

TEAMS OF OUR LADY

International Leading Team

Long-standing **TEAMS**



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January 2017

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Presentation

In 2010 the Satellite Teams published a new document called *“The Movement of Teams of Our Lady and its older couples”* with the purpose of suggesting some lines of action to answer the more specific needs of these couples, and of widows and widowers.

The present International Leading Team (ERI), after an in-depth discernment, understood that the Movement should also answer the needs of the couples who wish to deepen the Movement’s founding charism – a path of holiness.

These teams who have been in the Movement for more than 20 years represent today a considerable amount, which is about 30% of the total number of teams in the whole world.

After attentively listening to the couples of these teams, and to the Movement’s structures, through accurate questionnaire forms designed with this purpose, it is with great joy that the ERI submits this document, reminding you that there is no definitive answer to this reality, and that this is an attempt to find a solution to the situation already felt by Father Caffarel.

In his famous Chantilly speech in 1987, Father Caffarel said: *“There are couples who have been 10, 20 or 30 years in the Teams of Our Lady and are feeling the need to go further. I know these teams, I know these couples, some have come to me for confession for more than 40 years, and it is wonderful to see how they are evolving, and just as we may have to start at a lower level, perhaps we should be giving more help to those who wish to go further. It is not an easy question [...] I am not putting forward any answer, but it makes me sad to see these couples who, after a certain number of years, are disappointed by their teams. [...] What can be done? What is the answer? I don’t know, but we cannot let down those who wish to go further.”*

The contents of this document must be analyzed and debated in all SR/RR structures and distributed to all teams which have been in TOL for over 20 years, so that these couples may follow the suggest-guidelines if they so wish.

We hope (and whoever hopes doesn’t stay behind waiting,) this document may help couples who have already followed a long path in the Movement to feel a **“New Breath”** in their pursuit of a more demanding spiritual life.

Paris, January 31th, 2017
By the International Leading Team (ERI)
María Berta and José Moura Soares

ABBREVIATION

LC	Liaison Couple	ERI	International Leading Team
TRC	Team's Responsible Couple	F-L-S	France Luxembourg-Switzerland
PC	Piloting Couple	PCE	Points Concrets d'Effort
RRC	Regional Responsible Couple	RR	Region directly Linked to ERI
SRC	Sector Responsible Couple	CS	Spiritual Counsellor
SRRC	Super-Region Responsible Couple	SR	Super Region
END	Teams of Our Lady		

Introduction

The current International Leading Team (ERI) in place since 2012 is pushing ahead with projects already started by the Movement. One of those, the Long-standing Teams Project, already included in the 2012/2018 Strategic Plan, has 2 objectives:

- ▶ To develop and facilitate a pedagogy for long-standing teams, (and for all older couples if they so wish), to enable them to further deepen their spiritual lives.
- ▶ To discuss the Movement's spiritual animation for elderly members while respecting their needs.

To fulfill such objectives, the ERI created a Service Team in 2012 to give impetus to the work started between 2007 and 2010 by a Satellite Team entitled "elderly members – long-standing teams".

Those responsible in the Movement had a concern to progress teams' spiritual growth that had somehow lost its initial momentum. The tendency to stagnate or to continue with reduced vigour ("we've seen it", "we've done our bit", "it's fine as it is") is not new.

Father Caffarel observed, during a conference in Rome in 1959 on **Vocation and the Way of Teams of Our Lady**, that after a few years in the Movement, couples in teams made a voluntary choice: either they followed the call towards spiritual perfection, or they sank into a kind of "sclerosis". He added that if

Teams of Our Lady (TOL) was simply a movement that initiated Christian life within marriage, couples would stay in the Movement for only a few years before their spiritual life stagnated. In the journey leading to spiritual perfection, to which we are all called, the Movement has to guide couples onwards from their initiation.

Father Caffarel was convinced that this road to perfection for married laity linked into, and answered, both an urgent call from the Church and a pressing need throughout today's world. At the time, he did not know how the Movement could articulate the journey from *initiation* to *spiritual perfection*.

In the 1960's, END established the *Deepening Years and Ageing Teams* projects.

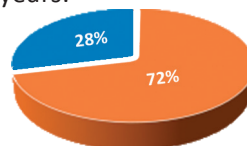
The *Deepening Years* consisted of a reflection on the vocation of couples that had been in teams for 15 to 20 years. This experiment ran along a communal theme over a 2-year period. At the end of that time, team members joined another specific programme called Ageing Teams. *They followed a different structure, method and plan* to that of the teams forming the main part of the Movement ¹.

The *Ageing Teams* project was an enlightening experiment that "touched" thousands of couples in the early 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. Since then, END has regularly studied this important topic that still challenges the Movement's efforts to sustain continual growth and personal development of its members.

1 "Années d'Approfondissement /Équipes Anciennes", IN: Report on the work of the Satellite Team *Âgés et Équipes Anciennes*, presented to the ERI in Dec 2009.

END statistics show that the number of long-standing teams increases with time. Of the 2956 teams in the Movement in 1969, 172 were considered as long-standing (5.8% of the total)² i.e., members had been in Teams for at least 15 years.

In 2016, END registered 3551 teams with over 20 years in the Movement³, or 28% of the total number of teams.



The majority of these couples play an active role and are an example for younger couples. Furthermore, they offer a positive lay presence of evangelization both within the Church and the world; lending opportunities for spiritual renewal during the many stages of life (children, teenagers, adulthood and third age).

The increasing number of long-standing teams is linked to increased life expectancy seen in the world during the 20th century due to biomedical and social advances in: industrialisation, medicines, health care and prevention of diseases, etc⁴.



- 2 Calculation made as part of the “*Étude Comparative du Développement des END*” 1959-71 Paris.
- 3 Database of the Annual Statistics for Super Regions and Regions for the year 2016, sent to the ERI in Dec 2015.
- 4 SILVA, Pedro Joel. “O aumento da expectativa de vida se deve ao declínio de mortalidade infantil e a morte de adultos por doenças infecciosas” A motivação e suas metas motivacionais. In: *Envelhecimento e suas múltiplas áreas de conhecimento*. p. 174.

The challenge is to create a new phase of development in these teams in order to:

- ▶ Give impetus to those in need of a closer relationship with God and others in the community;
- ▶ Stimulate a more positive outlook to stamp out monotony, which Father Caffarel describes as a “sickness of love”;
- ▶ Strengthen their communal commitment to a renewal of Christian charity leading them to increased vitality.

In order to meet these expectations for the Long-standing Teams Project, the ERI carried out, via the SR/RR, a survey of sectors and team members with more than twenty years of movement experience in the Movement between October 2014 and May 2015. The consultation consisted of two questionnaires: one addressed to the sector responsible couples and another to the base team members. They could respond as a couple or as a team.

The answers allowed us to better understand the expectations of the older team members on the call to holiness as well as on the means that seemed to them advantageous to aid continued progression on this path. The research revealed a poor comprehension of the human ageing process as one of a natural continuum of life through its various stages. The confusion between “*elderly members*” and “*members of long-standing teams*” makes the choice of appropriate paths to follow for the two situations a delicate one.

This awareness is crucial to the strengthening of community life and interaction between the different generations. While at a meeting in Barcelona in March 2016, the ERI decide to include a resume of the document: *Teams of Our Lady and its older members* as an Appendix.

This current document is made up of 4 sections including an Appendix.

In the first section, this document provides a synopsis of *“Earlier Work on Long-standing Teams members”* to highlight some of the more recent actions which led the Movement to where it is now. It describes the work carried out by the Satellite Teams *“elderly members – long-standing teams”* between 2007 and 2010. The creation of a Permanent Formation Platform was launched in 2011 and to an Actions Program being devised during 2012/2018.

In the second section, we touch on *“foundations recommended by Father Caffarel to continually renew the couples’ spiritual lives”* to provide them with the means to face up to the challenges and changes encountered throughout their lives when there becomes a natural tendency for interest to wane.

The third section describes *“proposed actions for Long-standing Teams”* which are similar to those used in Formation of the Movement, at least as far as the format is concerned. What differentiates them from the existing propositions is the tone given to its content and the intensity of the spiritual guidance provided to assist couples in their “re-adjustment” from one phase of life to another.

Lastly, the final part explains how to achieve “re-ENERGIZATION” as required by the structured standard Guide to the Movement. There will not be a parallel structure to guide the Long-standing Teams. Responsibilities will be shared to bring vitality and spiritual progress to the long-standing team while following criteria set by the Movement.

The paper then ends with a summary (Appendix) of the document *“Teams of Our Lady and its older members”* produced by a satellite team in 2009 at the request of the ERI and approved in 2010. It concerns the spiritual need of elderly team members (on average, over 80 years of age), be they widows(ers), married or spiritual councillors and offers some suggestions for the other team members on how best to lead and encourage them while being attentive to their needs

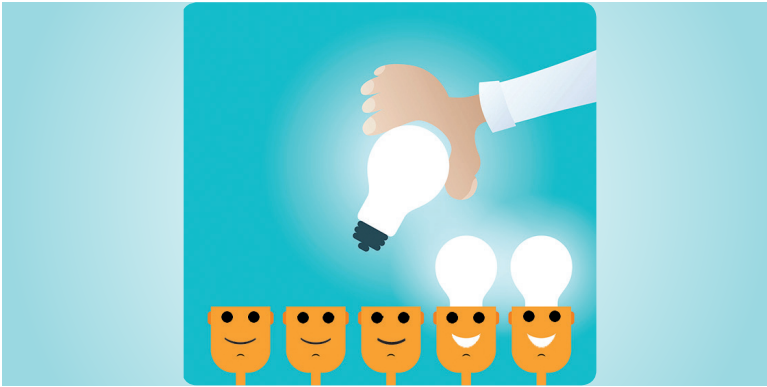
1

Earlier work prior to the current Long-standing Teams Project

Long-standing Teams first began to be thought of in the late 1950's. They were named and defined by Father Caffarel as couples having had 10 to 15 years in Teams and who, after having lived through the "*Deepening Years*", agreed to enter into a programme more suited to a *Long-standing Team*. The most recent documents relating to these teams go back to the late 70s and early 80s.

Between 2007 and 2010, a satellite team created by the ERI conducted research into "*ageing teams and elderly members*". This team undertook a gigantic task: bibliographic research into current and past works; appraisal of surveys on formation within and outside the Movement; appraisal of various concepts to improve reflection; appraisal of the subject with END. Their investigations and suggestions were submitted to the International College in Rome in 2009. The handbook "*END and their Elders*" was submitted in December 2009 and approved by ERI in 2010.

It is with this handbook that, in 2009, **The International College in Rome**, committed those within the Movement in charge of the teams' animation, to act. It defined a pedagogic orientation subsequently expanded by the ERI:



- ▶ *The core “re-energisation” should be continuous encouragement deepening faith and enriching teams and team life;*
- ▶ *The Movement should have positive attitudes towards personal growth and community, encouraging couples and teams to advance consciously without ageism etc.*

The Plan for Permanent Formation, launched in 2011, included the majority of points raised by the International College in 2009. Since that time Permanent Formation has been an on-going process of animation taking into account the **length of time the Team has been in existence** and the particular stage of the couple’s life. Unlike what happened before at its meetings, the Plan also incorporates the **complete Team** that approves and ratifies each stage of the formation.

The ERI has taken particular care to include the Long-standing Teams as an on-going project in its **Action Plan 2012/2018**, with the following objectives:

- ▶ Develop a pedagogy for Long-standing Teams (and any other couples if they so wish) to deepen their path towards spiritual fulfillment;

- ▶ Discuss the spiritual animation that the Movement can offer to older members, whilst respecting their specific needs.

By including the *Long-standing Team* project in the Action Plan, it allowed the ERI, during a meeting in Paris October 2012, to create a Service Team to continue the work started by the Satellite Team “elderly members-ageing teams”. This team took the following steps:



- ▶ A survey into teams, their members and sector couples with over 20 years in the Movement;
- ▶ Revision of the proposals and documents on Ageing Teams produced by the Satellite Team;
- ▶ Update the documentation on the Deepening Years and Ageing Teams put forward and implemented by Father Caffarel in the 1960s.

2

Long-standing Teams

The Long-standing Teams proposal put forward by the ERI will only bear fruit if it satisfies the needs and wishes of the couples concerned and if its appeal is great enough to those involved in the animation process (Responsible Couple, Sector Couple, Regional Couple, Super Regional Couple, Liaison Couple, Spiritual Counsellor). The ERI does not simply wish to provide an easy-to-use pedagogy, but to animate teams in order that they may embrace it with heartfelt acceptance.

The re-launching of *Long-standing Teams* Project in 2012 highlighted situations that did not exist at the outset of the Movement; one of those being Elderly Teams, a gift and sign from our merciful God to enrich END.

A necessary distinction

Despite the care taken in sending out the questionnaires, it became obvious from responses received that confusion arose between “elderly members in a team” and “members belonging to long-standing teams”⁵.

The difference appears when characteristics associated with the 3rd age – for example, health and mobility difficulties – were confused with a long-standing team. In this instance, the results of the questionnaire were unreliable.

Awareness of the distinction between elderly members and long-standing teams will facilitate the selection of different

5 “Compte rendu de la recherche Projet Équipes Anciennes – part 2” presented to the International College in Rome, 2015. P.3

actions in the re-energising process adapted to each circumstance.

Elderly members ⁶

Elderly members (on average over 80 years of age) are facing a very different phase of their life. With their working lives behind them for some time, they are now dealing with a gradual loss of physical and mental faculties, reduced health, mobility and a diminishing circle of friends, etc.



Limited mobility reduces people meeting with one another, increases their dependency on others, and leads to isolation. Consequently, their relationships diminish and eventually consist of family members and small groups of friends.

Reduced physical mobility might necessitate change in the organisation and programming of the teams meeting (change in the timetable for instance).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, elderly people are readily available for other forms of participation (prayer, giving witness about the Movement, marriage, etc). Most of the time, they want to carry on belonging to a community and feel useful, because they need to make sense of their lives and continue towards spiritual fulfillment.

6 Elaborated in the manual “Les END et leurs aînés”. 2009. pp. 6-9.



Long-standing Teams

Long-standing Teams challenges differ from those of elderly members. Unlike the elderly members who are physically limited to attend meetings, the long-standing teams have been part of END for some long time and are in need of deepening their faith ie: towards salvation.

The ERI defines a “Long-standing Team ” **as one that has existed for over 20 years.**

The life of its members is characterized by several phases, at some stage the curve of natural enthusiasm turns downward as a consequence of, for example: loss of security, loss of leadership or influence in the work place, retirement, an awareness of getting older giving rise to psychological effects.

The Movement’s view towards those members is centered on spiritual animation in its continuous search for deepening faith.

These objectives answer the aspirations of people who took part in the survey: - *“to continually energise the driving force towards spiritual fulfillment and be encouraged to stay on the right path by those means offered by the Movement”*⁷.

Foundation

In its early stages the *Deepening Years and Ageing Teams* created by Father Caffarel corresponded to a natural loss of momentum that appeared at the beginning of middle age known as “the critical age”.

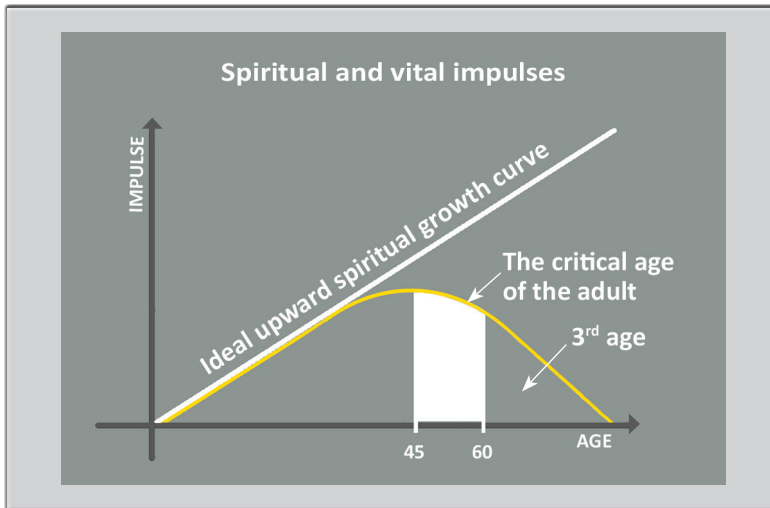
Father Caffarel depicted this situation by a graph *“an ideal upward spiritual growth curve and a downwards natural growth curve in the adult”*⁸. When spiritual life is rich, “even though our physical being is gradually decaying, our spiritual being is renewed day after day” (2 Cor. Ch. 4:v 16).



According to Ruiz Salvador, the critical age is between **45 and 60 years** - a time of crisis and reflection when the person feels deprived of established confidence when efforts are needed to re-adjust, to re-assess ones values and re-view objectives.

7 Report on the research Projet Équipes Anciennes – Part 2. Presented to the International College in Rome. 2015, p.4.

8 “Équipes Anciennes”. In: END Monthly Newsletter, year 22, No. 8, <May 1969.



Father Caffarel said that in experiencing these stages of life, the couple, having managed those changes, must continue to pursue spiritual development. Having journeyed with the couple during their earlier married lives when their natural enthusiasm and spiritual momentum was high, he did not wish to abandon them later in their lives when their need was greatest.

Contrary to the receptiveness of younger teams, older couples are at a stage when they themselves and personal life changes pre-dominate.

For Father Caffarel, the challenge meant a change in the way we think, necessitating a serious re-orientation in order to guide people through those stages.

He considered the diversity of experiences in the lives of older couples an interesting undertaking for the ageing teams project.

Such factors are just as pertinent today.

3

Suggestions for Long-standing Teams

The suggested proposals add specificity to the formation of "Long-standing Teams." This does not exempt them from their inclusion in the normal training process of the Movement.

The duties of the responsible couples (RC) at all levels of responsibility relating to **meetings, conferences, vigils, retreats, sessions, topics, weekends**, etc., can be exercised flexibly according to the cultural reality of their specific country and the needs of the couples. Such actions can also be extended to other couples NOT belonging to existing teams, who wish to walk the path of deepening their faith towards holiness, as described by the ERI in objective no. 9 of the Action Plan 2012/2018.⁹

Proposition 1:

"New Breath of Life" Meeting

Making the most of this stage of personal existence, whereby individuals look more closely at the future ahead and wonder about the meaning of life, the Movement aims to: ***Renew the spiritual lives of the "Long-standing Teams" encouraging them to participate fully in "New Breath of life" Gatherings.***

The expectation is that over a period of 3 or 4 years after the launch of the Project, the Long-standing Teams will be rejuvenated and move forward with a new sense of dynamism after a "New Breath of life" Meeting.

9 **The Action Plan 2012/2018**, in its objective no. 9, provides for an opportunity for all couples who wish to continue in deepening their faith towards holiness, drawing on the methods that are at the disposal of the Long-standing Teams that make use of them.

Proposition n° 2

Gatherings or themed in-depth meetings

After 20 years of involvement in the Movement, couples and teams may find themselves entering a phase full of challenges, which leads to an awareness of themselves by means of the faith they have in Jesus Christ. It's the right time for vital training capable of enabling couples to overcome the losses and conflicts that arise in this stage of their lives. The Movement aims to: ***Allow all long-standing teams to be able to participate in gatherings or themed in-depth events.*** The objective is that the super regions and attached regions are able to define a guide for contents and objectives for these events that will really assist the couples to understand the positive and negative aspects of the problems encountered in "the critical adult phase".

There are many topics that can be included in this type of event. We suggest that some of the issues to take into account are those mentioned under the article "Long-standing Teams" published in the Teams of Our Lady Charter No 8, May 1969:

- ▶ The importance of spiritual formation to deal with the decline of natural impulse;
- ▶ The practice of the Endeavours proposed by the Movement as a support to face the challenges of the journey of the faith. These Endeavours are an invitation to:
 - "Listen regularly" to the Word of God.
 - Continue a daily true "tête-à-tête" with the Lord (Prayer).
 - To find time together each day, husband and wife, in conjugal (and possibly family) prayer.
 - To find time each month for a true conjugal dialogue, in the presence of the Lord (the sit-down).



- Establish a "Rule of Life" and review it every month.
- Annually take stock by placing oneself in front of the Lord during a retreat lasting at least 48 hours, preferably together as a couple.
- ▶ The need to change mentality in order to cope with the diversification of the person's maturity;
- ▶ The progress of life which generates the need for individualisation and personalization of Endeavours;

The SR/RR may replace, or elaborate on, issues in order to meet the specific needs pertinent to their couples.

Proposition nº 3

Study topics and support material in use in the SR/RR

The relinquishing of the Long-standing Teams proposals in their original form was an opportunity for some Super Regions (SRs) to take the initiative and develop themes that met the needs of their older team members.

The ERI considers the experience and the benefits gained by the Movement as being of vital importance together with the spread of these themes and ideas throughout various parts of the world. Therefore we suggest that each SR / RR, according to the needs and desires of their couples, may: ***Draw upon the study topics and support of books already in use in the SR and others created to address specific local needs.***

Team members have welcomed some of the issues raised, due to their relevance of their content from a human and the Christian point of view, although not specifically intended for the Long-standing Teams.

Among them are:

- ▶ Belgium SR. "***Seigneur, Restez avec nous....Le soir approche.***" Team E-7, Brussels. [Topic translated into Portuguese (2003) and Spanish (2013)]. It is intended for teams whose members have reached the age of retirement and seek new options in life.
- ▶ Oceania SR. "**Celebrating the "Third Age"**". Australia in 2008. Topic for retired couples, young grandparents. Addresses issues related to their own family and everyday life, especially issues that blight couples that are facing challenges related to health and trials associated with widowhood.



- ▶ France-Luxembourg-Switzerland SR (F-L-S). "**Un grand amour m'attend.**" France, 1998. [Topic translated into Portuguese by Portugal Super Region (2003) and a team from Brazil (2004)]. Intended for older team members. A hymn to life and marriage that encourages couples to continue on the path of holiness, living out their lives as a testimony for future generations.¹⁰

The Satellite Team's Reflection and Research Database (2016) enables all members of Teams to access to the list of topics and books available in the SRs/RRs.

Proposition nº 4

Specific study topic for "Long-standing" Teams

According to Father Caffarel, the challenge facing the long-standing teams is the change of mindset necessary, so that the couples can overcome the adversities and crises that they encounter and confront. Overcoming such critical situations requires a change of attitude. Therefore, the Movement will: ***Make a specific study topic available for the "Long-standing Teams"***.

This topic will lead couples to an awareness of the problems that characterize this phase of their life. In general terms, the proposal will address the psycho-affective domain, the spiritual life of the team member and belonging to a team, based on the support that the Movement offers to help its members address the challenges of their daily lives.

Other pressing and current study topics that are pertinent to couples of a more mature age bracket, and that are appropriate for the deepening of their faith, will be compiled and made available by the SR / RR.

Proposition nº 5

Topics and works related to Father Caffarel

The survey conducted by the ERI with those teams and team members with more than 20 years' experience in the Movement,

10 Manual "*Les END et leurs aînés*", p.15.

and the respective responsible Sector couples, revealed that couples want the Movement to continue fostering reflection on the basis of the thoughts and aims of our charismatic founder, Father Caffarel.

The Movement accepts the challenge of maintaining the unity of END, preserving the founding charism and seeking to return to the source by consulting the Founding Charter and the writings and editorials of Father Caffarel published in the END Letters. This is essential for the "rejuvenation" of the Long-standing Teams that lack vitality. This is why the Movement strives to: ***Revitalize the life of "Long-standing Teams" on the basis of the study of Father Caffarel's works.***

A large number of works by Father Caffarel can be used for study purposes. In addition, other themes can be prepared from his articles published in the END Letters and in *l'Anneau d'Or*.

As a reference, we present some of them:



- ▶ **College des Bernadins. Father Caffarel – Teams of Our lady at the House of Prayer 1903-1996** (Colloquium by Agnes Walch) Ed. College des Bernadins, Lethielleux, 2011.
- ▶ **END. Textes choisis du Père Caffarel.** Paris, END, 2003. (Study topic translated into Spanish, English, Italian and Portuguese).
- ▶ **END. Le Père Caffarel: Prophète du Mariage.** Paris, END, 2009. (A collection of texts intended for team members throughout the world to provide a better understanding of the Movement and the reflections of Father Caffarel).
- ▶ Jean et Annick **ALLEMAND. Les Equipes Notre Dame: Essor et des couples chrétiens mission.** Paris, END 1988.
- ▶ Jean et Annick **ALLEMAND. Henri Caffarel. Un homme saisi par Dieu.** Paris, Teams of Our Lady, 1997. (Biography of the founder of the Movement, by Jean Allemand).

- ▶ Jean et Annick ALLEMAND. **Prier 15 jours avec le Père Caffarel, fondateur des Equipes Notre Dame.** Paris, Nouvelle Cité, 2001
- ▶ **Pere Henri Caffarel. The Presence of God – One hundred letters on Prayer, 1903-1996.** Ed Feu Nouveau, Paris, 1793.
- ▶ **Père Henri Caffarel. Quel est le fondateur charisme des Equipes Notre-Dame?** (Conference by Father Caffarel at the Gathering for the Responsible Couples in Chantilly, on May 3, 1987).

This revitalization can occur through study topics, meetings, retreats and formation gatherings according to each SR / RR.

Other proposals

Doctrinal issues / Annual Review / Retreat

The Movement seeks to encourage team members to deepen their **doctrinal** formation (biblical themes and the Church's Magisterium) that are indispensable for the apostolic and missionary actions of Christians. The Christian lay mission today transcends temporal realities. It includes a response to the call of Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom.

As an example, we list some examples of reading material and study: *John Paul II's Letter to the elderly*, *Benedict XVI's Deus Caritas Est*, and the apostolic exhortations of Pope Francis' found in "*Evangelii Gaudium* "and" *Amoris Laetitia*". There are many other Vatican II documents that are important to the team members. Similarly, an extensive variety of topics are available about Jesus Christ as a Person, the four Gospels, the sacraments and in particular on Marriage and the Eucharist.

The **Annual Review** becomes a valuable aid in the spiritual lives of couples. Using this gathering together as couples and recognizing the importance of this sitting down together, couples can become aware of their own fatigue and the need to develop projects, modeled on the Gospel of Luke (14: 28-32), to re-energise the team.

The **Retreat** is a special time of prayer, silence and recollection that enables the couples to have a profound experience of God. The retreat becomes a form of encouragement and inspiration for a committed path towards conjugal spirituality. There are many couples that seek retreats that are carried out in silence, as well as extended retreats. It is important that those responsible for organizing the retreats take into account the pedagogy of the Movement.

4

The Revitalization of Long-standing Teams - the role of the Structures within the Movement



The following guidelines are aimed for couples belonging to long-standing teams. They may be adopted in whole or in part; may be suitable for the specific needs and requirements of the growth of the couples, and may take into account the respective culture of each country. Such guidelines are arranged according to the levels of responsibility within the Movement since responsible couples are the protagonists of the spiritual impetus found within the teams, whether they are long-standing teams or not.

Teams of our Lady have a pedagogy that articulates the lives of its members around the founding charism, which offers every team member a path that enables them to realize their spiritual, personal and conjugal goals when following Christ.¹¹ To ensure this, couples can count on the help of the team through mutual assistance and spiritual accompaniment, which work together to bring about the realization of these different aspects.

The SR/RR Responsible Couple (RCSR)

The SRs/RRs have the responsibility of conveying the principal guidelines of the Movement to all its members, together with its pedagogy and methods. It is up to the responsible couples to discern, on the basis of the formation facilities offered by the ERI, those elements that are deemed most appropriate to the needs of their respective couples and, if necessary, adapt them to the cultural realities of each specific country.

In order that the guidelines pertaining to the Long-standing Teams have a fruitful and lasting effect in the spiritual life of the SR/RR, it is suggested that:

- ▶ An ongoing process of formation occurs within the Movement's principal framework, namely the Regional Responsible Couples (RRC), Sector Responsible Couples (SRC), Team Responsible Couples (TRC) and Liaison Couples (LC)..
- ▶ The development of specific topics takes place that are pertinent for the Long-standing Teams. This can be done by either introducing new topics or making use of the material and study topics already in use in other SRs, as is deemed appropriate to the specific reality of each team.
- ▶ An appropriate formation is carried out, enabling the RRC, SRC, LC and TRC to become the protagonists of a spiritual process that:
 - Maintains the spiritual desire of Long-standing couples to

11 **Guide sheet.** Kit of instructions for Liaison and Sector Couples. (*photocopy*) 30/10/2010. Page 1. In.: *Project pedagogy. France.*

remain “alive” on their path towards holiness, rather than resorting to any pretext based of their ageing.

- ▶ Promotes a sense of belonging to the Movement, valuing and respecting each team and the role each one plays.
- ▶ Appreciates and values the presence of the elderly couples in events promoted by the Movement, so that their lives bear testimony of love and fidelity to other team members.
- ▶ Formation and training activities for the benefit of the long-standing teams are promoted, and included in the Super Region’s plan for the calendar year.

The Regional Responsible Couple (RRC)

For sectors and their respective teams, the RRC is the guarantor that the precepts and identity of the Movement are carried out in the Region. Their main concern is the spiritual vitality of the Sector couples with whom they build a sense of unity in common prayer.

By being responsible for the formation of all the region's couples, the RRC is expected to:

- ▶ Encourage an ongoing effort to better understand the realities facing the teams and couples in the Region, in order to help them better understand the Movement and its objectives;
- ▶ Ensure that the SRCs understand the spirit of the ERI Guidelines intended for Long-standing Teams, and can be the protagonists of this formation in their sectors;
- ▶ Encourage the formation of the Sector Responsible Couple, Liaison Couples and teams Responsible Couples, ensuring they are kept up to date with the guidelines and proposal by the ERI for Long-standing Teams;
- ▶ Foster reflection and an exchange of experiences about the needs and requirements of the sectors that have Long-standing Teams, in order to maintain a continuously updated framework;

- ▶ Identify the sectors that have Long-standing Teams and maintain an updated inventory of these teams, together with their principle characteristics and needs.

The Sector Responsible Couple (SRC)

All levels of responsibility within the Movement form part of the dynamism that exists in the life of the teams, but it is the Sector Couple that most fully understands the living reality of the teams. The Sector Couple is expected to intensify their actions to respond to the genuine needs of the couples in the Long-standing Teams.

The Sector Responsible Couple is the primary source of help to ensure the vitality of the teams, because it has a level of responsibility that enables it to be in direct contact with the base members of the Movement. It is therefore up to the Sector Responsible Couple to:

- ▶ Identify (with the help of Liaison Couples) all existing Long-standing Teams under their watch and keep an updated inventory of these teams, together with their principle characteristics and needs.
- ▶ Ensure that there is a sense of vitality within the Sector by encouraging a close and fraternal relationship with the Liaison Couple to enable the Long-standing Teams and the Sector itself to identify and counter the possibility of apathy and lack of enthusiasm that may arise among them.
- ▶ Keep the members of the Long-standing Teams committed to formation activities provided by the Sector. Therefore, certain actions are suggested to:
 - Integrate team members that are at every different stage of life to participate fully in all Sector or Regional events or activities;
 - Create opportunities for older couples to share their experiences with younger couples;
 - Create opportunities for the couples in Long-standing Teams to bear testimony of how *long-lasting love and marriage* is a path that leads to holiness.

The Movement needs such couples since they have the experience, the testimony and knowledge to offer to everyone else. At the same time, these older teams members also need the Movement for their own spiritual growth.

- ▶ Performing their pastoral task:
 - By personally attending gatherings to ensure the transmission of the spirit in the 'Long-standing Teams' Programme', to enable all team members to become aware of the importance of this programme for older couples in their sector and for the Movement itself.
 - By stimulating the participation of the Team Responsible Couples and Liaison Couples in specific formation (meetings, retreats, sessions) promoted by the Super Region and Region to propagate the *Long-standing Teams 'Programme'*.

The Liaison Couple (LC)

The role of the LC should be to contribute to the development of the spirit of unity and communion between the teams they link.

The Liaison Couple's service to the Long-standing Teams must be friendly and attentive, offering available support that aids the avoidance of any distance from Teams life and encourages the teams to move forward along the common path of faith.

It is suggested that the LC:

- ▶ Keep updated records of the teams they are linked with, so that there is a continuity of care and action by the Liaison couple, should another couple step into their role.
- ▶ Participate in training and formation activities designed to keep the LC updated in relation to the proposals and maxims of the ERI for Long-standing Teams, together with the Responsible Couples of the teams they are linked with.

The Team's Responsible Couple (TRC)

The TRC is the main catalyst of the life of the Movement, since it is in the context of the Team that the spiritual lives of couples are deepened and effectively renewed. The Team's Responsible Couple directly faces the challenge to revive and nourish couples who may encounter moments of despondency. The TRC can count on the help of the Liaison Couple and the Priest Spiritual Counsellor, who, in the exercise of "demanding love", can lift the spirits of the team members to encourage them in the deepening of their faith.

The TRC is expected to maintain ongoing efforts in personal formation and the realisation of the Movement's proposals for Long-standing Teams, in order to account for the promotion of the Long-standing programme, in line with the needs of older couples.

Because of the responsibility to provide help in the team's spiritual life and development, the TRC is expected to:

- ▶ Seek to deeply understand the desires and needs of each individual couple in their team, to help them maintain the desire to grow in holiness and to respond to the call received from God, especially in light of the realities of life in which they find themselves;
- ▶ Strengthen the spirit of communion and co-responsibility in the team, so that each of its members become more aware of belonging to the Movement;
- ▶ Recognise that one of the important challenges of the TRC, together with the Liaison Couple, is to engage in promoting unity and cohesion within the Sector. They can do this by encouraging the presence of couples in the formation activities that are promoted. This in turn helps the couples realize the value that their attendance can add to the lives of others, through the testimony of their mere presence at these formation activities.

Conclusion

This manual is a response to the decision of the ERI to create pedagogy of spiritual encouragement and liveliness to be offered to Long-standing Teams.

The actions provided for in Article 9 of the Action Plan 2012/2018 (researching study topics available in the SRs, encouraging couples with more than 20 years of teams' experience to take part in the "New Breath of Life" gathering to enable them to discover the desires and the needs of older couples in relation to their own spiritual journey) were all taken into consideration in the preparation of this document.

The findings of the research conducted in this Project pointed to the desire on the part of most of the team members to return to the source and deepen the experience of the founding charism of the Movement and its mystique and methods. Couples, in turn, seek help and have the assistance of the Movement to progress towards holiness. Therefore, the proposal is to deepen reflection on the thoughts of Father Caffarel and the founding charism and give rise to their dissemination throughout all levels of the Movement. This research unveiled two important issues. The presence of the elderly, which many Sector Responsible Couples confuse with those members of the Long-standing Teams, and the lack of clarity of what this entails.

Reflections on the thoughts of Father Caffarel have enabled us to conclude that there is an intimate relationship between his assessments of the Long-standing Teams and the knowledge of the Critical Age of the Adult. Several reasons can lead couples to lose the ability to face the challenges of this stage of life (transformations, loss of natural enthusiasm, loss of security, retirement, etc). Therefore they need spiritual help to avoid routine or despondency in their relationship or in their team. Their difficulties and the help required to overcome them are clearly different from that which is characteristic of the elderly.



The **meetings, conferences, vigils, retreats, sessions, topics, weekends** available to Responsible Couples may be used flexibly by the SR/RR, according to the cultural reality of their specific countries and the needs of their couples.

No other similar parallel structure of encouragement or support has been created for Long-standing Teams. The promotion of these initiatives should occur according to the existing levels of responsibility within the Movement, for the Responsible Couples are the protagonists of the spiritual animation and revitalization of the teams, whether they are old or not.

The proposed formation for Long-standing Teams will only be successful and long-lasting if some basic prerequisites are met. Members of the different structures within Teams of Our Lady should have a broad range of understanding of the ERI proposal for Long-standing Teams and its members should be continuously encouraged to participate in Sector and Regional activities with all the other different generations of team members.

Appendix Teams of Our Lady and its older members¹²

In 2009, at the request of the ERI, a satellite team prepared a document addressing the role of the elderly team members (with an average age of 80 years or more) within the Movement. These individuals are referred to as "elderly" because they have experienced many stages of life that many still have to experience, and by their example continue show us the way. The threshold of 80 years old is only an approximate age, since not everyone goes through the process of ageing at the same pace or rate.

Is it a sinking ship or the golden age? Opinions differ on what old age means and signifies, but most of us agree that the senior and very elderly members of the population are becoming increasingly numerous, especially in developed countries. Modern Western society has gradually associated death with a frightful impediment and ageing as a disease. As a result, it has tended to push the aged out of sight and mind as much as possible. Moreover, death is now seen as more pertinent to the aged members of society, whereas in the past, it was more common to see babies and young adults die rather than only the elderly. Thus society views death and ageing as being closely linked and related. The elderly are becoming increasingly mentioned as topics for study and discussion is entered into about them, but this field of study merely portrays them as individuals from a past generation. The view that society has concerning the role of the elderly is too limited, as the elderly symbolize concerns about impending death. We are far from biblical times when the Lord cursed the house of Eli by saying: "*The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your family line*".

12 Translation of the original summary from French into Portuguese prepared by Marie-Armande et Xavier Thieulloy.

Christians, for their part, regard old age as being the last step in preparation for the great encounter with God. Old age is accompanied by significant changes in the lives of the individuals it affects with a reduction of their physical and intellectual abilities and the emergence of dependence on others.¹³

The encroachment of death makes the elderly particularly sensitive when death strikes a friend or loved one, especially if it is a spouse. The long-standing teams are directly affected by these changes that often concern its members, which may pressure them to adapt to new modes of daily living and relationships.

Despite older people facing ever increasing limitations, these limitations should not prevent them from being active participants in a familial community or a community of friends. These communities will enable them to feel useful and give them a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Up until their deaths, the elderly can still play a priestly role, or take part in the mission of being a prophet and provide guidance, but the balance between these three missions changes with age: the mission of filial service diminishes after the departure of children, and civic responsibilities as the result of retirement, but the other two missions in the lives of the elderly can be lived out with the same intensity, regardless of their health status. Changes related to old age may even be an opportunity to enable them to have more time to focus on the Movement than when they were younger; belonging to Teams of Our Lady may also help to liven up and provide an impetus to the actions of elderly members as a couple made in the image of God¹⁴. This remains true even in the event of widowhood. In the priestly role, they can pray on their behalf and on the behalf of the people of God, in praise and as intercessors¹⁵. As prophets, their role is to bear witness to the Word of God and make

13 In a way, this dependence can lead parents to become their 'children's children'. These children's life experiences are often different (from that which their parents lived through or were used to), and they may struggle to meet the needs and expectations of their parents in the most desirable way.

14 "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them." Gen 1,27.

15 "Prayer is a service. It is a ministry that older people may perform for the good of the whole Church and the world. Even the most infirm and handicapped of them can pray. Prayer is their strength, it is their life. Through prayer they can

His love present in the world. The Christian couple reflects the image of the union of Christ with the Church, and this vocation does not become less demanding as the couple gets older. The testimony of a human love lived in fidelity to Christ for decades, despite all the difficulties they may have faced and even beyond the death of a spouse, can have a major influence on young couples immersed in a society that focuses on the present moment and neglects to focus on the long-term. The apostolate of the elderly should address the generations that follow them, but also appeal to older individuals within their own age bracket who may be less advanced on the path of faith.

Mutual assistance, which is at the heart of Teams of Our Lady, should remain a crucial part of the relationship between the elderly members of the Movement and the generations that follow them.

The document "The Teams of Our Lady and its older members" presents the following proposals to ensure that the Movement takes into account the needs of its older team members, and provides them with the help necessary:

Guiding the elderly

1. To give direction on how to adapt to the life situations of each couple (rule of life, importance of "sit downs", conjugal prayer ...)
2. Encourage the elderly to develop their prayer life (praise, thanksgiving, intercession). The sectors or the Super-Regions could periodically send a newsletter about prayer to its older members, by specifically offering them prayer intentions, in the similar manner as the intercessors. The older members could be asked to pray for the Movement when it is preparing for meetings (sector meetings, responsible couple meetings, etc.) as a good way

cont. break down the walls of isolation, emerge from their condition of helplessness (...) An older person, confined to bed and reduced to the end of his or her physical strength, can, by praying, become like a monk, a hermit. And through prayer he or she can embrace the whole world." Pontifical Council for the Laity, The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World. 1st October 1998.

of maintaining their connection with the Movement.

3. Offer specific topics suited for the elderly. The Movement already offers topics that helps prepare its senior members for retirement or when they enter old age. According to the annual reviews of super-regions, it appears that the older members of Teams are interested in topics related to Scripture and the texts of the Magisterium. The topics could also deal with situations and issues pertinent to the elderly (dependence, widowhood, illness in the family, living in thanksgiving ...).
4. Meetings and gatherings between elderly team members, and also with younger generations. The older couples could be asked to host younger couples from their region. Thinking about the most effective manner in how to go about involving them in mixed and sector meetings. These older members could also be invited to give witness to their fidelity, their mutual assistance and life in the Movement.
5. Using modern means of information and media: these means of communication can be used to make life easier for the elderly, for example, providing written topics in large, legible letters or recorded on CD. Other team members can keep in touch with them by phone.

Guiding the other members of the team

These proposals revolve around providing mutual assistance:

1. Younger team members could help elderly members participate in meetings and gatherings organized by the Movement, especially Sector meetings; and they can visit these older couples to provide everyday services, including giving Communion if these older members are unable to attend Mass. Younger couples can also encourage the older couples to make use of the modern means of information and communication.
2. The relationship between the older and younger members could eventually lead to a relationship that is comparable to that of "adoptive grandparents". Because of the increasing mobility of people nowadays, grandparents are often situated far away from

their grandchildren, and, conversely, young families live far away from their grandparents; therefore establishing relationships between these two generations can be beneficial for everyone.

Organisation

Within the team

A team consisting of elderly members should gradually adapt their routines and pace of life to the physical and mental conditions of its members. Meetings could therefore take place during the day for lunch instead of dinner, which allows the older members to get to their destinations in the daylight. These older teams can also adopt a more leisurely pace to their meetings compared to that of the younger teams, who are often pressed to keep within restricted times.

Some teams often meet at the homes of those couples that have great difficulties in moving around; the meeting begins with Mass, which is often the only opportunity that the older, ailing members get to attend a Mass during the month. In such a case, the sharing of the meal may not take place, or be prepared by other team members, whenever such instances occur. Special attention should be given to transport team members to their meeting places. The mutual assistance of the younger team members may in some cases be requested.

Within the Sectors and other structures of the Movement

For the leaders of the Movement, and in particular for those responsible couples in each Sector, a primary concern with regards to the elderly, is to know how to help them continue living out the spirituality and the essential aspects of the Teams of Our Lady, especially as each team's numbers progressively diminish as time passes. In many instances, the team members are actually relatively homogeneous in age. Members of a team come together and find that they have many things in common because of their old age; their team may be strongly affected by illness and the death of its members, and this makes it difficult to open up to younger team members who are not on the same path or stage in life as the older members. Sometimes the remaining members

of a team may be brought into a team a little younger, but this is rarely possible and these older members find themselves effectively excluded from the Movement at a time when they would have great need of mutual aid. The Movement, at all levels, should reflect upon how to implement the measures to meet the needs of its oldest team members on all levels. These could include:

1. *A reassessment of the policy of creating teams that is homogeneous in terms of the age of its members.*

In teams consisting of octogenarians or nonagenarians, perhaps younger members in their sixties or seventies could be introduced as the older members depart. These relatively younger members could give their support

2. *Or by establishing special ties with the elderly who are at risk of being excluded from the Movement as a result of the dissolution of their teams.*

► It would be a form of twinning up with a team of younger people or a couple from a younger team being twinned with a team or a couple from an older team; young people would keep the older teams informed about the life of their team, they would be included in their prayer intentions, and would share the reflection on the study topic with them. With the material help of younger people, older members could participate in certain team meetings or Sector meetings. This twinning would also be a good opportunity for the younger team members to be exposed to the daily witness of older team members. This should not be limited to specific aspects of the life of Teams of Our Lady, but be extended to include tangible and mutual daily assistance in the lives of each teams' member. Older team members could familiarise new younger team couples that arrive in their respective cities. Younger team members could do grocery shopping for older members or bring them communion if they become immobile. It is in this context that an informal twinning between the teams becomes a practical example and testimony (and not merely

a not necessarily relevant testimony) of how it is possible to encourage older team members when they are twinned with younger team members. Liaison Couples obviously have a very special role to play in the Movement's relationship with those teams that contain a large number of its "oldest members"; the Liaison Couples should make the elderly members feel constantly loved and valued by the Movement that is enriched through their participation, and should try to visit each couple.

- ▶ A mailing of the Teams Newsletter should be maintained and encouraged for those elderly team members who wish to maintain a link with the Movement, even if they no longer formally belong to an active team. These members will find much pleasure in reading articles specifically written and intended for them, especially by sharing experiences relating to them within the various sectors or regions. Some Super-Regions might consider sending a newsletter to widows and widowers tailored to their particular situation, in addition to the Teams Newsletter.
- ▶ Since older members of society will increasingly represent a growing part of the population, it is desirable that the different structures and levels within the Movement, from the Sector Couple to the International Responsible Couple, appoint a couple in charge of monitoring and addressing the issues pertinent to elderly team members, and maintain a connection with them. A network can be created between these couples, using the Internet to exchange information. Since the issues relating to the elderly affects the whole Church, this network of correspondents should also keep in touch with those responsible for the pastoral care of the elderly, to share their experiences and propose activities offered by other movements or church organizations to the elderly team members.

Conclusion

Walking with the elderly and for the elderly is a duty for all." ¹⁶ This recommendation of the Pontifical Council for the Laity applies quite naturally to Teams of Our Lady and all its members, whatever their age may be.

As the Pontifical Council for the Laity further states: "Older people must become increasingly conscious that they have a future before them that they themselves must shape. They must be made aware that their missionary task is not exhausted. They still have a responsibility to testify to children, young people, adults and those in their own age group that there is no meaning nor joy outside the bond with Christ, neither in their own personal lives nor in their relations with others."¹⁷

17 The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World. Pontifical Council for the Laity. 1st October 1998.

18 *Idem, ibidem.*

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Edition and Production:

Nova Bandeira Produções Editoriais (Brasil)
novabandeira@novabandeira.com

Graphic Project:

Maria Alice and Ivahy Barcellos

Illustrations:

Pages 7, 12, 13, 15, 21, 22, 27, 34 – Can Stock Photo

Photos:

Pages 17, 24 – TOL collection – Cover Photograph and page 16 - Photo
published in the Spanish SR newsletter, no. 274, p. 27
(mixed team meeting during a training day)

Layout:

Samuel Lincon Silvério