

Teaming up with Our Lady

a Testimony by Jen Bradley

Seven years ago my husband, Chris, and I joined Teams of Our Lady. We really didn't know what we were getting into at the time. It's easy for us to look back now and see how the Holy Spirit was guiding us. We didn't know we needed Teams of Our Lady in our life, but the Lord did!

Teams of Our Lady is a worldwide movement in the church for "married spirituality." It is officially recognized by the Holy See under the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Teams consist of 5-7 sacramentally married couples, along with a chaplain (priest or deacon if available), who meet monthly to share, pray, and discuss challenges of living a Christian marriage and life. In addition to the monthly meetings, Teams strive to live out endeavors to assist in their spiritual growth as couples and as individuals. The endeavors include daily personal prayer and prayer as a couple, regular reading of the word of God, a monthly "sit down," following a personal "rule of life," and attending an annual retreat.



Every month we gather in one couple's home for a simple meal. Each person shares highs and lows of the month with the team. After dinner we read scripture, offer prayer intentions, share on the endeavors, and discuss the study materials related to marriage and faith. We also have the opportunity to "deep pool" where members may bring up spiritual or personal matters for which they want input from the group. All personal information discussed at the meeting is not shared outside of the meeting.

Joining Teams

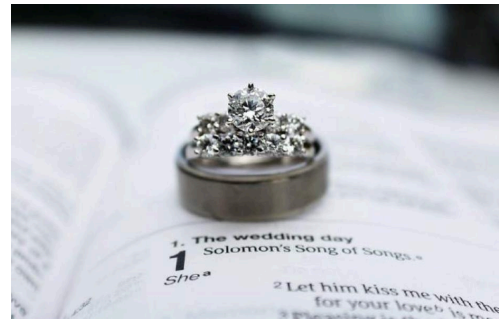
A dear friend, whom I met through a Catholic moms group, had been involved with Teams of Our Lady when she lived in Texas. Her and her husband started our team when they moved to Arizona. At the time we were not involved in any kind of church group or ministry, though I was feeling a personal nudge to get involved. The idea of joining a group with other Catholic couples appealed to me, but I wasn't sure how Chris would feel about it, as he was not

Catholic at the time (Non-Catholic spouses are welcome, if the couple is married in the Church). Thankfully Chris agreed to try Teams of Our Lady. We are both so thankful he did!

Our marriage is different because of Teams. Being part of Teams is a commitment. We have four children ages 3 -10, three of whom were born since joining Teams. Certainly the commitment was a concern when joining. We asked ourselves, "Do we have time for something like this?" and found that the Lord has provided the time we need. Sometimes our monthly Team meeting is our one and only date night for the month. Is it worth it? We think so. Our children understand that Teams is part of our lives and we believe they benefit from us taking time to focus on our marriage. We often think, "What else would we be doing for our marriage if we weren't involved with Teams?"

Friendship, Fellowship, & Conversion

When we first joined, we immediately enjoyed the friendships and fellowship that began to develop. Our team provides a small community within our large Catholic church. We can call on them when in need anything from watching our children to urgent prayer requests. Our children don't attend our meetings (with the exception of nursing/bottle fed infants) but they have gotten to know each other, as we get together for family events when possible.



When the Lord presented me with a husband who was not Catholic I often wondered how I could truly share my faith with Chris. Teams was the answer! Chris has gone to Mass with me since the start of our relationship. For him, Teams brought to life all those men in the pews. These faithful Catholic men were everyday guys. He could relate to them. He became friends with them. After several years in Teams, Chris announced at a meeting that he was ready to join RCIA. A teammate served as his sponsor. Our team was present at the Easter Vigil when Chris joined the church. To have our team's prayerful support through that journey was invaluable! Without a doubt, being in Teams played a role in Chris's conversion. It brought the Catholic faith to life for him.

The Heart of the Movement

The fellowship and friendship we experience through Teams are awesome, but we've realized over the years that the heart of the Teams of Our Lady movement is the endeavors. The endeavors have truly transformed us and our marriage. We are far from perfect on any of the endeavors. But, when we think back to where we started and where we are today in our prayer life and faith, I'm certain we would not have made that progress without Teams in our lives. Praying together was not something we did before joining Teams, now we pray together daily. Another endeavor, the monthly "sit-down," is simply a period of time set aside

for discussion between the couple in the presence of God. Some of the conversations we've had as a result of a sit-down have been pretty amazing. These conversations regarding deep spiritual matters likely would have never taken place without the discipline of Teams in our lives. My own prayer life has changed since becoming involved with Teams. The Magnificat, Mary's prayer upon hearing Elizabeth's greeting, is the Teams of Our Lady prayer. We recite it at the end of every meeting, as well as daily. Saying this prayer daily - Mary's expression of joy in serving God - has really opened my heart to God's will for my life and our family.

The endeavors and other responsibilities in Teams of Our Lady are things any Christian couple can and should do. But with Teams we have our monthly meeting to hold us accountable, and to simply serve as a reminder of all the things we should be doing for our marriage. If we didn't read scripture or have a sit down we make it a point to do better this month. The meetings give us opportunities to share struggles and successes and to offer and receive support. We turn to our teammates for support and inspiration. Often couples don't realize that sharing something simple that they do in their marriage can inspire other couples to make positive changes in their own marriages and spiritual lives.

Living Out the Sacrament of Marriage

Being in Teams makes us more mindful of the sacrament of marriage. We are not just married, we are living out the beautiful sacrament of marriage. It reminds us constantly that Christ is at the center of our marriage. It gives us structure to truly live out the sacrament. It "keeps us on track." And while actually getting to our monthly meeting or getting through our study materials may cause us some temporary stress, we've never walked away from a meeting feeling like it was a waste of time. On the contrary! The Holy Spirit is with us at those meetings. And we've experienced many fruits due to our participation and dedication. We feel very strongly that He called us to this movement.

A Worldwide Movement

Similar to how we enjoy practicing our Catholic faith like millions of Catholics worldwide, we enjoy being part of this worldwide movement. It is comforting knowing couples throughout the world meet monthly with their teams just as we do, using the same format that has been used for years since a parish priest in France, Fr. Henri Caffarel, started the first teams in the 1930s. The movement has grown to 10,000 teams worldwide. There are nearly 800 teams in the United States. The movement is very young here in Arizona, with only 3 teams. We truly feel called to grow Teams in AZ so that other couples may experience the spirituality and fellowship we enjoy through Teams.

Chris & Jen Bradley have four sons: Jack, Charlie, Mick, & Jimmy.