

Charter of the Teams of Our Lady (1947-1977)

Why the Teams of Our Lady?

We live in an age of contrasts. On the one hand, divorces, adultery, free love and neo-malthusianism are widespread; on the other hand, a growing number of couples aspire to a thoroughly Christian life. Some of these have founded the Teams of Our Lady.

- They aspire to carry out fully their baptismal commitments,
- They want to live for Christ, with Christ, through Christ,
- They give themselves to him unreservedly,
- They intend to serve him unquestioningly,
- They acknowledge him as leader and Lord of their home,
- They make his Gospel the charter of their family,
- They want their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, to be
 - a praise to God,
 - a witness to people clearly proving that Christ has saved love
 - and a reparation for the many sins committed against marriage,
- They intend to be missionaries of Christ everywhere,
- Devoted to the Church, they want to be always ready to respond to the calls of their bishop and of their priests,
- They want to be competent in their work,
- They want to turn all their activities into a collaboration in the work of God and a service to humanity.
- Aware of their weakness and of the limits to their strength, if not of their good intentions,
- because they experience daily how difficult it is to live as Christians in a pagan world,
- and because they have unshakeable faith in the power of fraternal mutual help,
- *they have decided to form a team."*

Teams are not nursery schools for respectable adults but 'commando squads', made up of volunteers.

No one is forced to join, nor to remain in it, but whoever belongs to it must play the game honestly.

MEANING OF THE WORD 'TEAM'

The word 'team' preferred to any other, implies the idea of a precise objective, pursued actively and in common.

The Teams place themselves under the patronage of Our Lady. In so doing, they emphasise their will to serve her and affirm that there is no better guide to God than the Mother of God.

SPIRIT OF THE TEAMS

Mutual help.

1 – There can be no Christian life without a living faith. There can be no living and growing faith without study. In practice, most married Christians give up all efforts at study and meditation, for want of knowing their importance, for want also of time, guidance and training. As a result, their faith remains weak and vulnerable; their knowledge of God's ways and of the Church's teaching superficial and fragmentary. They have little knowledge of the ways to union with God. They have but little notion of the realities of family life: marriage, love, fatherhood, the upbringing of children, etc. As a result, they have little religious vitality and a very limited range of influence.

The couples of the Teams want to react against this. And so, they endeavour to deepen their religious knowledge and to discover the demands of Christ, in order to conform their life to them.

It is together, as a team, that they pursue this effort.

2 – It is not enough to know God and his teaching, there must be personal encounter with him. To study, one must add prayer. Just as we help one another to study in the Teams of Our Lady, so we help one another to pray. We pray with one another; we pray for one another.

"Again, I say to you, that if two of you consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them"(Mt. 18: 19-20).

Strengthened by the Lord's promise, the couples of the Teams strive to remember the presence of Christ among them and pray together joyfully and confidently.

3 – Is it not 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 couples of the Teams of Our Lady practice mutual help generously, as much materially as

spiritually, obeying Saint Paul's great precept: "*Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfil the law of Christ*"(Gal 6: 2).

They try to satisfy the four demands of brotherly love: *to give*, *to receive* (more difficult than giving), *to ask* (even more difficult) *and to know how to refuse* (there can be no asking with simplicity, where there is not the simplicity to refuse a service requested, if it cannot be rendered without too much difficulty).

Mutual help should provide the legitimate security that so many others expect from money.

Witness.

The Acts of the Apostles (4: 32) tell us that the early Christians "*were of one heart and one soul*". Seeing them, the pagans were surprised: "*See, how they love one another!*" and admiration often led to conversion. Has brotherly love, in this twentieth century, lost the power of influence and attraction that it had in the early days of the Church?. The Teams of Our Lady think that, today as then, non-believers will be won over to Christ if they see Christian couples truly loving one another and helping one another in seeking God and in serving their brothers and sisters. And so brotherly love, going beyond mutual help, becomes a witness.

DISCIPLINE OF THE TEAMS.

For the spirit of Teams to be alive and lasting, there has to be a rule. Spirit and rule, like body and soul, cannot be separated: the spirit must be the soul of the rule; the rule must support and protect the spirit.

The rule must be sufficiently light not to inhibit the personality and mission of each couple, but strong enough to protect against slackness.

The team.

A team is composed of four to seven couples. One of these couples is its leader. It is important not to exceed this number, beyond which an intimate atmosphere is difficult to achieve and loses in quality".

The monthly meeting.

Friendship suffers from prolonged separation; it needs regular meetings. This is why the team meets at least once a month. Attendance at the monthly meeting is obligatory². The plan of the meeting is as follows:

A Meal Together

It is very desirable to begin the monthly meeting with a meal together at the home of one or other of the couples in turn (as far as possible, of course). Man has not yet

invented anything better than a meal to bring people together and create bonds of friendship. Is it not at mealtime that the family comes together? Is it not the Eucharistic meal that gathers together the children of God? The Acts of the Apostles tell us that the early Christians “*broke bread from house to house and took their meal with gladness and simplicity of heart*” (Ac 2: 46).

Praying Together

Praying together is the outstanding way of meeting others in depth, of acquiring a common spirit and of growing aware of the presence of Christ among his own. But it only achieves this, if it is sufficiently prolonged to help people to put aside their worries and create silence. At least a quarter of an hour is devoted to praying together before the Exchange of Views.

Immediately before the prayer, the couples share their intentions. If they are to be truly adopted by all, they must be presented with sufficient details and must be seen to be close to the heart of those who express them.

Then the current intentions of the great Catholic family are evoked so that they can also be prayed for (for example: persecuted Christians, a mission in difficulty, a particular apostolic venture, recruitment to the priesthood, etc.).

For this prayer together to swell the hearts and make them beat to the rhythm of the Church, it will include psalms, collects and hymns from the breviary and from the missal. These are given in the *Letter of the Teams of Our Lady*.

Another part of the prayer consists in each member expressing aloud their thoughts and feelings inspired by the passage from Scripture given in the Letter. A time of silence must also be allowed so that each member may have a more intimate and personal contact with God.

GENERAL SHARING³ AND SHARING ON THE OBLIGATIONS.

A time must be set aside at monthly meetings (it can be during the meal) for a general sharing on matters of interest and concern affecting the family, a member's job, civic or Church involvements, successes or failures, discoveries, joys and sorrows.

After the prayer, a time is reserved to the 'sharing' on the obligations of the Charter. Each couple says quite frankly whether they have kept, during the preceding month, the obligations laid down in the Charter.

It goes without saying that there is an intimate and personal domain which it would be wrong to reveal under pretext of friendship. Members of Teams react against the unashamed openness – all too widespread today – of couples who do not hesitate to reveal to everybody the problems of their married life. Barring this one reservation, how

truly in keeping with Evangelical charity it is to share in this way and to call, in all simplicity, on brotherly mutual help. How many couples are saved from mediocrity, or even from failure, the day they no longer have to struggle alone.

EXCHANGE OF VIEWS⁴.

Conversations not carried out in the presence of God are liable to be superficial. Ideas are bandied about and hearts refuse to be open to truths that call for transformation. Team members endeavour to be absolutely loyal: every truth that is better grasped must become part of one's life.

Exchanges of views are fruitful only if they are prepared. The spouses must reflect together on the study topic and send, a few days before the meeting, their comments in writing to the couple chosen to lead the next exchange of views. This obligation of a time of reflection together each month has proved very fruitful to them.

Mutual help in study demands that the exchange of views be prepared by all. Preparation in this case is even more necessary than for material mutual help in which people would have qualms about receiving without giving to others.

- This 'General Sharing' is wider than the sharing of news. It is called 'Mise en commun' in the French text of the Charter and is a reference to Acts 4: 32: "*They had everything in common*"
- This 'Exchange of views' is not a discussion or debate but a sharing of thoughts on the study topic.

The topics for study are not left to the free choice of teams. They are provided by the Leading Team

- not out of arbitrary authoritarianism – but in order to help couples to acquire as complete a concept of christian thinking as possible, and to initiate them to an authentic married and family spirituality.

The first three years are devoted to fundamental topics: love, marriage, married spirituality.

After these three years, teams can choose from several series of subjects for which study outlines, questionnaires and references are provided⁵.

It goes without saying that teams can organise extra meetings, either for additional exchanges of views or, quite simply, to deepen friendship.

The obligations of each couple.

Couples, as we have seen, come to Teams seeking help. This does not absolve them from making some efforts. It is to give direction and support to their efforts that the Teams ask their members to observe the following obligations.

1. *To set themselves a rule of life* (the great diversity of couples does not allow the same rule to be proposed to all). Without a rule of life, the religious life of the spouses may easily be governed by the whim of the moment and become chaotic. This rule of life (it goes without saying, that each spouse has his/her own rule), consists in nothing else than determining the efforts that one intends to impose on oneself in order to respond better to the will of God.

It is not a question of multiplying one's obligations but to define them in order to strengthen the will and avoid drifting. Advice and guidance of a priest are desirable in order to guard against doing too much or too little. There is no obligation to reveal to one's team the rule adopted nor the manner it is observed. It must be noted, however, that some have benefited from extending mutual help thus far.

to pray together and with their children once a day, as far as possible, because the family, as such, owes worship to God and prayer together has great power,

1. *to say the prayer of the Teams of Our Lady daily, in union with all the couples of the*
1. *to practice once a month the 'duty of sitting-down'. It is the occasion for each couple to review their life.*
1. *to study together as a couple the topic for study and send in their comments in writing before the meeting – and to attend the meeting.*
1. *to read the editorial of the Letter of the Teams*
1. *to make every year a residential retreat of at least 48 hours, husband and wife together as far as Only one retreat is obligatory prior to the team's commitment.*
2. *to give each year – by way of contribution – the fruits of one of their working days, in order to provide for the material needs and expansion of the movement to which they owe in part their spiritual enrichment.*
3. *to contact and welcome, with a fraternal heart, couples from other teams, when the occasion arises*

STRUCTURE OF THE TEAMS

The Responsible Couple⁶.

A short formula defines the role of the Responsible Couple and underlines its fundamental importance: 'they are responsible for brotherly love'. It is their responsibility to see that the team succeeds in evangelical charity and that each couple find in it the help they need.

They are strongly advised to prepare the monthly meeting with the team chaplain.

It is the Responsible Couple who provide the liaison with the leaders of the Movement and, through them, with all the Teams of Our Lady.

They send each month a report on the activities of their team to their 'Liaison Couple'. These reports make it possible for the Letter of the Teams to make every team benefit from the experience of other teams. It brings to light – should it occur – the slackness of a team. The Leading Team can then deal with it. Any team that does not want to play the game loyally, or cannot do so, is asked to leave the Movement. This is a necessary discipline: how many movements collapse, slowly smothered under the weight of inert members who have not been asked in time to leave.

When the Responsible Couple are forced to ask a couple who do not observe the commitments of the Teams to leave, they must make them understand that, although the general interest requires their departure, the affection the team has for them is in no way changed. They will ensure that contacts and bonds of friendship with them remain close.

The Responsible Couple is chosen by the members of the team at its foundation and subsequently at the end of the team year⁷. The couple who were Responsible Couple for the previous year can be chosen again. The Leading Team retain the right of veto on their appointment.

The Responsible Couple will only fulfil their role well if they have recourse to prayer. This is why both spouses commit themselves to attend mass on one weekday (barring serious obstacles) and to practice ten minutes of contemplative prayer each day.

The role of the priest in the team.

Each team must secure the help of a priest. No programme of work can, in truth, replace the doctrinal and spiritual contribution of a priest. He not only outlines principles, but also helps couples to seek to translate them into their life. This is a fruitful collaboration. Priest and couples learn to understand, to value and to support one another: the couples adopt the great apostolic intentions of the priest and the priest remembers at mass these couples whose efforts, struggles and desires he knows so well.

Launching of a new team.

Launching a new team is a delicate matter. Too hasty a start, without the objectives and methods having been clearly stated, ends almost necessarily in failure. Careful preparation is necessary and a minimum of three meetings must be devoted to reading and explaining the Charter, under the guidance of the 'Pilot Couple'.

After approximately a year, the couples of the new team are invited to commit themselves. They will then, in the presence of a representative of the Leading Team,

commit themselves to observe loyally the Charter of the Teams of Our Lady, both in the spirit and letter.

Admitting a new couple to a team.

The new couple must acquaint themselves with the Charter. They will study the Charter with the help of the Responsible Couple or of another couple in the team. They will then progressively endeavour to practice the obligations. After a loyal trial of approximately a year, they will commit themselves with the team when the other couples renew their commitment.

How is one to give the new couple the formation acquired by the couples of the team through the study of the basic study topics? It is for the Responsible Couple to help them to study these basic subjects, even if it means excusing them from answering the questionnaires in the topic being currently studied by the team.

The Letter of the Teams.

Close contact is necessary between the Leading Team and teams generally – however distant these might be. Brotherly links between the teams themselves, based on mutual acquaintance, mutual help and prayer is no less important.

The *Letter of the Teams*, sent to each couple, establishes and maintains a double link: vertical and horizontal. In it are to be found news of teams, reports on the most interesting experiences, the editorial (mentioned above), the texts of prayers for the monthly meeting, information, etc.

Liaison Couples, Sectors, Regions.

Although very useful, the Letter of the Teams, on its own, is not sufficient to ensure that the ties between the Leading Team and teams generally are as close and fruitful as desirable. It is for the various levels of leadership in the Movement to make them so.

Each team is entrusted to a Liaison Couple (each Liaison Couple looks after three to five teams). Furthermore, teams are grouped in “Sectors” and the Sectors in “Regions”. Sector Couples and Regional Couples are responsible for the smooth running of the teams entrusted to them.

Through frequent mutual contacts, leaders at various levels pass on the motivation they receive from the Leading Team and keep the latter informed of the desires and needs of teams. Thanks to them, the relationship between teams and the Leading Team have a note of brotherly cordiality instead of being purely administrative.

The Leading Team.

The Leading Team is composed of priests and couples. It is not simply an administrative organ, but the motive force of the whole widespread body of teams. Its

mission is to keep the spirit of Teams alive and its discipline strong. Its members must live close to God in prayer and close to teams through attentive friendship.

For their part, members of Teams must give it support by their prayers and help it by their comments and suggestions.

Couples do not look upon their entry into the Teams of Our Lady and their acceptance of the Charter as an end, but as a starting point. The law of the christian home is love, and love has no limits – it knows no rest

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