

Bogota, April 11, 2019

**To the members of Teams of Our Lady**

**Dear couples, widows, widowers, spiritual counselors and spiritual advisors:**

It is no secret that in recent years, due to a significant increase in some countries, it has become more difficult for each team to be accompanied by a priest. The priest, as Spiritual Counselor, is invited to walk with the other members of the team or even with several teams in our Movement. This difficulty is due to the combination of two simultaneous factors: the strong growth in the number of teams and the reduction of vocations and priestly ordination. Therefore, what was once meant to be a temporary measure of inviting a spiritual Advisor to assist a team, has now become an increasingly common practice. Note that this Spiritual Advisor may be a deacon in preparation for the priesthood, a permanent deacon, a layman or religious.

The position of the Movement is very clear as to integration of a Spiritual Advisor into a Team of Our Lady assuming all efforts of acquiring a Priest Spiritual Counselor for this team have been exhausted. The mission of this Spiritual Advisor is to promote the growth of new teams and support the functioning of existing teams; it is not a means of seeking the impossible "substitution" of a priest: it is an intrinsic characteristic of our Movement that its' teams be accompanied by a priest who is an ordained minister and who performs his priestly function in the team ...

Thus, the Spiritual Advisor is neither an option nor an obligation of each team, it is the response from the organization of the Movement to a team's need to progress in faith and love. However, such teams should never forgo the integration of a priest into their team. On the other hand, it is necessary to ensure the bond of each team with the priestly ministry: this bond can be ensured by the priestly presence within each team, a personal and lasting presence of a Priest Spiritual Counselor, who may participate in one or more team meetings throughout the year.

The International Responsible Team (ERI) is constantly receiving questions from all over the world on this important issue; therefore, we consider it necessary to send this communication to the whole Movement in order to maintain unity in the modalities and fidelity to the principles that inspire us.

The Spiritual Advisor, as we have already said, render a precious service and despite being well trained, they must be knowledgeable in the Charism, the Mysticism and the Pedagogy of the Movement and, in a special way, understand the specific scope of their service and the meaning of the irreplaceable role that the Priest Spiritual Counselor has in each team.

It is necessary, then, to create information and training sessions for the Spiritual Advisors who are already linked to a team, so that they keep a clear focus regarding their capacity and to avoid

dualities or confusion with any other type of involvement they may have with other teams in the Movement.

Although the Movement has a duty to inform and prepare each Spiritual Advisor designated for a specific team, we must be very careful not to send erroneous messages. For example, offering open training for people who could "potentially" provide this service, we risk confusing a Spiritual Advisor to be the same as a Spiritual Counselor. The Regional and Sector Responsible Couple as well as the Sector's Priest Spiritual Counselor must approve the integration of the Spiritual Advisor on a case-by-case basis as an exception and not the rule for each team.

We know that there are already responsible initiatives taken by several Super Regions in the world regarding the use of spiritual Advisor, and we know the seriousness and the intent with which they were taken; but at the same time we have a duty to draw attention to the dangers to those who misunderstand the spirit and purpose of such initiatives, which may begin with good intentions but endanger the unity of the Movement and fidelity to the founding charism.

Therefore, the International Responsible Team (ERI), with its Spiritual Counselor, send out this brief reflection to provide serenity and to dispel the doubts that are frequently posed:

### **The Spiritual Counselor and the Spiritual Advisor**

At times the work and functions of the Priest Spiritual Counselors and Spiritual Advisor are confused, it is necessary to clarify the difference in their role and in their mission.

As for the priest, we emphasize his function "capital" (in the name of Christ "head") in the Christian community. In Teams of Our Lady (a small cell in the church), the presence of a Priest Spiritual Counselor is explained well in the principal official texts of the Movement: Charter or Statutes (1947), Supplement to the Charter or Statutes (1976), Second Wind (1988), Guide to the Teams of Our Lady (both versions, 2008 and 2018), Canonical Statutes of Teams of Our Lady (2014), The Counselor (1980), The Priest Counselor (1993), The Priest Spiritual Counselor (2006), The Priest Counselor and the Spiritual Accompaniment in the Teams of Our Lady (2017).

The Spiritual Advisor (does not appear in the first documents) is understood to be as the collaborative spiritual presence in a team in the absence of a Priest Spiritual Counselor that is explained by various circumstances (few priests in certain locations, inability of finding one...etc.). The Spiritual Advisor is assigned to a team with the approval of the Sector's or Regional's Responsible Couple with the desire and expectation that a Priest Spiritual Counselor will be found. This desire by the Movement must be discerned with care for each team. The Spiritual Advisor does not have the priestly function, but as a collaborator for the spiritual development and growth of each team member.

When the Spiritual Advisor is mentioned in the latest official documents of the Teams of Our Lady, it is always inferred to as a result of the concrete difficulties of integrating a Priest Spiritual Counselor; and the Movement points out the differences between the two missions. It is very important that the Spiritual Advisor receive the proper training (different from the Priest Spiritual Counselor) in order to fulfill his role as Advisor. While we wait feedback from the Super Regions who already offer these “mixed” training sessions, we find it prudent not to combine the Spiritual Advisor and Priest Spiritual Counselor into the same training, as their functions and roles are different.

Dear members of Teams of Our Lady: it is with immense gratitude to all Spiritual Advisors who assume this service with generosity and courage that we invite you to pray with us to Our Father for support in our homes to raise priestly vocations and future spiritual counselors by reciting this prayer that Pope Francis prayed on the World Day for Vocations:


*“Father of mercy, who gave your Son for our salvation and who strengthens us always with the gifts of your Spirit, grant us Christian communities which are alive, fervent and joyous, which are fountains of fraternal life, and which nurture in the young the desire to consecrate themselves to you and to the work of evangelization.*

*Sustain these communities in their commitment to offer appropriate vocational catechesis and ways of proceeding towards each one’s particular consecration. Grant the wisdom needed for vocational discernment, so that in all things the greatness of your merciful love may shine forth. May Mary, Mother and guide of Jesus, intercede for each Christian community, so that, made fruitful by the Holy Spirit, it may be a source of true vocations for the service of the holy People of God.”*

In deep communion, on behalf of the International Responsible Team - ERI,



Clarita et Edgardo Bernal Fandiño  
Responsables Internationaux END



Père Ricardo Londoño Dominguez  
Prêtre Conseiller Spirituel ERI