Renew your fervor. Then, returning to the present, compare your ideals with reality by making an examination of conscience as a couple. Make some practical resolutions and look for opportunities to heal, strengthen, rejuvenate and open yourselves up as a couple. Bring to this examination clarity and sincerity. Diagnose the causes of anything that is wrong.

Then devote some moments to meditating upon each of your children. Ask the Lord to “put His eye in your heart” as He promised, so that you can see them and love them as He does, and guide them according to His designs. Finally, and above all, ask yourselves if God is the first to be served in your home?

Have you nothing else to say to each other? Very well then, be silent together. A time of silence is by no means the least profitable moment. Remember this saying of Maeterlinck: “We do not yet know each other for we have not yet dared to be silent together.” It is important to write down what you have learned, considered and decided in the course of your sit-down, but that can be done a bit later, by one or the other of you, and then re-read together at your next meeting.

What I have just spoken about is only one means of keeping your love and your marriage young and alive. There are certainly many others. But this one has proved its worth.”

(Fr. Henri Caffarel, 1945)

Questions to share as a couple and as a team

- ✓ Are you successful in making the Sit-Down a priority in your marriage?
- ✓ What do you do to overcome the difficulties that sometimes appear in the course of the Sit-Down?
- ✓ If you have not been successful so far in having a Sit-Down, to what do you attribute this difficulty?
- ✓ How have the other couples and the Spiritual Adviser helped you with this difficulty?

Orientations for :

- **Hearing the Word of God, Personal and Conjugal Prayer**

“And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of



him and saying, ‘Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish.’ Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who advanced against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. “

(Luke 14: 28 – 32)

• For a sit-down

We suggest that during your Sit-Down you get to the heart of what this Endeavor is about and consider how intensely it has been an effective process of conversion for you.

- ✓ Has the Sit-Down helped us to be honest with each other and to live the love that we share more intensely?
- ✓ Do we feel that the Sit-Down has contributed to continued strengthening of our marriage in opening us more to God and to our neighbor?
- ✓ Have we helped and encouraged our teammates to move forward in their marriage?
- ✓ Have we made a priority of mutual striving for sanctity in our own marriage?

• For the Rule of Life

From the Sit-Down suggested above, the couples may choose an aspect of their conjugal life that frequently is not a positive witness of the Christian message. They can then choose a Rule of Life based on their reflection.

C. For the Team Meeting

Text for Meditation (and for the team meeting)

Ecclesiasticus 26, 1 – 4

“Happy the husband of a really good wife; the number of his days will be doubled. A perfect wife is the joy of her husband he will live out the years of his life in peace. A good wife is the best of portions, reserved for those who fear the Lord; Rich or poor, they will be glad of heart, cheerful of face, whatever the season.”

Suggestions for the Sharing

- ✓ Each couple is invited to share sincerely and honestly with their team the contribution that the practice of having a monthly sit-down has brought to their life today, whether as recently married couples, or established couples with or without young children, or with adult children, or even already married children.
- ✓ They can also share the dynamics and constant renewal necessary to the practice of the Sit-Down, so that it may not remain static, but on the contrary so that it may be modified over the course of time, as is the very life of the couple.



SEVENTH MEETING

THE RULE OF LIFE

“Never give in then, my dear brothers, never admit defeat; keep on working at the Lord’s work always, knowing that, in the Lord, you cannot be laboring in vain.”

(1 Cor 15. 58)

A. Objective

- ✓ To understand more fully the purpose and value of the Rule of Life as an Endeavor;
- ✓ To foster greater spiritual discipline and growth;
- ✓ To grow closer to our spouse and to God through our efforts to improve ourselves.

B. To work on during the month

Life Experience

The Rule of Life is an Endeavor which permits and encourages a personal review of those aspects of our life which we should change or improve.

We propose that this month each one take time to actually look into a mirror and gaze upon your reflection, first thinking about your external appearance, then allowing it to reflect your interior self, your good qualities and your weaknesses.

More specifically, think about them in relation to:

- ✓ Your spouse;
- ✓ Your entire family;
- ✓ Your work.

On the basis of this reflection, choose a Rule of Life to work on this month and, if necessary, through the coming months.

Study Theme and Reflection

The Rule of Life, as the other Endeavors, leads us in the direction of spiritual and personal growth, which we are proposing. However, different from most of the Endeavors, the



Rule of Life pertains more particularly to each person of the couple. The Rule of Life is not an objective attainable in itself, but it is a means, a tool to help us to move forward. It must be reasonable and accessible, at the same time demanding, but tied to what is truly essential in our life. In the Charter of Teams of Our Lady, Father Caffarel affirms: *"If the mystique of the Teams is to be real and lasting, there must be a rule. Mystique and rule, like body and soul, cannot be separated. The mystique should inspire the rule; the rule should protect and strengthen the mystique. The rule should be broad enough not to hinder the personality nor mission of each couple, yet strict enough to prevent slackness."*

The Rule of Life and its benefits

Both practically and spiritually a Rule of Life helps form our will. It leads us to become less impulsive, less self-centered, more attuned to the needs around us. We strive to achieve concrete goals through concrete means. Whether it is through deepening our prayer life, our conjugal and family prayer life, or whether it is through correcting bad habits or omissions in our personal life, progress in a Rule of Life can bring us peace and greater calm.

The value of a Rule of life must not be underestimated. We must not minimize its importance. It expands personal horizons which can help each one of us **"to take a step forward"** to respond to the love and call of God. We must not forget that the joy in Heaven is great when someone takes a small step in the right direction. Thus, far from being a "little" Endeavor, limited and marginal, the Rule of Life directly calls on our freedom **"to love more"**.

In the Monthly Letter of Teams of Our Lady, of April, 1971, Father Caffarel reveals his preoccupation with how well Teams couples understand this Endeavor: *"In reality I note that the practice of the Rule of Life often does not correspond to what is expected of it. There are many Teams couples who only include very small obligations, neglecting to make them an instrument for their spiritual progress. It is true that in order to include what is essential, they must know what is essential."* And he questioned: *"But is it not for that, that the couples in a team share about their efforts and that each team enjoys the benefit of the presence of a Spiritual Adviser?"*

The choice of a Rule of Life

So that the Rule of Life chosen truly be beneficial for our growth, it is necessary first to get to know ourselves better. And then we must reflect and pray about it. In order to develop a true capacity for listening to and dialogue with God, it is necessary to spend some time every day in prayer. It would be good to devote serious time to this during a spiritual retreat. When it is difficult to settle on a Rule of Life, frequently our spouse, or the Spiritual Adviser or even a teammate can help direct us, or at least indicate areas for improvement, or gifts to develop, or progress in any area they believe will encourage our growth. Thus, if the Rule of Life has as its objective to bring progress in the Christian life, we must make an effort in three areas:

- ✓ **to free ourselves** (from what?);
- ✓ **to nourish ourselves** (with what?);
- ✓ **to discipline ourselves** (in what?).



Therefore, serious reflection based on prayer and meditation can offer us important paths to follow which can help us in our choice.

A Rule of Life cannot be the same for everyone since we are all different. God has a plan for each of us, which is not always easy to discern. Through gradual steps of growth, in developing appropriate Rules of Life, gradually we are going to conform our life to the plan that God has for us.

Sometimes more than one couple will adopt the same Rule of Life in order to break the same bad habit, or to develop a good habit as, for example, participating in one more Mass each week. There is no limit of possibilities. However, a word of caution: it is very important to reassess our Rule of Life regularly. It is very easy to put off exchanging one that has been successful with another, which might be a greater, but necessary challenge to our growth.

There is never an obligation to reveal to the others in the team what we have chosen for any given Rule of Life. Yet progress made with one's Rule of Life may be shared during the meeting. We may share whatever we wish and may even find it beneficial to seek advice from the others. This must be totally voluntary. Mutual help, in whatever form, aids in the growth of a team.

The Rule of Life as a means of conversion

The Rule of Life must be a personal choice, freely chosen and considered an obligation. It is recommended that it be simple, clear and concrete, which encourages perseverance and the possibility of success. Gradually we can overcome what was once difficult. Good habits then become part of us!

There is a word that often appears in the writings and in the words of Father Caffarel. It is the word “**demand**.” In many of his texts he recalls for us his innermost conviction that as in God’s love for man, man must respond with a love equally uncompromising. Christian life is demanding. It passes through the Cross. And, in addressing couples, he exhorts them: “*There is nothing in Christian life without demands. As an individual and as a couple, be demanding in your love and in your mission. You will never be disappointed.*”

Also, in the Charter of Teams of Our Lady, Father Caffarel warns couples: “*Without a rule of life, fantasy can rule the religious life of the couples and render it chaotic. This rule of life is nothing more than determined efforts that each one knows must be imposed to better respond to the will of God for himself. It is not a question of increasing obligations, but of specifying them to stay the course and to avoid drifting.*” It is more and more urgent that Christian couples of today be true witnesses of adherence to the Word of God by their personal convictions and by consistency in their life.

In the document “The Mystique of Sharing on the Team Endeavors,” Alvaro and Mercedes Gomez-Ferrer, former leaders of the International Responsible Team (ERI), summarize the main points that must serve as the basis for this Endeavor: “*To draw up a Rule of Life, we must first come to know ourselves, our weaknesses and hurts, the points we need to work on. Others can help us choose this rule. What better way to avoid deluding ourselves? Of course, a spiritual journey does not advance smoothly or regularly. Rather, we often have to stop and ‘take our bearings’ in order to set out again in the right direction. That is why we must revise our Rule of Life periodically.*”



Supporting Texts:

"A climber who wants to reach the peak cannot afford to wander aimlessly over the mountain. He must be clear about his objective and the paths he intends to follow. Nor should he attempt more at any one time than he has the strength to do. It is important also that he not languish in his efforts but that he perseveres to the end. The same is true also of our spiritual life. We need a clear sense of direction. We need to make specific efforts without overdoing it, and we need to persevere."

A climber must not be weighed down by unnecessary baggage. He must have enough food for sustenance, and keep to the right path lest he falls down a crevice. Likewise, in our ascent to God, we have three parallel requirements:

- ✓ *Detachment from whatever weighs us down*
- ✓ *A well balanced diet of spiritual food*
- ✓ *The need to follow the path of holiness*

As we climb the "mountain of the Lord" (Ps. 23) we need to pause regularly and question ourselves on the above three requirements. Are there things we are unduly attached to? Are we so absorbed in work or a hobby that we do not pay the attention we should to our family? Do we feed our spiritual life sufficiently? Should we go to Mass more often? Has spiritual reading any place in our life? What are our weak points? How can we strive to overcome them? What gifts have we received which God wants us to develop?

(Beginning a New Team – Part 1 – USA)

"In common, no doubt with all couples, you know the temptations and trials of life. It is precisely to guard against these and to sustain your efforts that you form your Teams. You find in them a precious help to discover, with the counsels of a priest, the demands of the spiritual life and to solve, in the light of faith, the problems which face you as married couples and parents at different stages of life."

(Pope John XXIII)

**"THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE DEMANDS OF CHRIST GO TERRIBLY FAR.
Would Christ have spoken only to discourage people of good will?"**

Indeed, in offering us this ideal in all its blinding starkness, he does intend us to adjust our life to it; but he also – and first of all – wants us to face up to our way of thinking about these demands and of living with them so that we can discover what it is in us that rejects or contradicts them, so that we may be aware of our condition as sinners.

And isn't this what troubles us most cruelly? We have such a great need to be satisfied with ourselves and to give ourselves good grades; yet, if we open the Gospel, we are bound to condemn ourselves.

...True, the evangelical ideal is difficult to achieve but if, first of all, we accept, believe and acknowledge how far we are from this ideal and sincerely want to conform our life to it, then the Lord's grace will come to our help.

(Father Caffarel – Monthly Letter of Teams of Our Lady, November, 1963)

Questions to share as a couple and in the team

We recommend that you carefully study the material presented in this chapter on the Rule of Life, then individually prepare your answers to the questions that follow. The first two questions are for you to prepare and then share with your spouse.

- ✓ What value do you place on having a Rule of Life?
- ✓ In what areas would you like to make changes in your life: spiritual life, personal life, couple life, family life ?
- ✓ Respond to the following questions to discuss in your team meeting.
- ✓ How has the practice of the Rule of Life impacted your life?
- ✓ How can we better support each other in our team in our efforts to choose and make progress in our Rule of Life?
- ✓ How can our Rule of Life bring us closer to doing the will of God in the daily events of our life and to grow in virtue?

Orientations For :

- **Hearing of the Word, personal and conjugal prayer**

“...A man on his way abroad summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third one; each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now a long time after, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. “Sir,” he said “you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made. His master said to him, “Well, done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in our master’s happiness.” Next the man with the two talents came forward. “Sir,” he said “you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things. I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master’s happiness.” Last came forward the man who had the one talent. “Sir” said he “I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back.” But his master answered him, “You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have recovered my capital with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the five talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

(Matthew 25, 14)



- **The Sit-down**

Discuss the value of the Rule of Life with the aid of these questions:

- ✓ How can you help each other with this endeavor?
- ✓ Share successes and difficulties in moving forward in this practice.
- ✓ Consider the questions suggested in the third paragraph of the **Supporting Text** selected from “Beginning a New Team, Part 1.”

- **The Rule of Life**

In light of the **Life Experience** recommended on the first page of this chapter, adopt a Rule of Life, specific and manageable, in which you plan to make a special effort during this month.

C. For the Team Meeting

Text for Meditation (and for the team meeting)

Philippians 3: 9 – 17

“I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, the perfection that comes from the Law, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ, and is from God and based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have become perfect yet: I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me. I can assure you my brothers, I am far from thinking that I have already won. All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come; I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus. We who are called ‘perfect’ must all think in this way. If there is some point on which you can see things differently, God will make it clear to you; meanwhile, let us go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are.

My brothers, be united in following my rule of life. Take as your models everybody who is already doing this and study them as you used to study us.”

Suggestions for the Sharing

- ✓ Share in your team meeting how you have been impacted by your study, your conversations, your resolutions and how the procedure recommended has affected your personal progress with the Rule of Life. Refer to the questions suggested in “**Questions to share as a couple and in the team.**”
- ✓ Encourage each other to continue your efforts in this Endeavor, truly beneficial for all.



EIGHT MEETING

THE SPIRITUAL RETREAT

“A blessing on the man who puts his trust in Yahweh, with Yahweh for his hope. He is like a tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots to the stream: when the heat comes it feels no alarm, its foliage stays green; it has no worries in a year of drought, and never ceases to bear fruit.”

(Jeremiah 17, 7-8)

A. Objective

To understand and truly live the invitation made by the Movement in the Guide of the Teams of Our Lady: “THE ANNUAL RETREAT: to participate each year in a retreat.”

“You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while.” (Mark 6, 31)

To set aside each year sufficient time to meet before the Lord, as a couple if possible, in a retreat which affords time for reflection on your life in the presence of God.

The retreat is a privileged time to stop, listen and pray with the purpose of spiritual renewal. It is also a good time for personal reflection and a general review of one's life, especially in the area of personal growth and growth as a couple.

B. To Work on During the Month

Life Experience

During your time as part of Teams of Our Lady, you have probably had experience with retreats. It would be good **to recall the messages or important experiences** from retreats, whatever has left a lasting impression.

During the month try to relive these messages or experiences, being aware of their influence in your personal life and in your relationship as a couple.

Study Theme and Reflection

This theme will be developed as follows: *Going on retreat...Living a retreat...Spreading the effects of a retreat...Returning to a retreat*



Going on retreat

“Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. “

(Matthew 11, 28)

“Jesus withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot.”

(Matthew 14, 13)

In response to the invitation of Jesus to be with Him, we take the initiative to free ourselves for a couple of days, to turn over the care of our children to someone else, to free ourselves from obligations, to give up the usual relaxation of the weekend... We are going on retreat!

We prepare ourselves to answer the active call of Our Lord. That is very clear for us who are members of Teams of Our Lady, as an annual retreat is an endeavor which we have freely accepted. As couples of TOOL, we are invited to profit from the special ambiance of retreats to be renewed, since a retreat inspires us to leave our routine and work in order to listen to God more attentively and to discern the plan that He has for us.

We leave on retreat knowing that the faith deep in our hearts is going to receive strength that a few days of prayer can give us. We leave in search of ourselves in order to encounter our deepest identity, that which Our Lord accorded us in making us his children,

We should be aware that what is important is that we are in search of Him who calls us: It is Christ who loves us and who invites us. No retreat master, no program, no retreat theme is more important than this invitation.

To live a retreat

In order to communicate with us, it is the Lord who chooses the time and the format. It could be through prayer: we must reserve time for prayer, lots of time. Or through the words of the retreat master. Or through reading. Or through the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Or through our spouse. Or through someone's testimony. Or through silence...

Spiritual Retreats:

- They are unique experiences which help us to keep order in our daily life, putting us in contact with our inner self, in light of God's love for us.
- They are unique opportunities to delve into our inner self and discover once more our true sense of self. A retreat is meant to encounter Christ, to open us more to his

Spirit, to draw near to Him and to redirect our personal path and our path as a couple toward the Father.

- It is necessary to live it, not as a learned lesson, but as a lived experience. That means: as an existential experience which engages not only understanding and reason, but also will and being affected by it.
- It is not an escape valve. We leave our concerns behind only to free ourselves to evaluate our life. We withdraw from our daily routine for a few days in order to understand better our life's meaning.
- In the complexity and busyness of modern life, the need for meditation and spiritual tranquility are implanted in the souls of those who desire to direct their destiny and their lives to God.
- Thus it is a privileged time to stop, to listen and to pray, an opportunity for self-examination and to assess our lives in the presence of God.

The Retreat, a pause:

- A pause to revitalize our spiritual life, to help us put God first in our life, so that together we can discover His will in our marriage and in each one of us, in order to find the most beneficial means to put this will into practice in our life.
- A pause to help us to live better each day, so that we can see more clearly, before God, our mission to make his love shine more brightly through us.
- A pause for a time of prayer especially profound, which will be for us a source of strength and light throughout the rest of the year.

The sacrament of marriage will produce fruit within us progressively, in relation to our individual growth and our spiritual growth as a couple. One of the means in order to vitalize that spiritual growth is the retreat, made as a couple.

The success of life as a couple depends in large part on the quality of encounters that mark their life. Without coming together as a couple, how could we know each other and love each other? To pray, to experience a retreat as a couple, is to accept being met by God who is offering Himself to us. It is to learn how to encounter the other in a love which holds back nothing for itself.

For the couple, all the benefits of a retreat flow from these two meetings which are actually only one: each spouse with each other and the two with God.

Spreading the effects of a retreat

The retreat completed, the effects begin to be felt in our daily life and in the witness that we can give to others through the fruitfulness of our personal and spiritual growth.

The conversion that has been realized in each of us through a retreat allows us to see more clearly God's will for us in our life: more prayer, more respect for our spouse, for our children, greater confidence in God, greater clarity in our giving and in our service to others. The retreat produces, above all, a reevaluation of our life.



It is also very important to share our experience with our team, mentioning the benefits we have gained from the retreat, in an effort to stimulate others to make a retreat also.

Future retreats

Frequently returning to the source of all love will help us to grow and to know ourselves better in spite of obstacles which exist in the lives of all couples. Our Lord awaits each couple in a retreat to draw them to him once more, and to give each one of the couple a renewed heart, capable of truly loving.

Through events, the rhythm of life, activities imposed on us, life draws us on. We need to return to a retreat to meet God again, to look into our own lives once more with our spouse.

The benefits of a retreat last for some time. We are aware that with time we will lose the impetus and that once again we will need a retreat. That is why the Teams of Our Lady asks that we make one every year.

Teams of Our Lady is for its members a school of mutual support. In order to participate in a retreat frequently there are sometimes difficulties, such as being able to leave young children, or financial issues relating to the cost of the retreat. However, these obstacles can be opportunities to help our teammates be able to make a retreat.

Supporting Texts

To reawaken your faith

"For more than twenty years I have been presiding over retreats for couples. And each time these men, these women, nearly all spiritually anemic when they enter this "clinic" which is a retreat house, for this "soul cure" (as the protestants call it) which is a retreat, have, when they leave, nearly all acquired a new spiritual vitality."

A year or two later they should return to make another retreat because many of them will once again have fallen into a kind of anemia. Then once again they will be able to experience the extraordinary effectiveness of those days spent with God.

What then is the secret of this effectiveness? Silence, daily mass, prayer... are undoubtedly good reasons. But the main reason, the most decisive, is something else. Within the households of these men and women faith had weakened, became dormant, painful, worn out, dying: with the breath of the Word of God it is reawakened, reaffirmed, takes on new life. Because between faith and the Word of God there is a tight relationship, only the Word of God has the power to reawaken and stimulate faith, this faith which is knowledge of God, of his intimate life and his plan for the universe.

Faith dwindles in those who do not remain open to the Word of God and do not cherish it. If there are so many "anemic" Christians, it is because there are few who are searching for God. On the other hand, he who nourishes his faith, who strives to know God, he is the one who is saved from spiritual anemia.

Father Henri Caffarel

Spiritual Retreats were called “Spiritual Exercises” by St. Ignatius Loyola. He was a tireless proponent of them and the Society of Jesus has continued what he began. There follows a text that can help us in our reflection.

“The days of the Exercises are joyful and peaceful. What you will have to do during this time is to think a lot.

Doing the Exercises is not only listening to presentations on spiritual themes. Doing the Exercises is to work intensely during several days to conquer yourself, to give a definitive orientation to your life and put it in order with all its emotions. It is not the same thing: to play in a game and to be present as a spectator.

You are the protagonist of the Exercises. You, not the Spiritual Director, play the main role. Everything revolves around you. After the grace of God everything depends on your personal effort. The Exercises require active participation.

- *The more that you think, that you meditate and ponder, the better the Exercises will be for you.*
- *The more you absorb what you hear, the better you assimilate it, the greater will be the benefit that you will take away from these Exercises.*
- *The more that you allow yourself to be filled with the feelings (sentiments) of each meditation and the better that you place yourself in harmony with the themes on which you are meditating, the greater will be the effect they will produce in you.*
- *The more that you ask of God and the more intimately you communicate with Him, the greater will be the marvels that will take place in your soul.”*

Tirso Arellano, S.J.

“You must go to the desert with a simple soul, without worrying about doing something: in reality, you have nothing to do in the desert, only simplify your life, rid yourself of all preoccupations and activities. The desert is not easy, it is demanding.”

Rene Voillaume

Questions to share as a couple and in the team

A spiritual retreat is a powerful time in one’s personal life and for the couple; it is a transforming life experience. Reflecting on your experiences during retreats:

- Which ones have been more useful in strengthening your relationship with God?
- Which ones have been more useful in strengthening your relationship as a couple?
- The benefits and riches received in a retreat motivate us to share them with others. Share your experiences in this regard.
- After all members of the team have participated together in a retreat, share the benefits that could impact the life of the team. If there has not yet been the opportunity for the whole team to make a retreat together, think about and reflect on the reasons which have made this impossible to date.
- What has motivated you or helped your determination to “*Go on retreat?*” It is equally important to evaluate what has held others back from making a retreat.

Orientations for:

• Hearing the Word of God, Personal and Conjugal Prayer

“Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and woodworms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworms destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

(Matthew 6, 19-21)

Take and receive, Lord, my memory, my understanding and my free will, all that I have and all that I can do; it is You who have given it to me, and to You, Lord, I return it all. Do with it what you will. Give me your love and your grace. That is all I need. Amen.

Lord, help me to remember that one does not reach the heights by flat roads.

• The Sit-Down

The life experience for this month has permitted you to recall the message or the most important experience for your life, obtained from retreats that you have made.

Have a conversation on how your relationship as a couple has been strengthened by these messages or experiences. Try to recall those which are most helpful at this moment in your life.

• The Rule of Life

In case you have not made a retreat this year, try to arrange to make one at the next opportunity.

Those who have made a retreat this year might choose a Rule of Life based on something specific from the retreat.

C. For the Team Meeting

Text for meditation (prayer for the Team Meeting)

Isaiah 55, 10-11

“As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.”

Suggestions for the Sharing

A retreat is a pause to review, plan, deepen and enlighten our relationship with God and with others.

We invite you to share as a team how this “pause” has influenced you in the practice of the Endeavors.



THE EVALUATION MEETING

"The last meeting of the team year is a review meeting. It gives the team the opportunity to reflect and review its life openly and in a Christian spirit. It looks back on its progress during the past year and prepares for the following year."

(Guide of the Teams of Our Lady)

A. The Objective

Now is the time for the team to make a serious and thoughtful review of the year just completed, concerning, in particular, the practice of the endeavors and the sharing about them. As its name implies, it is a meeting of evaluation and of thinking ahead. It concerns, of course, the various aspects of the life of each couple and especially the life of the team - that it protects it, strengthens it, and, if needed, corrects it.

B. To Work on During the Month

Life Experience

We propose preparing the evaluation meeting as a life review in the spirit suggested by this extract from the Complement of the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady: "*The life of the team is not restricted to the monthly meeting. Throughout the month, members of the team are going to pray for each other and for their intentions. The sharing and the support will take place according to the initiatives taken by each team.*"

As a Couple

- ✓ What spiritual progress do you feel you have made during this year?
- ✓ How have the endeavors helped you along your way?
- ✓ Which endeavor has been the beginning of significant change in your life, individually and as a couple?

As a Team

- ✓ How do we evaluate the quality of the sharing as a team during this past year?
- ✓ Have you found meaning and a greater richness during the sharing?
- ✓ What have we received from the other couples?
- ✓ How has your spiritual adviser been able to contribute to the growth of the team?

Within the Movement:

- ✓ Has the Movement (at the level of: Sector, Region, Province, Super Region or International) offered learning opportunities relating to understanding the mystique of the endeavors and sharing on them?
- ✓ How have you profited from these opportunities?

Supporting Texts

"(...) It is not my intention to propose to you here an in-depth examination of conscience: in my team, in my parish, in my profession, in the nation, in the Church, am I a parasite or a good servant? At the same time, it does not seem good to focus superficially on this important problem. More modestly I invite each couple to ask themselves: Why did I join Teams? To receive, or to give?

Then, speaking to each team: Why have you stayed in the Movement? Has it been only for the ready-made study materials, or to receive a newsletter, or to profit from the experiences of others? In that is the case, you are not in the right place.

(...) But if you respond: "We want to participate in the great task undertaken by the Teams of Our Lady, we want to bring the kingdom of God into our marriage, to work so that sanctity becomes rooted in our modern world and that it not remain a privilege of monks; we want to be good workers for mankind, fervent apostles of Christ," then you are connected to your spirituality, your team will serve all. (...) Being filled with the spirit of Teams, you will not have difficulty in accepting its discipline. Your reaction will no longer be: Such and such rule bothers me; I protest! – rather, given that this obligation is good for the good of the Movement, I accept it!"

(Father Henry Caffarel – Love and Grace)

"We cannot approach the Movement as a renter faces the owner or an employee faces his employer. We must feel like members of a whole, responsible for all, joined together with all. We can never set ourselves apart, independent of the weakening or progress of the Movement.

A living movement is a movement which is being built every day, thanks to the action of each of its members. In this undertaking, each one takes on responsibility

which is his alone, according to his particular strengths, resources, time and generosity...

A movement begins to die when its members put aside the attitude of builders and become like renters.

All of you, members of Teams of Our Lady, do you contribute to the building of the Movement? I invite you to put this question on the table.

(Father Henry Caffarel – Builders or Renters)

Questions to share as a couple and as a team

During the meeting each couple can share about what was most significant to them in their understanding of the mystique and the practice of the endeavors, and the importance of making the sharing more effective.

Orientations for :

- **Hearing the Word of God, personal and conjugal prayer**

"In the meantime, brothers, we wish you happiness; try to grow perfect; help one another. Be united; live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."

(2 Cor 13, 11)

- **The Sit-down**

Begin the sit-down by listening to the Word of God, followed by shared prayer.

After a brief silence, begin the dialogue with the following questions:

- ✓ In the course of the year on what occasions have you felt "a rebirth," a change in your life, a conversion? What opportunities have you lost?
- ✓ How have the endeavors helped you to have a change of attitude?
- ✓ What are the most important changes you have noticed in your spouse?

- **The Rule of Life**

During the Sit-down set goals and objectives for the following year.

C. For the Team Meeting

Given the nature of this particular meeting and the possibility that it may last longer than usual, it is important to establish a procedure to follow. As a suggestion, we offer the following:

Blessing

"Lord God Our Father, you give us all we need for our spirit and our body; we thank you for this food that we are about to share with each other, as a sign of friendship; we thank you for those who have prepared it. We ask you, Lord, to grant us a fruitful meeting. May our lives always be disposed to serve our brothers and to accomplish your will."

Amen

Text for Meditation (prayer for the Team Meeting)

(2 Tim 1, 6- 7; 9)

"That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you... God's gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control. So you are never to be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord, or ashamed of me for being his prisoner; but with me, bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy."



Study Theme and Reflection – Questions to share

Present, in a spirit of truth and openness, your reflections on the questions suggested “under Life Experience on page 1.”

Analyze the points presented by each one and together identify what should become priorities for the coming year.

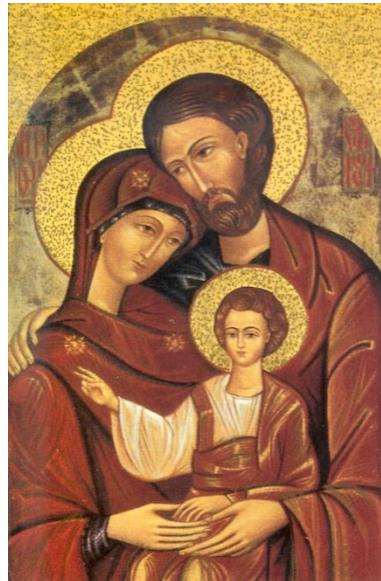
In accord with the orientations of the Movement, the team should choose a study theme for the coming year.

Following the wish of the team, you might send the Sector Couple your evaluation reflections which you consider important for the Movement.

Magnificat

The meeting ends with the prayer of Mary, in union with all the couples of Teams of Our Lady.

APPENDIX



THE MYSTIQUE OF SHARING ON THE ENDEAVORS

THE ENDEAVORS

- Listening to the Word of God
- Personal meditation
- Conjugal prayer
- The rule of life
- Monthly sit-down
- Retreat

THE THREE ATTITUDES

- Assiduous search for the will of God
- Search for the truth about ourselves
- Experience of encounter and communion

PLAN OF THE MONTHLY MEETING

1. THE MEAL

The meal is introduced with a simple prayer. It must have an environment of mutual support.

2. THE PRAYER

- a. Initial prayer
- b. Reading and hearing the Word of God
- c. Personal prayers
- d. Intentions

3. SPIRITUAL SHARING

Exchange of experiences with the **Endeavors**, seeking everyone's progress.
It would be good to add a reflection on **life in the team and in the Movement**.

4. THE POOLING

We pool our life experiences. We share with the other couples our personal, married, family and professional life, our engagements... in a spirit of mutual support and charity.

5. THE STUDY TOPIC

Together, we go deeper into our faith. The study topic has been prepared by the couples and their reflections sent to the couple in charge of the discussion that month.

6. MAGNIFICAT AND FINAL BLESSING

SUGGESTIONS OF PRAYERS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and set them on fire with your love.

V. Send us your Spirit and all will be created.

R. And you will renew the face of the Earth.

Let us pray: Lord our God, with the light of the Holy Spirit, you have formed the hearts of your faithful. Make us obedient to Your Spirit and we shall appreciate what is just; give us the grace of experiencing always His comforting presence.

R. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SHARING

Lord Jesus, at this time of sharing about our lives, we remember that all the graces of our Sacrament come from you and that love only makes sense when it seeks in a concrete way the good of each other and of our families.

May this time help us to grow. That is why we pray to You: teach us to speak of our weaknesses and imperfections with humility, asking everyone's pardon; help us to speak without vanity about our successes and our joys, as an encouragement and mutual aid, giving thanks to God.

At this time we also wish to remember and pray for couples who are suffering and who are experiencing difficult times, especially those in our team, that our help for them may increase. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD HENRI CAFFAREL

God, our Father,
You have instilled in the heart of your servant Henri Caffarel
a depth of love which has drawn him without reservation toward your Son
and inspired him to speak about Him.

Prophet of our time,
He has shown the dignity and the beauty of the vocation of each person,
following the word of Jesus directed to all: "Come, follow me."

He has filled couples with enthusiasm for the greatness of the Sacrament of Marriage
which signifies the mystery of unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church.
He has shown that priests and couples are called to live the vocation of love.
He has guided widows: love is stronger than death!
Inspired by the Spirit, he has led many believers on the path of prayer.
Possessed by a burning fire, he lived totally in you, Lord.

God, our Father
Through the intercession of Our Lady,
We ask You to advance the day
when the Church will proclaim the sanctity of his life,
so that all will discover the joy of following your Son,
each one following his vocation in the Holy Spirit.

God, our Father, we ask Father Caffarel for ... (Indicate the grace requested)

Prayer approved by Monsignor Andre VINGT-TROIS – Archbishop of Paris.

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