



Magnificat

A Newsletter for Married Couples

United States Teams of Our Lady - Equipas de Nossa Senhora - Equipos de Nuestra Señora

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Volume 26, Spring 2007

Registrations still being accepted for Teams 2007 National Conference

There is still time to send in your registration for the 2007 National Conference in beautiful Chaska Minnesota, July 3-6. We have a variety of fascinating speakers, each followed by mini-team meetings designed to help you focus on each of the talks and make new friends along the way. We will gather for special liturgies and evenings of fun – including a sing-along around a campfire. Events are planned that can be enjoyed by the whole family. The Oak Ridge Conference Center is located just 30 minutes from downtown Minneapolis making it easy to enjoy the many theaters, restaurants and other cultural, social, sporting and shopping opportunities in the area.

The conference is just around the corner and rooms are filling fast - *so send in your registration today!* For more information contact Ted & Janet Windus at (218) 729-5395 or e-mail jwindus@stjamesduluth.org

Marcellino D’Ambrosio is Keynote Speaker

Marcellino D’Ambrosio initially set his sights on stardom, playing bass guitar in several popular rock bands by the time



he was 16. But a deeper encounter with Christ cause a change of course resulting in a Ph.D. in theology from the Catholic University of America under the guidance the renowned Jesuit theologian, Avery Cardinal Dulles.

Dr. D’Ambrosio, a father of five and a business owner, brings to his teaching a practical, down-to-earth perspective that makes his words easy to understand. For the past four years, his TV series on the Early Church Fathers has been broadcast internationally on the Eternal Word Television Network and he is currently one of the sought after guests on a variety of syndicated Catholic radio networks such as EWTN and Relevant Radio.

Dr. D’Ambrosio is a *New York Times* best-selling author, with his book on Mel



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Please direct all inquiries, *Magnificat* articles, E-mail, and general correspondence to the Administrative Office at the address and phone number provided below. We will forward requests to the people best able to serve you.

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Ted & Janet Windus

Central
Jake & Ruth Graves

South Central
Don & Carolyn Jacques

West Coast Region

Western
Luic & Ana Nunes

Gibson's film, "The Guide to the Passion", selling over a million copies in its first three months. He is also a world renowned commentator on Catholic issues, recently defending the legacy of Pope John Paul II on Fox News' "Geraldo Rivera At Large" and Bill O'Reilly's radio show.

In 2001 Dr. D'Ambrosio left his position at the University of Dallas to direct www.CrossroadsInitiative.com, an apostolate of Catholic Renewal and evangelization, and to oversee the growth of Wellness Opportunities Group, an international company dedicated to helping people attain physical, mental, and financial freedom. He, his wife Susan, and their five children, reside just outside of Dallas.

Rev. Michael Schmitz

Father Michael Schmitz is a priest for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota. Raised in the beautiful Brainerd Lakes area, also known as the "Fourth-of-July Capitol of Minnesota", Fr. Mike is happy to be spending the day with Teams of Our Lady in St. Paul ("The Fifth-of-July Capitol of Minnesota"). He is the fourth of six children. Fr. Mike was ordained a Catholic priest by Bishop Dennis Schnurr at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Rosary in June, 2003 and has since served at the Cathedral in Duluth, Blessed Sacrament parish in Hibbing, and at the Newman Catholic Campus Ministry at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. He is also the Director of the Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Duluth.

Rev. Charles E. Yost, SCJ, STL, MSLS

The topic of Father Yost's Conference talk is "Simple Prayer For Married Couples." It is an approach to prayer using the daily events and situations of one's ordinary daily experiences. He will use the Psalms to illustrate some of what he has to say and give some pointers to practice what he

calls "simple prayer." Father Yost will make his talk as practical as possible. There will be references to saints and mystics, such as Teresa of Jesus (of Avila) and others. He will include references to Father Caffarel, and to a letter of St. Augustine giving some direction on prayer.

Father Yost was born in Pittsburgh and attended Catholic elementary school and a high school seminary in Donaldson, Indiana. He professed religious vows in September, 1951 in the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. His college and theological studies were at Sacred Heart School of Theology, Hales Corners, Wisconsin. He was ordained in May, 1958. Father Yost holds graduate degrees in Theology and Library Science from Catholic University, Washington, DC.



He taught theology in Sumatra Indonesia and at Sacred Heart School of Theology, Hales Corners for fifteen years and was librarian. Father Yost has held several administrative positions in his religious community at locations in Wisconsin, California, Mississippi and Florida. He was a pastor in California and Mississippi, and did community development work in Wisconsin and Mississippi.

Father Yost has preached at retreats throughout the U.S. and Canada, and even at one retreat in Finland. Father Yost has authored fifteen collections of Sermons and a Commentary on the Psalms. He has worked with retired priests for six years in Florida, where he is semi-retired. Father Yost became acquainted with TOOL in 1989, and he is currently chaplain to Clearwater, Florida 1, as well as Southeast Regional Chaplain. •

Thoughts on the Magnificat, Teams beyond your team

BY TED & EILEEN KOSNIK
SUPER REGIONAL COUPLE

"My Soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior..."

Luke 1:46

Why the Magnificat?

We are blessed that Father Caffarel and the early TOOL couples chose the Magnificat as our "official" prayer. Meditation on the Magnificat is not something which personally we would have chosen to do without the inspiration of the Movement, and what a loss it would have been!

There have been several requests from teams around the country to explain why the Magnificat was chosen as the TOOL prayer and is said around the world by TOOL couples. When inquiries are made, a meditation is submitted, and an article surfaces, *all on the same subject*, it appears to be the work of the Holy Spirit! We think rather than give speculative answers, it would be better to use the time and energy to understand the prayer itself.

We try not to reinvent the wheel, so we are using the two articles mentioned above in this issue of the *Magnificat*, hoping to draw you into the prayer. The first is *A Magnificat Meditation Calendar* written by TOOL member Michael Leavy (see p. 15). We personally found this inspiring and educational, as it breaks down the Magnificat into small parts for a daily meditation. It originally appeared in the Long Island, NY TOOL newsletter. We thank Michael for the permission to reprint the article for you.

The second article, by Virginia chaplain Father Hilary Hayden, was written for TOOL at some point in the past and has recently resurfaced. We thank Fr. Hayden for this excellent work and reprint it in this issue as well (see p. 9).

Finally, if you would like to explore the Magnificat in book-length form, we highly recommend *Mary's Song* by Mary Catherine Nolan, O.P. It was published by Ave Marie Press in 2001, and is out of print but can be easily purchased at



Amazon.com. Our team used it as study material and gained much from its use.

The Larger TOOL Community

We hope you were inspired by the postcards from Lourdes in the last issue. We wanted you to experience Lourdes through the eyes of some of the 132 U.S. TOOL members who traveled to the International Gathering. The International Gathering occurs every six years and is limited to those who can afford the time and resources to travel a great distance. It usually attracts empty nesters and those able to be away from work and family in the fall.

Because we feel that the experience of being at a gathering of TOOL couples

from beyond your Sector or Region is such an important part of understanding the larger Movement, we hold national conferences every two years. You have an option of attending the U.S. National Conference in Chaska, Minnesota in July for far less strain on the budget, with childcare provided, at an excellent facility in the middle of the country.

You can reap the rewards of meeting TOOL members and spiritual counselors from all over the U.S. while enjoying a family experience with like-minded couples and families. Janet and Ted Windus have spent two years planning for this event and negotiating a wonderful facility, speakers, and family events for us. Please reach out to couples with whom you share prayer and commonality of purpose: COME TO MINNESOTA July 3-6!

Calling Future Leaders

Prior to the National TOOL Conference 2007 we hold a training program for future leadership couples. If you have received an invitation please respond positively! Tony and Mary Borba will travel from California to train pilot couples, Bob Grinewich will join us from Buffalo to speak on icon prayer, and many others will share their love of the Movement. If you would like to be part of training and have not yet received an invitation, please contact Ted and Eileen Kosnik, 903-535-7864 or e-mail ekosnik@mac.com. We would like to talk with you!

May the peace of the Lord be with you during the Easter season. See you in Minnesota! •

Where does all the money go?

BY TIM & MARY-ELLEN FLEMING
SECRETARIAT

As spring approaches, we are once again putting together our letter to Teams of Our Lady members requesting a donation. It is usually a very difficult assignment for us as we are not comfortable in asking folks for money but we understand the necessity if we wish to continue to see Teams grow and prosper.

At different times we have been asked how the money our membership donates is used and we thought this might be a good time to explain that.

First and foremost, as part of the international movement, we have an obligation to help support the promotion of Teams globally. Each year we are assessed an amount by the International Leading Team (ERI). Our tithe for 2006 was \$31,116. Generally the assessment is based on a number of factors including the number of Team members in a country along with the Gross Domestic Product of that country. Overall, the ERI strives for fairness in this assessment.

This money is then used in areas that do not share our prosperity, or in areas that are just starting up, such as South Korea. In the early days of Teams in America, couples received international funds to help them get Teams up and running. We feel blessed to be part of such a global family and especially remember that as we say our daily *Magnificat* along with all the other couples of the world in Teams.



Another way your contribution is used is in the promotion of Teams in the U.S. Today we have over 3,200 active Teams couples and spiritual counselors.

Each of those couples was piloted with materials paid for by our membership. Other publications are also available to members from the Teams Office including discussion materials. Do you need tapes, videos or other items for your annual Retreat? These have been bought with donations and are available to all our membership to use at no cost. To get information about them, visit our Web site at www.teamsofourlady.org.

The *Magnificat* that you are reading is also a publication funded by contributions, and is one of the wonderful ways we, as Teams members, are able to stay connected. The articles are informative and entertaining, and pictures are always enjoyed!!

Twice each year the Regional Couples meet with Ted and Eileen Kosnik, our Super Regional Couple. These meetings accomplish a number of purposes. For example, the planning for the upcoming conference in Chaska, MN was done at the last two meetings. Also a very important function of the couples is to update and edit all our materials, keeping them timely, informative and interesting. This work is also accomplished at these meetings. How do we go about training for Sector Couples and Pilot Couples and how does Teams of Our Lady spread throughout the country? Again, the work and strategizing happens at these meetings. Finally, the occasional problems or dilemmas that organizations our size sometimes encounter are addressed and (almost always) resolved by the couples as they meet. Your donations help to make these meetings possible.

Of course, there are also the everyday expenses of postage, insurance, and other sundry items that are part of any organization. Additionally, we need a place to store all of the material that Teams maintains. Money is also provided to Regions and Sectors for such things as their newsletters, postage and other associated expenses. In all instances, prudence is the watchword.

We are very conscious of your generosity and we are humbled by it. And we are also very thankful for the prayers that support Teams of Our Lady in the U.S. and us, as we go about our work for this wonderful group. As we begin our fifth and final year as Secretariat, we feel very blessed that we have been

We have an
obligation to
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Teams globally.

able to be a part of the picture these many years. We are especially pleased to have met so many of you as we attended the various meetings and conferences over the last four years. We look forward to meeting more of you at this year's conference in Chaska, Minnesota. God bless you all for your generosity, your kindness and your prayers. •

Blueberry muffins in Lake Erie

BY BOB & JOYCE GRINEWICH
LAKE ERIE REGIONAL COUPLE

On February 18, the Orchard Park Sector of the Lake Erie Region held their first Sector Day at St. Bernadette's chaired by Joe and Diane Manuel. We started with a prayer service and the "Magnificat" recorded by Fr. Stan Fortuna. We served as main speakers for the event and we were blessed to have two of our teams' priests attend.

Joyce spoke on "Fidelity to the Movement." She gave a simple analogy comparing making blueberry muffins to writing out the questions before the team meeting. You can decide to change the recipe for making blueberry muffins by adding ingredients such as chocolate chips, and baking them in a large pan. They aren't blueberry muffins when baked. They are still good, but they are not blueberry muffins. It is the same with following the responsibilities of Teams: if you decide *not* to write your answers to the monthly study topic as couple, then you



Gail McLaughlin and Nancy German enjoy a break at the Pittsburgh Sector Day.

are changing the format that has been proven to work for almost 50 years.

Bob spoke on "Marriage and Eucharist." He clearly explained the characteristics of the two Sacraments: Eucharist and Marriage. Both are active channels of God's grace; both a free; both are total & unconditional; both are faithful and both are life-giving. Those five characteristics link Eucharist and Marriage in a beautiful and most glorious manner. In conclusion, Bob pointed out that in order to fulfill the awesome responsibility to be witness and bearers of the love of Christ to all in the same way as Jesus was a reflection of the Father, married couples need to receive the Eucharist as often as possible to receive the strength in living out their vocation in the world today.

Father Bob McCreary special guest at Pittsburgh Sector Day

Fourteen couples from both the Pittsburgh North and South sectors attended the recent Sector day on Saturday, March 17. Held at Kearns Spirituality Center in McCandless Township, the day included lectures, lunch and mass. The featured speaker was Frank Yerpoli, who has taught/lectured on the Bible for the past 35 years.

Frank chose to concentrate on two passages from the gospels of Mark and Luke. The morning session concentrated on Jesus' miracle with the blind men in Mark. The focus was on the connection between physical sight and spiritual sight.

The afternoon was devoted to Luke and the story of the prodigal son. Frank included many historical references which helped put the study in the perspective of the times. All left with a whole new appreciation of the Bible and were excited to reread these passages with a new insight.

The group was treated to a special guest speaker, Fr. Bob McCreary, who was the catalyst in creating the TOOL movement in Pittsburgh, Minnesota, Wash-

Regional Reports

ington, D.C and the Cleveland areas. Fr. Bob spoke of the importance of Teams both to the laity and the priesthood. He provided valuable commentary on the TOOL meeting, connection to the family and propagation of the movement.

Couples were broken up into groups to share on questions Fr. Bob provided. The groups were chosen so that couples were not with couples from their own team. One of the aims of the Sector Day was for couples of the Sector to get to know each other.

We concluded with a prayer and a shared meal with many wonderful dishes. The next combined Sector event will be a picnic in June. •

Thoughts and happenings from the Midwest Region

BY ED & ANNE FRANCO
MIDWEST REGIONAL COUPLE

Greetings from Michigan! We would like to share with you a few events that have been happening in the Midwest Region that you might want to consider for your sectors.

In northern Michigan, where the winters are long and cold, the Petoskey teams enjoyed a Fun Night in February, gathering for cards and games. As many couples as possible will attend a weekend retreat in late March, a Petoskey sector tradition.

The Detroit teams gathered in November for an evening of prayer followed by a Square Dance. Musicians, led by Walt Romano (one-half of Detroit's Sector Couple), led us in a half-hour of prayer through music. A professional caller arrived, got us all to our feet for a couple of hours of lively dancing – a great way to get to know couples in other teams!

Teams growth: The Spirit is moving!

In the Northern Ohio Sector, our newest sector, formed in the fall of 2005, there are two teams in piloting in Toledo, with the

possibility of another soon. Thank you, Theresa and Chuck Weber and Debi and Rick Allen, for taking on these two teams as their Pilot Couples.

Granville, Ohio, in the southern part of the state, also has two teams in piloting. We are grateful to Barb and Scott Scholten and Sharon and Dave Shallenberger who are their Pilot Couples.

And in South Bend, Indiana, there are also two teams about to finish their piloting period. Our sincere thanks to Mary and Ed Quiett and Kathy and Will Braniff, their pilot couples.

Sixteen Teams members and one priest from our region were able to attend the International Gathering in Lourdes in September. We returned renewed, refreshed and more determined than ever to share the good news about Teams. We en-

courage all of you to make the effort to bring your families, or come yourselves to the National Conference in July. If you can't come, please try to send at least one couple from your team. It will really make a difference in your life! The love and enthusiasm and new ideas that come from sharing with others in Teams can only be experienced by being there. We look forward to meeting you this summer! •



Anne and Ed Franco, Midwest Regional Couple (left), enjoying a visit with members of the two teams in Bloomington, Indiana.

SHUFFLING IN THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION

BY JOHN & CAROLYN LYMAN
MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL COUPLE

The three sectors in the Maryland, Washington, DC suburbs came together for a Teams Shuffle meeting on March 11th. The meeting, held at St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, was hosted by the Washington 8 team and was attended by over 70 Teams members. This annual Lenten gathering offers an opportunity to meet others in a team setting and to share a team meeting with others outside of our own team. Each couple was arbitrarily assigned to a “new” team that did not include any of their own members. At each table an RC was assigned and the meeting was conducted similar to a regular team meeting. All shared from the “pot-luck buffet” table which provided an opportunity to sample many new dishes and desserts.

Fr. John Farrelly, OSB gave a spiritual reflection on the growth of Teams and our call to evangelize the movement. Each “table team” was then asked to reflect and to share on this call and what our response might be. The table discussions were later shared with the larger group. Many suggestions were offered to encourage and support new members, especially younger couples.

It was noted that this particular gathering was attended by a large percentage of “senior” Teams members and that Teams in the area does not have many second generation couples. It was suggested that we might start by evangelizing our own married children. As we concluded, one member challenged each couple to invite at least two new couples this year to a Teams information meeting.

The Philadelphia Sector celebrated its first Sector Day on February 10, 2007. Teams couples gathered to hear Fr. Paul Dressler, OFM Cap, chaplain of the Philadelphia 1 Team, share his thoughts

Fr. Dressler invited couples to seek God in the every-day and in the present moment.

Kevin and Bridget Hughes, Philadelphia’s Sector Couple, also shared their

(8), Sarah (6), and Elizabeth (4). They have been in Teams for seven years and are excited about spreading the movement more widely in the Philadelphia area, where it has really begun to grow



Teams gather for a group shot at the Washington-Maryland area sectors Team Shuffle in March.

reflections on the joys and struggles of couple and family prayer. Noting the up-and-down cycles of praying together, Kevin and Bridget spoke of the importance of remembering that God’s presence doesn’t depend on our ‘feeling spiritual.’ Faithfulness to praying together, in the ‘highs’ and the ‘lows,’ will

bring renewal to a couples’ prayer. John and Carolyn Lyman, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Couple, traveled over a hundred miles to share the day with the new Sector and install the Hugheses as Sector Couple. “It was like a little retreat,” said Carolyn Lyman, “What a great opportunity before Lent!”

Kevin and Bridget Hughes have been married for eleven years. Kevin teaches theology and spirituality at Villanova University, and Bridget is a potter and stays at home with their three daughters, Rachel

in the last few years. “We always had a vision of our marriage as a chance to do ministry together,” says Bridget. “We felt we could serve God better as a couple than as single people. And Teams has been a great opportunity to do just that.”



Carolyn & John Lyman, Mid-Atlantic Regional Couple and Bridget & Kevin Hughes, inaugural Sector Couple for the new Philadelphia Sector.

on “The Spirituality of Surrender.” Through a rich feast of teachings from the Church Fathers to present-day psychologists and spiritual directors,

What are you waiting for?

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Register now.

Growing New Teams in the Southeast

BY ED & SUSAN KLEIN
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL COUPLE

The Southeast Region's activities have centered in the Tampa Bay area. On January 6, 2007, a 12th Night Celebration was held. It included a con-celebrated Mass in Christ the King Church with Rev. William Swengros as main celebrant and homilist, dinner, dessert and coffee, and a talk by Rev. Charles Yost, our Regional Chaplain, on "Simple Prayer." We had discussion groups with three assigned questions on conjugal spirituality. The event was attended by 154 people. The Fort Myers 4 Team drove up for the event, two couples from Long Island who winter in Punta Gorda/Port Charlotte came up, and the Spring Hill Teams came down

to provide the music. A great time was had by all!

In March an organizational meeting with representatives from all teams was held to develop an administrative structure for the Tampa Bay area. A day of recollection on the Theology of the Body put on by Rev. Paul Pecchie and organized by South Tampa 1 was also held.

There is exciting news in Jacksonville area as well; they have four new teams; one just finished piloting in Jacksonville and the others are in piloting--two in Palm Coast and one in Orange Park. •



A Lourdes reunion – Rev. Charles Yost, Southeast Regional Chaplain and Ed and Marie Sconzo (left) from Teams in Long Island were on the same "Mini-Team" in Lourdes. The Sconzos were visiting Florida with fellow team members Arlene and Al Cortese (right).



Judye and Roger Valliere from Vienna 08 demonstrate that communication can be more than words.

Teams couples from throughout Northern Virginia (Coastal Region) gathered on February 24 for their annual Day of Enrichment. This year's speaker, Dr. William Commins, a licensed social worker who specializes in family counseling, provided attendees with thoughts, tips, and exercises on couple communication. Couples had the chance, too, at mid-day Mass to communicate with God – the third partner in our marriages.



Speaker William Commins related communication to couple spirituality with a number of thought- (and fun-) provoking exercises.

PRAYING THE MAGNIFICAT

By Father Hilary Hayden

A PRAYER?

Many find the Magnificat hard to pray. It is not addressed directly to God in a personal way. Jesus is never mentioned. While it speaks of what God has done in a seemingly distant past, it makes no petitions for the present. How can I pray that?

If this is such a difficult prayer we may wonder why it is used daily in the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayer of the Church. It is the climax of Evening Prayer, or Vespers. Why has this prayer had such a prominent role for so many centuries?

The answer lies in understanding where the Magnificat comes from in the Bible and in seeing how it is used there. If we can adjust our “spiritual sights” to this biblical perspective we may find great richness and inspiration in this difficult prayer.

GIVE YOURSELF A CHRISTMAS PRESENT!

The Christmas Story is found in the Gospels of St Luke and St Matthew. Here we want to focus on the first two chapters of St Luke. Give yourself the gift of reading these two chapters very thoroughly. It will be a great help if you have a copy of the new American Bible and read the explanatory notes for these chapters. This may be hard work, but what a gift it is to go deeper

into the meaning of the birth of Jesus for our lives. Familiarity with the text is the beginning of praying the Scripture. Courage!

THE CONTEXT OF THE MAGNIFICAT

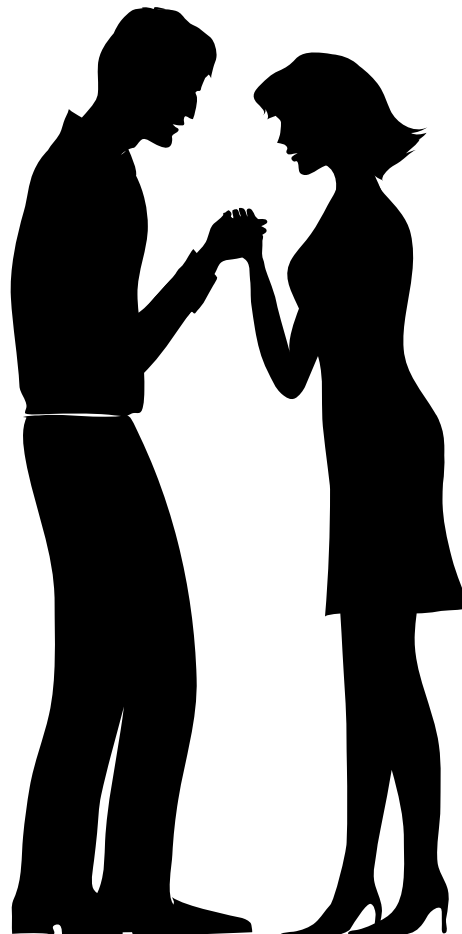
We have all had the experience of misinterpreting something said when it is separated from the conversation of which it is or was a part. That whole is what we call “context.” The Evangelist Luke is a master artist as we can see from the way he tells, in chapter I of his

Gospel, the story of the preliminaries to the birth of Jesus. We have to see how the Magnificat fits into the story.

We can understand the “context” in a much broader sense. On one hand Luke is writing in a tradition, the tradition of the dealings of God with Israel, the written form of which we call the Old Testament. His mind is saturated with this tradition, these writings. On the other hand he is writing about 70 years after the birth of Jesus. He looks back on these events as a Christian believer, with a faith and a vision that were only possible after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit to all who believe. He had nothing like the documentation that George Weigel had in his recent massive biography of John Paul II. The Gospels are faith documents, written in faith to proclaim the mystery of Jesus. They are historical in that they describe events that happened at given moments in space and time. But the religious purpose of the Gospels gives them their unique shape. We need to be aware of the conventions used by sacred writers. In many respects they differ from the very precise methods used by historians today.

THE STORY OF TWO BIRTHS

In chapter one St Luke entwines the stories of how the births of John the Baptist and Jesus came about. “In the days of Herod, King of Judea” (v. 5) the priest Zechariah was performing



his service in the innermost part of the Temple. The angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he had found favor with God. He and his barren wife Elizabeth are to have a son in their old age, and they are to call him John. Zechariah is incredulous and Gabriel tells him he will be dumb until his message is fulfilled. Zechariah returns home and a child is conceived.

In Elizabeth's sixth month Gabriel appears to Mary, "a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph" (v. 26), telling her that the Lord is with her. Mary was greatly troubled at his greeting but Gabriel tells her not to fear, for she has found favor with God. She will bear a son to be called Jesus. Gabriel describes his great destiny. Mary asks how can this be as she is a virgin. Gabriel tells her, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35). Moreover, her relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son, "for nothing is impossible with God" (v.

37). Mary makes her great assent, "Behold I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Then Mary set out to visit Elizabeth, in a town not far from Jerusalem. When Mary greets Elizabeth, Elizabeth's child leaps in her womb.

Elizabeth responds, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed in the fruit of your womb ... Blessed are you who believed that what was

spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" (vv. 42, 45).

Mary's response to Elizabeth is a song or canticle that we call the Magnificat. The chapter goes on with the story of the birth of John the Baptist. At John's circumcision he is named "John." Zechariah's speech is restored. He then utters a song or canticle that we call the "Benedictus," the first word of its Latin translation. Chapter two tells the very familiar story of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem.

MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE

The immediate context of this song is the encounter of Mary and Elizabeth. Elizabeth knows (how?) the great thing that has happened to Mary. She gives Mary a triple blessing. Would we expect that Mary would then bless Elizabeth? She does not do so, but rather blesses and thanks the Lord. Why this awkwardness in the continuity of the story? We'll come back to that but first let us think about Luke's purpose in putting this text in this place.

This song of praise is a reflection on the meaning of the Incarnation for Mary and for us. It links this event to the reality of the Gospel as seen in Luke's perspective. How?

Mary begins by expressing joy and praise for "God my savior" (vv. 46, 47). She goes on to express the reasons for her great joy. In verse 48 and 49 she describes the reversal of her situation, from lowliness to exaltation. Verse 50 begins a reflection on the meaning of the event in a wider context, God's mercy on "all who fear him." Verses 51-53 tell of God's merciful reversal of people's situation in past

and present. In the final verses (54 and 55) the coming of Jesus is seen as God's "taking Israel by the hand" as God fulfills the promises made to Abraham.

Here is an interpretation by Luke Timothy Johnson:

"Here Mary is made the representative if not the personification of Israel. The mercy shown her reflects and exemplifies the mercy shown to the people ... We notice that the epithets applied to God in the song are attributes as well of the son she is carrying. God is called "Lord" and "Savior" and "Holy." So Jesus has already been called "holy" (v. 34) and "lord" (v. 43), and will shortly be termed "savior" as well (2:11).

"As with name, so with function. God reverses human status and perception: in a downward movement he scatters the arrogant, pulls down the mighty, sends the rich away empty. But God also, in an upward movement, exalts the lowly, fills the hungry, and takes the hand of Israel. Precisely such a reversal is announced by Jesus in his Beatitudes and woes (6:20-26), and is enacted by him in the narrative ministry."

Two great themes in the Magnificat are "mercy" (see verses 50, 54) and "reversal." Mercy is an important aspect of God's self-revelation at the Covenant of Sinai. God enters into a personal relationship with the people, marked by the covenant virtues of steadfast love and fidelity. "Mercy" translates the Hebrew word for God's covenantal steadfast love. That love is realized in a blinding way in the coming of Jesus and the salvation he brings.

Reversal is harder to understand. As we shall see, reversal is prominent in the Old Testament sources of the



Magnificat. It means that God's way of dealing with us is surprising and often turns upside down our civilized sense of human values. Reversal has to do with God's presence, power and purpose in our lives. The Magnificat tells us that God has no part or influence. Reversal is expressed in the strong images of tossing rulers off their thrones and exalting the lowly; filling the hungry with good things, sending the rich away empty. Remembering that this is poetry, what do these images mean to us? The quotation above suggests that the Magnificat anticipates Luke's presentation of the Beatitudes, a blessing on "you poor" and woe upon "you rich." Did Luke have a prejudice against wealth as such? Surely not, but the teaching is strong that wealth and power can be idols, ends in themselves such that God cannot be God for us.

God's intention is expressed by verbs in the past tense in verses 51-54. Is God less active in the present than God was in the time of Moses and the Covenant, or the time of Jesus? If God is God the answer must be no. Our faith calls us to be cooperators in God's concern for the poor. And this is not from simple humanitarian feeling, but as part of God's plan for working in the present for the salvation of humanity.

THE MAGNIFICAT: SHAPE AND SOURCE

The Magnificat is a hymn of praise. It is not directed to God in the second person, it does not have petitions. In shape it is much like those psalms that praise the Lord. For example, Psalm 145 begins,

I will extol you, my God and king,
I will bless your holy name forever.

The whole psalm is similar in content to the Magnificat.

Must we believe that after Elizabeth's greeting Mary took a deep breath and uttered this prayer? In the work cited above Johnson suggests that Luke is using a convention common to ancient historians. To bring out the meaning of a situation the writer puts a speech in the mouth of a person. We have it from high Church authority that such a convention in no way contradicts the divine inspiration of the passage or the Gospel.

We have seen that the Magnificat does not seem to flow directly from Mary's meeting with Elizabeth. If you examine the two texts which follow you will see a comparison of the Magnificat with Hannah's song in the First Book of Samuel. Other phrases in the Magnificat are quotations from or allusions to other Old Testament texts. We can say that it is a mosaic of such quotations. It seems like Luke has fashioned from the tradition a new hymn expressing the new reality revealed by Jesus. The Magnificat then has a strong continuity with the Old Testament. Jesus is fulfilling the promises "to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever" (v. 55).

PRAYING THE MAGNIFICAT

Compared to Zechariah the priest with official duties in the Temple, Mary was an insignificant person, a young betrothed woman living in an insignificant village. As Johnson says, "She is among the most powerless people in her society: she is young in a world that

values age; female in a world ruled by men; poor in a stratified economy.

That she should have found "favor with God" and be "highly gifted" show's Luke's understanding of God's activity as surprising and often paradoxical, almost always reversing human expectations "What of ourselves?" Mary is the First Disciple of her son, our Lord. We may think of ourselves as insignificant members of the Church of God. If we take the Gospels seriously we are all called to be disciples as Mary was and is. As disciples our role in the Church has a surprising unexpected quality. By our baptism we are as one with Christ as Mary is. We are given the Holy Spirit to direct us on our path, whatever our gifts, whatever our situation.

True disciples are ready for the great reversal brought about by Jesus. Praying the Magnificat reminds us of the great things the Lord has done for us. It encourages us to follow, as members of his Body, the way of Jesus that leads, through cross and resurrection, to the eternal life we are promised. What can we do, in the situation of the world today, to find the power, presence and purpose of God there? Think of today's idolatries of greed, injustice and oppression. The Magnificat helps us to find an answer. Let us pray the Magnificat! ►



1 Samuel 2:1-8 Hannah says:

"My heart exults in the LORD,
my horn is exalted in my God.
I have swallowed up my enemies;
I rejoice in my victory.

There is no Holy One like the
LORD;
there is no Rock like our God.

"Speak boastfully no longer,
nor let arrogance issue from your
mouths,

For an all-knowing God is LORD,
a God who judges deeds.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
while the tottering gird on
strength.

The well-fed hire themselves out for
bread,
while the hungry batten on spoil.
The barren wife bears seven sons,
while the mother of many lan-
guishes.

"The LORD puts to death and gives
life;
he casts down to the nether world;
he raises up again.

The LORD makes poor and makes
rich,
he humbles, he also exalts.

He raises the needy from the dust;
from the ash heap he lifts the
poor:

To seat them with nobles
and make a glorious throne their
heritage.

He gives to the vower his vow,
and blesses the sleep of the just.

"For the pillars of the earth are the
LORD'S,
and he has set the world upon
them."

Luke 1:46-55 Mary says:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of
the Lord;
my spirit exalts in God my savior;
For he has looked upon his lowly
handmaid.

Yes, from this day forward all gen-
erations will call me blessed.

The Almighty has done great things
for me,

holy is his name;
His mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear Him.

He has shown the power of his arm,
he has routed the proud of heart.

He has pulled down princes from
their thrones
and exalted the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good
things,
the rich sent empty away.

He has come to the help of Israel his
servant,

mindful of his mercy;
According to the promise he made
to our ancestors, to Abraham
and to his descendants forever!"

Notes:

1. Luke, Timothy Johnson, The Gospel of Luke, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp. 43-44.
2. Johnson, p. 39.

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Entering into communion with Mary

LETTER FROM
ERI SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR
MSGR. FRANÇOIS FLEISCHMANN

Dear Friends in Teams,

As I end my term of service to the International Leading Team I would simply like to suggest that you meditate on Our Lady's canticle, the Magnificat, that you are asked to pray everyday.

Saint Ambrose wrote: "May Mary's soul reside in all of us to glorify the Lord; may Mary's spirit reside in all of us to exult in God" (see Luke 2: 26); because, when we say the Magnificat, we are entering into communion with the

Mother of Jesus who guides our prayer.

Mary magnifies the Lord, she exults. Do we know how to acknowl-

edge the greatness and beauty of God who created us, a faithful and merciful God who gives his Son for the salvation of the world? Is praise the first motive of your prayer, as it was for Mary? Do you tell the Lord how joyful you are to have been called to deepen your married spirituality in Teams? Many testimonies from team members are an invitation to recognise in this practice the action

of God, my Saviour! With the memory of the Lourdes Gathering still fresh in our minds, we can sing together: The Almighty has done marvels for us!

Mary's words - that are sometimes disconcerting - proclaim that the Lord favours the humble, those who fear God (that is to say who respect and adore him), and the hungry. Is not Mary expressing there the rejection of the world's standards which the whole of the Gospel brings about? She forestalls the beatitudes and so many occasions when Jesus praises and saves the poor like the Samaritan leper and many others. May the Holy Virgin of Nazareth find us uncomplicated and welcoming of God's gift! May she help us to remain united to Jesus who has given himself totally to us in his boundless love, in order to lift us up and open to us the ways to his Kingdom of justice and peace, of love and truth.

For the Lord remembers his love and his promise that applies to all those who are called to make up the People of God. Rely on God's faithfulness, on the steadfastness of his love that animates our love. He carries us through the trials of our journey; he makes us witnesses of his Covenant which our union as husband and wife truly reflects in a society that so often ignores the greatness of marriage.

If that prayer seemed difficult to you, remember that you are saying it in union with the Mother of Christ, the Mother of humanity. And listen to those words of Father Caffarel: "I would like us, in our Teams, to nurture

a faith in the all-powerful tender care of Our Lady and that every couple should experience the trust and security that little children feel in the presence of their mother" (May 1949 Editorial).

Letters from the International Leading Team

Let us boldly sing with Mary "Jesus, your love is our light, your love is our joy." •

Letter of Orientation, 2006 – 2012

BY JOHN & ELAINE COGAVIN
INTERNATIONAL LEADING TEAM

Our recent Gathering in Lourdes was the 10th International Gathering of our Movement. At the end of all Gatherings an Orientation is proposed by the Movement which sets out the priorities for the following six years.

These ‘Orientations’ are defined from the observations of the realities and needs of couples, and provide a common shared direction for all the members (Guide of Teams of Our Lady 2001).

The Orientation

To determine the Orientation for 2006–2012 it was decided to listen to the voice of the Movement from all corners of the world, to truly reflect the signs of our times and the needs of the couples in the Movement today.

During autumn 2002, the International Leading Team proposed to all the Regional and Super Regional couples in the world to research with their Teams the needs of the individual, the couple, the Church, and society in their areas. This was discussed and responded to by the Regional Teams throughout the world. The feedback information became the basis for a major meeting in Rome in January 2003.

There, the International Leading Team, the Super Regional Couples with the Regional Couples, Spiritual Counsellors and Newsletter editors from all parts of the world came together to discuss, to pray, to listen and offer their guidance for the future Orientation of Equipes Notre-Dame. After each session, responses from the workshop groups were synthesized and over a number of days

the direction became clear and the pillars of the Orientation were constructed.

This process we believe truly reflects the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the work of this Letter of Orientation presented at the end of our Gathering in Lourdes and which we encourage every couple and Team in the Movement to study, reflect, pray and act upon. During our time in Rome, we were blessed with a private audience with Pope John Paul II who presented to us his vision for Equipes Notre-Dame and how we should orient our Movement for the future. His guidance is also reflected in the Orientation.

The theme of the Orientation is “Teams of Our Lady, Communities of Couples, Reflecting the Love of God.” The Orientation invites each of us to respond to Jesus’ exhortation: “You must love one another, just as I have loved you.” (John 13.34)

The Message of the Orientation

The Orientation is a timely response to the needs of our time. Each of us can make it the basis for:

- A renewal of marriage based on our sacrament of love;
- A new understanding of our Team as a Church community of Faith, Hope and Love;
- Reaching out to all couples with a vision and a language which can be understood by all – a language of love;
- Opening our hearts as Pope John Paul II challenged us: “to bear witness ceaselessly to the greatness and beauty of human love.”

For each of us the Letter of Orientation presented at Lourdes contains the challenge, the invitation and the guidance

for building the Kingdom of God in our own world. We encourage you all to study this Letter, individually, as couple and as Teams.

This Orientation is further affirmed by the wonderful first Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI “God is Love” where he states that: “Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa.”

To support the Orientation, specific Study Topics have been developed. The first of these topics is based on direction from that meeting in Rome 2003, where it was seen as necessary to clarify and strengthen our own understanding of married spirituality, of our sacrament of marriage and the charism of Teams of Our Lady.

This Study Topic “Conjugal Spirituality and the Commitments of Teams of Our Lady” should now be with every Team in the world. We believe it should be studied by every Team as a step towards each one of us becoming more involved in the service of the Church, of couples and especially of the young.

As we learn together how we can fulfil our mission, another Study Topic will follow: “Teams of Our Lady, Witness to the Service of Couples.”

We hope and pray that deep reflection on this Letter of Orientation and sharing together on the Study Topics supporting it will help to progress each couple in their path to holiness while remembering the words of Father Caffarel:

“The Teams of Our Lady have as their essential aim to help couples to strive after holiness – no more, no less.” •

A Magnificat Meditation Calendar

by Michael Leary

Sunday

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit exalts in God, my Savior;

Today is a day of rest. May I use my time to reflect on the “greatness of the Lord” and all that God has done for me. When I enter into God’s presence, my soul will indeed rejoice in Him!

Saturday

He has come to the help of Israel, His servant, mindful of His mercy, according to the promise He made to our ancestors, of His mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever.

As I reflect on the Song of Mary I recall that it was Mary’s “Yes” to you, God. As I look back on the week, have I said “Yes” when you called me? How have I fared being “servant” instead of “king”? Lord, give me the strength to go through this exercise again in the coming week!

Friday

The hungry He has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.

Today I remember the hungry. Perhaps I take a small step to associate them by just eating a bit less, or contributing to a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. May I for this day become one with the hungry and appreciate their plight.

Thursday

He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.

Our society puts such emphasis on power. During my day help me, Lord, to remember that being powerful is not something to aspire to.

May I be meek in all by dealings with friends, neighbors, family and co-workers. It is in doing so that I will be lifted up and those with whom I come in contact will also be lifted up.

Monday

Because He has looked upon His lowly handmaid. Yes from this day forward all generations will call me blessed

As I begin my week, I am reminded that no matter my status in life I am truly God’s lowly servant. May I remember to treat all who cross my path today as though I am a servant of God. A life of service and humility is a life of sainthood.

Tuesday

For the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name

What has God done for me? As I go through my day, let me reflect on the talents He has given me; the challenges He has put before me. May I appreciate both as gifts from God, gifts that will make me holy.

Wednesday

And His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear Him. He has shown the power of His arm, He has routed the proud of heart.

As I go about my day, I reflect on what it means to fear God. Is it to be afraid, or to respect, to be in awe, of my God? Paradoxically when I humbly come before God with a sense of awe, when I acknowledge that I am weak, then I am strong. May today be a reminder to me of the importance of being weak and humble, so that I can put my pride behind me. Only then can I truly love my neighbor.





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