

CHARTER OF THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY - WHY?

We live in an age of contrasts. On the one hand, divorce, adultery and selfishness in marriage are increasing; yet on the other, the number of married couples who aspire to a thoroughly Christian life is growing. Some of these couples founded the Teams of Our Lady (Equipes Notre Dame).

They intend to fulfill their baptismal vows.

They are determined to live for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ.

They give themselves unconditionally to Him.

They agree to serve Him without hesitation.

They acknowledge Him as Lord and Master of their home.

They base their family life on His Gospel.

They want their love, sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony, to give glory to God, to bear witness to men that Christ has redeemed love, and to atone for sins against the marriage bond.

They aim to be missionaries of Christ at all times and in all places.

They wish to express their devotion to the Church by being always ready to respond to the requests of their clergy and bishops.

They strive to be competent in their professional calling and daily work.

They desire to turn all their activities into a collaboration with God in His work and in the service of mankind.

Because they are aware of their weaknesses and limitations,
because they experience daily how difficult it is to live up to the Christian ideal in
our modern world,
because they have unflinching faith in the power of fellowship and mutual help,
they have decided to form themselves into Teams.

The Teams are not nursery schools for respectable adults, but groups of freely committed and dedicated Christians.

No one is forced to join the Movement nor to remain in it. But those who do belong must abide by the rules.

The Meaning of the Title

The word "Team" has been chosen in preference to any other because it signifies that those who belong to the Movement have a specific aim which is jointly and vigorously pursued.

The Teams have Our Lady as their patron, thereby emphasizing their desire to serve her and affirm that there is no better guide to God than His Mother.

THE MYSTIQUE OF THE TEAMS

Fellowship and Mutual Help

1. There can be no Christian life without a living faith. There can be no living, growing faith without thought and reflection. In practice most Christian couples give up all efforts to study and to meditate, either because they fail to realize their importance, or because they lack time, guidance or training. As a result their faith remains undeveloped and weak, and their knowledge of God's will and of the Church's teaching remains superficial and incomplete. They have little understanding of the ways to achieve union with God. They are insufficiently informed about such realities of family life as marriage, love, parenthood, education and the like. As a consequence, they have little religious vitality and a very limited range of influence on others.

Couples in the Teams wish to counteract this tendency. They endeavor therefore to deepen their religious knowledge and to discover the extent of Christ's demands on them in order to live up to such demands at all times. They pursue this aim in common with the members of their Team.

2. It is not enough to know God and His teaching; there must be a personal encounter with Him. Prayer is needed in addition to study. Members of the Teams help one another not only to study but also to pray - to pray with one another and for one another.

"Again I say to you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by My Father in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My Name, there I am in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

Strengthened by Our Lord's promise, the members of the Teams try to remember Christ's presence in their midst and to pray together joyfully and confidently.

3. It is unrealistic to claim to help one's friends to lead a spiritual life if one does not first help them to overcome their worries and difficulties? This is why the Team couples help each other materially as well as spiritually, obeying the precept of St. Paul: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)

They strive to satisfy the four demands of brotherly love: **giving**, **receiving** (which is harder than giving), **asking** (which is harder still), and **knowing how to refuse** (couples will not ask for help, if they are not certain of obtaining a straightforward answer, which may be a refusal).

It is this fellowship and mutual help which should provide the Team couples with the security that so many others seek in material things alone.

Testimony and Example

The first Christians, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, "were of one heart and one mind" (Acts 4:32). The heathens, puzzled by this, used to say in wonder "see how they love one another!" and this admiration led to their conversion. In this twentieth century, has brotherly love lost the influence and the

power of attraction that it had in the early Church? The Teams of Our Lady feel that today, as before, non-believers will be won over for Christ, if they can see Christians truly loving each other and helping one another to seek God and to serve their fellowmen. Such brotherly love goes beyond mutual help and bears witness to Christ. (1)

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE TEAMS

If the mystique of Teams is to be real and lasting, there must be a rule. Mystique and rule, like body and soul, cannot be separated. The mystique should inspire the rule; the rule should protect and strengthen the Mystique.

The rule should be broad enough not to hinder the personality nor the mission of each couple, yet strict enough to prevent slackness.

The Team

Each Team is made up of four to seven married couples. One of them temporarily leads the Team and is known as the Responsible Couple. It is important not to exceed this number of couples, for if exceeded, an intimate atmosphere is difficult to achieve, and its quality is impaired.

The Monthly Meeting

Prolonged absence is detrimental to friendship which deepens through frequent contact. Hence the Team meets at least once a month, and attendance at the monthly meeting is an obligation. The following is an outline of the monthly meeting.

1. A Meal Together

It is highly desirable that the monthly meeting begin with a meal together, the host couples alternating as much as possible. There is no better way than a meal to bring people together and to establish friendly relations. After all, is it not at mealtime that families gather together, and at the Holy Eucharist that God's children are assembled? The Act of the Apostles record that early Christians "broke bread from house to house and took their meal with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46).

2. Community Prayer

By praying together we deepen our friendships, acquire a common spirit and grow conscious of the presence of Christ among His own. But this can only be achieved when the prayer lasts long enough to banish distractions and to create silence. At least fifteen minutes must be devoted to prayer before going on to the next stage of the meeting.

The couples first pool their special intentions. These petitions must be adequately presented so that everybody can truly make them his own. And it should be evident that the special intention be close to the heart of the person who expresses it.

The members also voice the intentions of the Church and petitions of current interest to the whole Catholic family (e.g., persecuted Christians, missions in distress, apostolic endeavors, and vocations).

In order that this community prayer may swell our hearts and keep them tuned to the heartbeat of the Church, Psalms, Collects, and hymns taken from the breviary and the Missal are included. They are given in the Monthly Letter.

Another part of the community prayer will allow opportunity for everyone to express aloud his meditation and thoughts inspired by the reading of the Scriptural passage in the Monthly Letter. It is good also to allow for a time of silence, so that everyone can establish a more intimate and personal contact with God.

3. Topic Discussion

If conversation is not carried on with the awareness of God's presence, it may degenerate and become superficial. Ideas will simply be bandied about and truths, which should be applied personally, will not be taken seriously. At Team meetings, couples aim at absolute sincerity and loyalty; each new truth, whenever better grasped, should be put into practice.

Discussions are only fruitful when they are carefully prepared. For this reason husband and wife should work together on the study topic and send in their written answers a few days prior to the next meeting to the couple chosen to lead the discussion. This obligation, which requires that each couple give time to serious thought and study together, has proven to be of immense value.

Mutual help on the study topic demands that all share in its preparation. In fact, mutual help is more important here than in material things. Moreover, in material things couples would hesitate to receive without giving.

The study topics are not left to the free choice of the Teams but are proposed by the Leaders of the Movement. This is not done arbitrarily but is designed to help members to acquire as complete a picture as possible to Christian thought, and initiate them into conjugal and family spirituality.

The first three years are devoted to the following basic topics: "Love and Marriage", "The Gift of Life", and "Ways to Union with God."

After these three topics, Teams have a choice of several subjects from which outlines, questionnaires, and references are also provided. Of course, each Team is free to arrange extra meetings either for further discussions or just simply to deepen friendship.

4. Sharing the News and Sharing on the Obligations

At the monthly meeting, a time, perhaps during the meal, should be set aside for sharing news of family, professional or civic interest, successes or failures, discoveries, joys and sorrows, etc.

After the community prayer, a time is also reserved for "sharing" on the obligations of the Charter. Each couple states quite frankly whether during the previous month, they have kept the obligations as laid down in the Charter. There exists, of course, a personal and intimate domain which should not be revealed on pretext of friendship. The Teams react against a certain lack of modesty - only too common in our day - which leads married couples to discuss all the problems of their conjugal life in public. But with this one reservation, the practice of "sharing" and of asking for mutual help in all

simplicity is well in line with true evangelical charity. Many married couples are rescued from mediocrity, and sometimes even disaster, the day they find they no longer have to struggle alone.

Retreats and Days of Recollection

If the monthly meeting is a powerful means for each and everyone to make close relationships of Christian friendship, how much more powerful then are retreats and days of recollection? Each couple (together, if possible) must make at least one closed retreat every two years for a minimum of forty-eight hours. The year in which they do not make a retreat, they must take part in two days of recollection.

The Obligations of Each Couple

As we have seen, the married couples come to the Teams for help, but this does not dispense them from doing their utmost themselves. In order to guide and strengthen their efforts, the Teams ask couples to keep the following obligations:

1. *To Establish for Themselves a Rule of Life* which cannot be the same for everyone because of the great diversity of personalities. If there is no self-imposed rule, the religious life of the couple may easily give way to every whim and become chaotic. God has a purpose for each one of us, and such a rule of life consists of steps we decide to take in order to make our life conform to this purpose. Obviously the husband and wife each have their own independent rule.

This is not a question of multiplying one's obligations, but of defining them so as to strengthen one's purpose and avoid diversion. Guidance and advice from a priest are valuable to prevent undertaking too much or too little.

There is no obligation to reveal to one's Team the rule adopted not the manner in which it is observed. It should be noted, however, that many have found it beneficial to go this far in mutual help.

2. *To Pray Together Once a Day With Their Children*, whenever possible, because the family, as such, is bound to worship God and because community prayer has a great force.
3. *To Say Every Day the Special Prayer of the Teams of Our Lady* in union with all other members of the Teams.
4. *To Carry Out Once a Month the Duty of "Sitting Down."* This provides an opportunity for each couple to evaluate their life and the pursuit of their goal.
5. *To Study as a Couple the Monthly Study Topic*, to send in their written answers before the meeting, and to attend the meeting.
6. *To Read Every Month the Editorial* in the Monthly Letter.

7. *To Give Annually by Way of Subscription the Equivalent of One Day's Pay* for the material needs and expansion of the Movement to which the couples are partially indebted for their deeper spiritual life.
8. *To Greet and Warmly Welcome Couples from Other Teams* whenever the opportunity occurs.

The Responsible Couple

One short formula defines their role and underlines their importance: "They are the guardians of brotherly love." It is their job to see that their Team successfully lives up to the ideal of evangelical charity, and that each couple finds in the Team the help they need.

The Responsible Couples are strongly advised to prepare the monthly meeting with the Team Chaplain. And it is they who keep in contact with the Leaders of the Movement and in that way with the whole Movement.

Each month, they send a report of their Team's activity. These reports are a source of information and benefit to all the other Teams through the Monthly Letter. The reports also serve to reveal any slackness in a Team, which the Leaders of the Movement can proceed to correct. Any Team which cannot or will not cooperate will be asked to withdraw. Such discipline is necessary. How many organizations die out, slowly smothered by the weight of passive members who ought to have been asked to leave.

If the Responsible Couple is obliged to ask a couple to withdraw because of their unwillingness to observe the obligations of the Teams, the Responsible Couple should make it clear to them that, although their leaving is in the general interest, the Team's affection for them will not change. And the Responsible Couple will take care that contacts and friendly ties with them continue.

The Responsible Couple is elected by all the couples of the Team when it is first formed and subsequently before the summer vacation. The outgoing couple may be re-elected for another year of office. The Leaders of the Movement have the right to veto this election.

The Responsible Couple cannot successfully fulfill their role without recourse to prayer. This is why husband and wife undertake, unless it is impossible for some serious reason, to go to Mass once during the week and to devote ten minutes daily to prayer.

The Role of the Priest in the Team

Each Team must secure the help of a priest. No program of work can take the place of the doctrinal and spiritual support of a priest. He not only lays down principles, but he also helps the couples to find ways to put them into practice in their everyday lives. This collaboration is rewarding; the priest and the couples learn to understand, appreciate and help one another. The couples adopt the apostolic intentions of the priest, and the priest, at Mass, remembers these couples whose efforts, struggles, and aspirations he knows so well.

Starting a New Team

A new Team must be started with care. If the beginning is made too hastily without a thorough explanation of the purpose and the methods of the Movement, almost certain failure can be expected. Careful preparation is necessary; at least three meetings should be devoted to reading and discussing the Charter, under the direction of a “Pilot Couple.” The new Team may then apply for temporary admission.

After a period of no less than a year, the Team may ask to make its “commitment”. If this is granted, the members of the new Team, in the presence of a couple chosen by the Leaders of the Movement, will formally undertake to keep faithfully the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady, both in spirit and in the letter.

Admitting a New Couple to the Team

The newcomers must acquaint themselves with the Charter. The Responsible Couple or one of the Team couples will help them to study the Charter and gradually to practice the obligations. After a loyal trial of at least one year, they will ask to make their commitment. This they will do with the Team, when the other members renew their commitment.

It may be asked how such newcomers can acquire the solid grounding that the others have obtained by studying the basic subjects of conjugal and family spirituality. It is the Responsible Couple who will help them study these subjects and, if circumstances require it, will excuse them from having to answer the present study topic of their Team.

The Monthly Letter

A close liaison is essential between the Leaders of the Movement and all the other Teams, no matter how far away they may be. No less important are the friendly links between Teams, built on mutual acquaintance, fellowship, and prayer.

The Monthly Letter, sent to each couple, establishes and maintains this dual liaison-vertical and horizontal. It contains news of the Teams, a report of the most interesting experiences, the editorial (reference to which has been made earlier), the prayers for the monthly meeting, and general information.

The Liaison Couple

Although very useful, the Monthly Letter is not sufficient to ensure that the ties between the Leaders of the Movement and all the Teams be as close and as fruitful as possible.

Each Team is in the care of a Liaison Couple; the Liaison Couples are each responsible for about five Teams.

The frequent contacts of the Liaison Couples with the Leaders of the Movement enable the Leaders to pass on their directions and, at the same time, keep informed of the wishes and needs of the Teams. In this way, the Teams are linked to the Leaders of the Movement by bonds of mutual understanding and not by purely administrative chains of command.

The Leaders of the Movement

The Movement is in the care of a group of priests and couples, who form not merely an administrative body but also serve to give leadership to the entire Movement. Their mission is to keep the spirit of the Teams alive and the discipline firm.

They must live close to God in prayer and close to the Teams in sympathetic friendship.

For their part, members of the Teams should support the Leaders by their prayers and should help them by the observations and suggestions.

Couples do not consider joining the Teams of Our Lady and accepting the Charter as a goal achieved but rather as a starting point. Love is the law of the Christian couple. And Love has no limits; love knows no rest.

(1) We deliberately speak of “witness” rather than “apostolate.” Not because the members of the Teams shrink from the apostolate, but precisely because most of them are already, actively and diversely involved in numerous Catholic Action organizations, whether of a parochial, social, professional, or civic character. Their very action makes them feel the need for a strong spiritual life, and it is to deepen this life that they join the Teams. Those couples who may not yet be active in an apostolate, soon come to realize its necessity.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1947

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