

TEAMS OF OUR LADY

International Leading Team

THE PRIEST COUNSELLOR
AND THE SPIRITUAL
ACCOMPANIMENT
IN TEAMS OF OUR LADY



March 2017

DOCUMENT OFFICIEL END

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Presentation

This document was the result of deep reflection by both the ERI and the International College that took place between 2015 and 2017. Without ending a discussion that started between 1990 and 1993; a long development period on the subject of spiritual accompaniment in Teams of Our Lady that culminated in the publication of an official document called "The Priest Counsellor" which, apart for some reflections on the priest's presence in the team, contained the first guidance about "what to do regarding the lack of priests?" In 2006 the ERI approved a new official document called "The Priest Spiritual Counsellor" which continued the reflection on the priest's role in the team, and explained the necessary conditions for Spiritual Advisors who were not priests.

Since then, some Super-Regions have developed valuable experience about the practice of spiritual advice in Teams and have continued to pass on to the ERI many issues; above all the desire to update the reflections and guidelines that have been in place to date. The steps which marked this process were the following: a report from the Brazil Super-Region delivered to the ERI at the Bordeaux College (2013), a Communication from the ERI at the Rome College (September 2015), the presentation of the draft of a new official document at the Swanwick College (July 2016) opening up a consultation period in the International College and final approval by the ERI of the same document at the ERI meeting in Munich in March 2017.

So, while inviting us to continue our reflection, in the latter document **the ERI updates and defines the Movement's official position about "The Priest Spiritual Counsellor and the Spiritual Advisor in Teams of Our Lady"**.

- It further deepens knowledge of the priestly ministry and establishes the need for a personal priestly model in each team.
- It stresses the richness of the exchange and mutual support between couples and priests.
- It provides guidance about the qualities and the way to ensure this spiritual accompaniment by both priests and other advisors
- It updates the conditions for the service of Spiritual Advisors who are not priests.
- It proposes appropriate organizational action, and formation sessions which should be provided for Priest Spiritual Counsellors and other Spiritual Advisors, for the purpose of keeping faith with our charism and ensuring quality support for couples in their path to holiness.
- It points out the importance of spiritual accompaniment for all teams.

We cannot finish this introduction without expressing the Movement's profound gratitude to Priest Spiritual Counsellors and Spiritual Advisors, who together with us, couples and teams, form active communities reflecting Christ's Love.

Paris, 31st March 2017

Tó and José MOURA-SOARES
International Leading Team - ERI

Foreword

« In the first place, then, I encourage all couples to put into practice, and to live in discernment, with constancy and perseverance, the spirituality that Teams of Our Lady follow. I think that the proposed “Endeavours” are truly effective aides [...] I am thinking, lastly, of faithful participation in Team life, which brings to each one the richness of learning and of sharing, as well as the help and comfort of friendship. In this regard, I emphasize the mutual fruitfulness of this encounter experienced with a priest who supports you. I thank you, dear couples of Teams of Our Lady, for being a support and encouragement to the ministry of your priests, who always find priestly joy, fraternal presence, emotional balance and spiritual paternity in their contact with your teams and your families. »

Pope FRANCIS¹, 2015

The Spiritual Counsellor’s place and role in a team has been studied in a number of very interesting texts which can be found in Teams of Our Lady’s records².

At every stage and everywhere in our Movement’s history, those in positions of responsibility have always stated that **the support of a priest in each Team of Our Lady is an essential feature of the Movement which is part of the “initial dynamism”³**. This belief is based not only on fidelity to the 1947 Charter, but, above all, on lived experience of the meaning and importance of the priest’s mission in the Christian community that is the team.

1. Speech to Teams of Our Lady, Vatican – Clementine Room, 10th September 2015.

2. Cfr. Chapter *Bibliography*.

3. Cfr. F. Caffarel: Conference to the Movement Responsible Couples: “*The founding charisma of Teams of Our Lady*”. Chantilly, 1987.

Parallel to this deep belief, **the lack of priests was a possibility that was already foreseen from the first stages of the Movement**. Nowadays, and in some parts of the world, this situation is commonplace and is happening more and more.

According to the 2017 statistics, there are 12,909 teams and 9,014 priests in the world: 2 counsellors for every 3 teams, although in certain zones this proportion drops to 1 counsellor for every 2 teams. The number of Spiritual Advisors, who are not priests, is growing (808, that is 8.2% of the total number) and is especially significant in the America and Eurasia Zones.

Faced with this situation, the Movement has continued its discernment on this subject in order to be able to respond as best it can **to the needs of the couple and to the Movement’s evangelizing mission, to remain faithful to its charism**.

This discernment gave rise in 2016 to the ERI document: “The Priest Spiritual Counsellor”. This reflects on the presence of the priest Spiritual Counsellor in a team, and gives some practical guidelines about how to deal with his eventual absence, highlighting among these (as an example) the possibility of having a Spiritual Advisor who is not a priest. Since then some Super Regions have accumulated enough experience to enable us to deepen and update these guidelines even more. This is the purpose of this document.

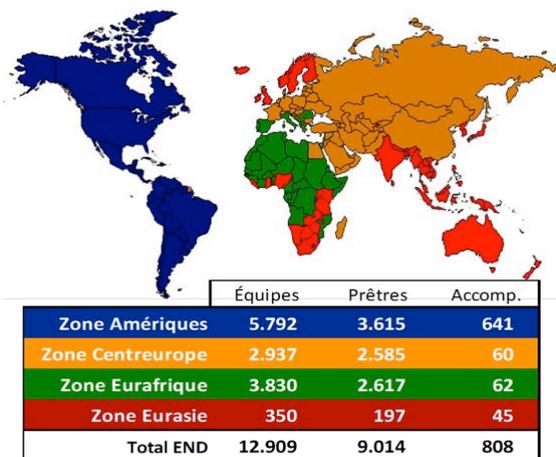
We cannot forget the times the Church is experiencing today, within the framework of the most recent synods and the **exhortations of Pope Francis** (*Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*).

The characteristics of the modern world, the needs of couples and families, reinforce the idea that **spiritual assistance is of positive benefit for both new and established teams**, who want to walk with Christ towards the Father. “*In this world ordained ministers and all other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Jesus’s near proximity as well as his personal gaze*” awakening confidence, openness of heart and an inclination to grow. Spiritual advice should lead couples to get closer and closer to God.⁴

4. Cfr. Pope Francis: *Exh. Ap. EVANGELII GAUDIUM (169-173) and Exh. Ap. AMORIS LAETITIA (204)*.

Following the International Gathering of Regional Responsible Couples (Rome 2015) the Movement shares a unanimous conviction that Teams of Our Lady is needed more than ever by couples and families on all five continents and **consequently the lack of priests should not prevent the creation of new teams in any location.**

The express appeal to mission made by the Pope on his speech to Teams of Our Lady (Rome, 2015) demands that we put to work the riches of our charism, amongst which one of the greatest is the communion formed between priests, spiritual advisors and couples in the service of the kingdom of God. *“Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelisation. (...) This is clearly distinct from every kind of intrusive accompaniment or isolated self-realization. Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples”*.⁵



5. Pope Francis: Exh. Ap. EVANGELII GAUDIUM (173).

1

The accompaniment of priests: an essential feature of Teams of Our Lady

«One day, during our prayer, a woman addressed God in these terms: “Lord, we thank you for the marriage of our two sacraments: priesthood and marriage”. I think this is a very deep insight and is part of this initial dynamism, the covenant between Priesthood - which represents the Church, the thinking of the Church - and couples - who bring their riches, their needs, their questions - ... a dialogue necessary if the thinking of the Church is not to become disconnected from real life, but rather is to seek to respond not only to the couples’ needs but also to their inspiration. And throughout the whole of Teams’ lives, this marriage of the two sacraments has been very important to us.»

P. Henri CAFFAREL⁶, 1987

6. Conference to the Movement’s Responsible Couples: “The founding Charism of Teams of Our Lady”. Chantilly, 1987.

Since the first meetings in 1939, the presence of the priest has always been an essential feature of Teams of Our Lady.

Throughout the Movement's history, the guideline followed in the key documents is clear and coherent: **what we have wanted from the beginning has been the spiritual counsellor to be a priest in his priestly ministry.**

Inside the "*small Church*" that the team is, lies the spiritual wealth which derives from the two types of priesthood: the priestly ministry and the priesthood of the faithful. Furthermore, in many instances the Priest Spiritual Counsellor lives the journey with couples "**as a fellow traveller**" in joy and happiness. He is welcomed as a member of the family; Teams are for him a source of comfort, inspiration and strength.

1.1. The texts

- **The Charter** (1947) says in the chapter about 'the teams' structures':

«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.»

- The supplement to the Charter's: "**What is a Team of Our Lady?**" (1976) in the chapter "A Christian Community" adds:

«The priest who "ensures that Christ be present as Head of the community" (Bishops' Synod, 1971), helps the community by being a constant reminder of its true goal.»

- The ERI document concerning **The Priest Spiritual Counsellor** (1993) also states:

«The Movement has always sought priests to be counsellors to teams. This a well-established tradition and a very strong commitment.»

The title "Counsellor" which had always been used in Teams was officially adopted in this same document.

«This term can result in a problem. It does not explain the most fundamental role of the priest in a team (his priestly presence). But it was chosen in preference to chaplain, to show the team's free choice, rather than nomination by an ecclesiastic authority.»

- **The Guide to Teams of Our Lady** (2001) mentions Teams' difficulties in finding Priests-Spiritual Counsellors (chapter VII, B-b):

«Each team must obtain the help of a priest [...] If it is not possible for a team to obtain the help of priest-spiritual counsellor, it is the responsibility of the Sector Couple to ensure that it has a temporary spiritual counsellor in keeping with the policy of the movement.»

Following on from this, the Movement has avoided any ambiguity in terminology given that the term "Counsellor" could be commonly used for other people who exercise the role of counselling. **It was decided to restrict the terminology "Counsellor" to priests and the word "Advisor" for those people who though not being priests assume the task of spiritual accompaniment in Teams.**

- **Canonical Statutes of Teams of Our Lady** (2002), revised in 2014, mention Priests Spiritual Counsellors in articles 5 and 7

"Composed of 5 to 7 couples, (the team) is assisted by a priest "A Spiritual Counsellor" which makes evident the bond with priesthood and communion with the Church".

«Priests bring to Teams the irreplaceable grace of their priesthood; they do not assume responsibility for governing; that's why they are called "Spiritual Counsellors". The Team's Priest Spiritual Counsellor is chosen by the team members, from among the priests that legitimately carry out their priestly ministry, in accordance with Canon 324 § 2.»

1.2. Holy Orders and Marriage: sacraments at the service of communion

The Catechism of the Catholic Church links the two sacraments: *"...Holy Orders and Matrimony are directed towards the salvation of others (...) They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the people of God"*⁷.

To represent the Church, three biblical images are often used in the teachings of the Magisterium: the People of God, an image used by Vatican II, to underline the visible, historical dimension of pilgrimage; Christ's Body, used by St. Paul, and predominant before the Council, showing the unity between Christ and the Church; and finally that of the Church as Christ's Spouse, an image developed in the post-Conciliar years which stresses the distinction between Christ and the Church, as it is an interpersonal union between two beings standing together as spouses do. **These three images help us to a better understanding of the relationship between the ministers of religion (above all the bishops) and the community:** in the first image of the Church, as people of God, the shepherds lead the flock. In the second image, the Church as Christ's body, the priest represents Christ, head of the body that is the Church. In the third we see Christ as the spouse of the Church. These beautiful images help us to understand the Church as a community gathered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **The Church is thus a sacrament of God's love for humankind.**

All of this wealth can be found in Teams of Our Lady, and is visible in the concrete relationship between priests and married couples.

7. Catechism of the Catholic Church (1534)

2

The priest in a Team of Our Lady: sign and presence of Christ

«I spent the last evening with some friends who had invited me to preach a retreat. I went late to my room and, when I was closing the blinds, I noticed some lights through the trees. "They have gone to their room" I thought, remembering those couples who had participated in the retreat "and this evening there will certainly be a warmer human tenderness and a greater love of God."»

It was then that an unexpected meditation came to my mind and I clearly saw the affinity between marriage and priesthood, the link which unites priest and the Christian family. How beautiful these couples are... and it is this happiness, this fullness that Christ asks his priest to sacrifice... How wonderful the gift of the disciple to his Master! How can someone who has renounced love and paternity be the one who has the power of re-igniting the flame at home? Is this a paradox? No, it is not a paradox but a mysterious correspondence between Holy Orders and Matrimony.

As a matter of fact it would be rather superficial to think that a priest refrains from founding a home because he despises love and family. It is not disdain but, dedication: he is the lamb marked for the sacrifice, so that God may bless the whole flock.»

Father Henri CAFFAREL, 1947

2.1. Father Caffarel's vision: mediation and complementarity

We all know how Father Caffarel met the first married couples. It was not the result of prior theological research; it was a gift from God to the Church: the sowing of a charism. Very soon (in 1947) Father Caffarel deepened the meaning of this meeting based on the mystery and the mission of priests, something which started that "Spring afternoon" when, while ascending to heaven, Jesus transmitted to the apostles a mysterious power: that of being his continuation on earth, spreading and perpetuating his presence.⁸

In 1954⁹ and 1955¹⁰, Father Caffarel underlined that the fundamental difference between the clergy and lay people is the **priest's sanctifying power**: "Christ literally gives power to his priests in order to sanctify us" (that is, to raise us up to God). Christ acts, gives life, teaches... through priests, and this all will happen "in accordance with your faith" (Matt 8:13). And possibly anticipating the shortage of priests, he raised for reflection: *Will you dissent from me, he says, that Christ uses not only the priestly body in this world but also the Holy Spirit to sanctify souls? That is true! This is the case, happily, otherwise we would have to despair of the salvation of millions of people not directly touched by priestly action*".

Father Caffarel believes that for those who know Christ and his teachings, **turning to the priestly ministry is not something optional**: it is through priestly action and the sacraments that Christ reaches us and communicates the Holy Spirit.

Like Christ, the priest is above all a mediator, the man who places himself in the middle so as to unite, going from God to men and from men to God. Father Caffarel himself is moved when he faces this tremendous mission and he ends up by asking couples to increase their gaze of love and gratitude towards priests "enjoying their presence, welcoming, supporting and praying for them" a request which has undoubtedly marked the style of Teams of Our Lady.

8. H. CAFFAREL: "The couple and the priest". L'Anneau d'Or, N° 14, March-April 1947.

9. H. CAFFAREL: "Our two sacraments". L'Anneau d'Or, N° 60, November-December 1954.

10. H. CAFFAREL: "Introduction to knowing the priest". L'Anneau d'Or, N° 63-64 special "The man of God", May-August 1955.

2.1.1 Being Christ's sign and presence

«You asked your priests to thoroughly study the Christian mystery of marriage. Permit me, now, to ask you, you, who have asked us to understand the magnitude of your marriage, to think about the magnitude of our priestly vocation. Please understand that I'm not talking about your being nice to us, but seeking a deep understanding of the mysterious powers of our sacrament.»

Father Henri CAFFAREL, 1954

It cannot be said that the priest replaces Christ, nor even that he is closer to Him, but that through his sacrament he represents Christ.

Thus, priests together with believers are members of Christ's body, but on behalf of and **beside** the latter, priests are those who make Christ present as Head of His body. The head is not separate from its members, but is nevertheless distinct from them.

That's why **the priest belongs to a team in a different way**. Despite his deep unity with the community of believers, he continues to be a companion to them. He belongs to the team, and at the same time he guides it in his mission as shepherd and prophet. This is an aspect that related to faith (it is necessary to transcend physical appearances and human limitations), but it is the most fundamental concept as it expresses the team's "sacramentality". The priest's mission of representing Christ fulfils the ecclesial dimension of the team (to be "Ecclesiola").

Mgr. Dominique REY¹¹ asks us to think about the three roles that the priest is called to manifest "**the father's, the spouse's and the brother's**". The Father's: the priest creates a new life in the team's soul and in its members. The Spouse's: The priest makes the team fertile so that its members bear fruit. The Brother's: To be "in front of" the brothers means to be "at their beck and call".

11. Mgr. Dominique REY: "The priest". Tempora, 2009.

«There is a noticeable sensitivity which erases all the differences between people, and which consequently accentuates today more than ever the fundamental equality of all people and universal fraternity in Jesus. And this happens precisely in the team where the priest is to be looked upon as a brother among brothers. Fraternity, a radical fact for a Christian due to his relationship with Christ, should exist in a priest. But it is also true that the priest is a brother in front of the brothers, representing Christ. Being *in front*, doesn't just mean being an expert, as if the priest's work was only being a social worker or a marriage counsellor. Still less does it mean *being above* the brothers. Instead what it really means is being at their beck and call. The priest identifies himself with Christ at the beck and call of the couples, and that is a way of being *in front*, that is appropriate to the priestly ministry. This responsibility is not always easy to take on. It is up to the priest to live his identity faithfully and the couples should be the first to help their priests to exercise their ministry with authenticity.»

Father José María DÍAZ ALEJO¹², 2010

All this is understood and accepted in the faith, and it doesn't become a form of power, knowledge or superiority of any sort, but a *presence* that results in *service*.

- The priest's *presence* is a sign and a reminder that God is close to us and takes an interest in our lives.
- The mission of *service* implies being unencumbered from everyone in order to be available to all. That's why team members should allow the Counsellor freedom to be himself without seeking to take control of him.

12. Spiritual Counsellor of the Central Region (Spain SR); currently Deputy Media Director of Toledo archdiocese. Quotation taken from the « Spain SR newsletter », n° 253, March-April, 2010.

Obviously, even in the absence of a priest, we will be Church. **Christ is present in the fraternal communion relationship of his disciples:** *For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.* (Matthew 18:20) But in the team, the communion of priests and couples becomes fully Church, a sacrament of love and unity, a place of welcome and evangelisation.

The great progress made by Teams of Our Lady throughout the world in the light of Vatican Council II has enabled us to understand that **priests and lay people can help each other progress in the knowledge of Christ's mystery.** On the one hand, priests guide couples in their difficult daily discernment, on the other hand the presence of couples who pray and love each other, helps priests to exercise their ministry with more dynamism and deeper fruitfulness.

It is the shepherds' role to celebrate this communion through the Eucharist and the ministry of Reconciliation, recognizing all the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives rise to in the community. They are "the charism of union, and not a union of the charisms"¹³.



13. Mgr. Francesco LAMBIASI, bishop of Rimini and president of the Episcopal Commission for the Clergy and Consecrated Life (2012).

2.1.2 The couples and the priest's complementarity

«Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the testimony of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.»

Vatican II Council, Church Dogmatic Constitution (10)

Since the beginning¹⁴, in Teams of Our Lady we have frequently talked about “the complementarity of priests and couples”. What does this mean?

• The Sacraments' complementarity

- Priests are configured to Christ/Head; the mystery of the conjugal covenant is a sign of the mystery of the covenant of Christ/Spouse of the Church.
- In certain Super-Regions the emergence of the permanent diaconate shows a Church that desires to serve human societies and reminds us that the ordained ministers (deacons, priests and bishops) are at the service of this dimension of the Church, following a Christ who serves, which is the same for all baptised people: to announce the Word, to live the Sacraments and to work for communion.¹⁵

14. Cfr. note 5

15. Vatican II Council: Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *LUMEN GENTIUM* (11, 22)

- «The Church is in good health when it makes the Holy Spirit's appeals resonate within us and allows each one of us to answer them. So these appeals provoke reciprocal engendering: it is the lay people who engender priests, but it is the priestly ministry that engenders baptised people into their priestly and royal dignity».¹⁶

• Vocations' complementarity

“Father Caffarel gives greater prominence to the complementarity of the conjugal and the priestly vocations than that of the sacraments of which they are the expression”¹⁷

Inside the “small Church” that is a team, lies the spiritual wealth that gives rise to the two forms of priesthood: the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptised. These two forms do not coincide: they are different in nature and not only in degree; they are not interchangeable, and can not be reduced one to the other. But neither can they be separated...

“The only rationale for the priest's priesthood is to make the faithful's priesthood possible: to give them the capacity to present their whole being and their actions to God in a spiritual offering.”¹⁸

• Complementary styles of life

In the Team, the priest is “the man for all”. He is the face of the One who gives himself for love. For the couples he is their support in difficult times, a profound sign of God's forgiveness, a discernment and reference point to discover the Lord's call. He helps couples to make a Eucharist of their lives, uniting them to Christ's sacrifice to his Father.

16. Msg. Jean Pierre BATUT, bishop of Blois: magazine “*Sub signo Martini*”, N° 51, June 2016, P. 13

17. Father Paul-Dominique MARCOVITS. Spiritual Counsellor to “*Fraternité Notre-Dame de la Résurrection*” and of the Friends of Father Caffarel Association. He was the diocesan postulator for Father Caffarel's beatification Cause.

18. Cardinal DANNEELS: *Easter Leaflet*, 1990

His vow of consecrated celibacy reminds us that our heart fundamentally exists for God, the only one who can fulfil our deepest aspirations.¹⁹

And there is the face of God that couples reflect in their lives²⁰: the face of concrete love that is specific to each person; the face of tenderness; the face of Him who provides a new opportunity each day with patience and fidelity; the face of being close to the other, but letting the other be himself/herself; the face of fruitfulness.

• Ecclesial Complementarity

The concept of complementarity refers also to that which exists between the local Church and the team. As a Church cell, the team is connected to it and should live with the Church the exchanges proper to this complementarity: the team is challenged and questions and enriches the local Church. The covenant of Marriage and Priesthood represents the Church itself and is part of our Movement's "dynamism of the beginning" and for this reason this covenant should serve not only the good of those who belong to it, but the good of the whole Church from which it derives.



19. Cfr. Pope Francis: *Exh. Ap. AMORIS LAETITIA* (161)
20. Cfr. Pope Francis: *Exh. Ap. AMORIS LAETITIA* (161, 162)

2.2. The priest's mission in a Team of Our Lady

«As a parish priest, my work has three main dimensions: to preach the Gospel, to celebrate divine worship and to guide the parish community. Within my team this third dimension (the priest as shepherd) is as in parenthesis: I am not in charge of the team. This means there is another type of relationship with couples that translates into a certain familiarity that can be seen at certain moments (sharing and pooling) where I participate in the same way as the other members of the team.

My role as a Spiritual Counsellor is not primarily based on what I can do or say, but on the fact of being there as a priest.»

F. Olivier de GERMAY²¹, 2004

In Teams we often talk about the Counsellor's "role", as if it were a job, and we may end up thinking of them as accredited office-holders. But the Counsellor, even though chosen by the team, is not an employee of the team; he does not have a contract with it. **By being a priest, wherever he may be, the Counsellor can only be seen as someone sent by God**, in charge of God's work, not his own.

So, the essential mission of the Counsellor is "to be a sign of presence of God", but that doesn't mean that he fulfils the mission for which he was sent to the team just by being there. **The Priest's Spiritual accompaniment to a team** on the path to holiness for its members develops along three axes, by being: at the service of conjugal love, at the service of the Magisterium and at the service of communion.

21. Spiritual Counsellor of the Haute-Garonne sector in the FLS Super Region.
Today, Mgr. Olivier de Germay is the bishop of the Ajaccio diocese.

2.2.1 Being in the service of conjugal love

The founding Charter of Teams is expressed with simplicity and clarity: “[The Spiritual Counsellor] *not only outlines principles, but also helps couples to seek to translate them into their life*”.

«Above all I try to help couples to welcome the grace of the sacrament of marriage into their daily lives. Indeed, it is not enough to have read everything about communication between the couple, or other similar issues, it is necessary to welcome the grace of The One who announces and accomplishes the good news of marriage.»

Father Olivier de GERMAY²², 2004

Through his listening, his experience, his advice, the Priest Counsellor is the one who reveals the gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable team members to embrace the right decisions according to the couple’s specific vocation and their lifelong aspirations. Thus, **the priest helps the couple to live their baptism and marriage in the full human and sacramental sense**: to make their life a Eucharist.

The Counsellor helps couples to be dynamically faithful to the charism. This means helping them to grow from what they are to what they should be. This is not easy, especially when there is a type of relationship in a team where everything is permitted and sympathised with. It is difficult to tell someone or a team which doesn’t respond, that this way of doing things is not acceptable, that this or that challenge must be thought about... That is the priest facing up to and guiding the team.

The word “*help*” can have lots of meanings: *animate* (give life), *guide* (provide meaning), *illuminate* (provide the truth), *propose*, *provoke*, *correct*... These are actions available to any member of the team as a member of their little community, but which coming from a priest take on a higher meaning and fruitfulness.

22. Cfr note 21

Thus, the Spiritual Counsellor, on the basis of stable membership, is a transforming factor for the couples and the team. Throughout the years, the exchange of prayers, thoughts and charisms, little by little, penetrates into the team, giving the couples a particular way of living the faith.

In but a few words: “**The Spiritual Counsellor leaves his mark on the Team’s life**”²³.

2.2.2 In the service of the Magisterium

«My role as Spiritual Counsellor is also to foster a deeper understanding of the faith. During the discussion of the study topic, above all, I am asked to provide insights into the Scripture or the texts of the Church, with the aim of finding concrete applications in daily life. The balance between listening and putting the Word into practice is not always easy to find!»

P. Olivier de GERMAY²⁴, 2004

By his Ministry, the Spiritual Counsellor also has a specific mission that consists of:

- **the Word of God.** The Counsellor enlightens the couples and the team through the Gospel. The community is created by faith, and faith is created by proclaiming and listening to the Word.
- **the word of the Magisterium of the Church.** By his doctrinal competence the Counsellor is the authority to consult when theological questions are raised.

23. Mgr. Ginés GARCÍA, bishop of the diocese of Guadix-Baza: “*Teams of Our Lady are a grace for the priest*” Letter #253 Spain SR (pp. 24-26), March-April 2010.

24. Cfr note 21

- **a prophetic word to the Team.** Being both inside the team and outside it, the Spiritual Counsellor can interpret situations better and say a word of encouragement, warning or condemnation, if it is necessary. He assists couples to understand and to be faithful to the Charter. He also helps them to better understand the study topic, so that they put it into practice in their daily lives.

The Counsellor has no exclusivity over the Word. The Holy Spirit may speak through the voice of whomsoever he chooses. For this reason, what everyone says must be listened to, evaluated and recognized as if it were a sacred statement. But with the priest, who represents the Christ/Head of the team the Word, that is the Way, the Truth and the Life, acquires a special presence.

«With the experience of over 30 years within the teams, I must confess that this little sermon following the proclamation of the biblical text as an explanation of it and an introduction to shared prayer is for me one of the most privileged and appreciated moments among my many services to spread the Word. I always prepare it with hopeful anticipation and affection because I consider it my most important contribution to the reflection on the study topic and to the very life of the team. (...) In addition in promoting a climate of prayer, the Counsellor must bring the word of God up to date, that is, make it accessible and challenging.»

P. Miguel PAYÁ²⁵, 2010

25. Spiritual Counsellor of the Levante region in SR Spain. Also Spiritual Counsellor of the SR between 1997-2015. Today he is the Canon of the Cathedral of Valencia.

2.2.3 In the service of communion

«Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity, every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body.»

St. John PAUL II, *Christifideles laici* 20

Unity in diversity is the fruit of the gifts which the Holy Spirit distributes in the community; and "among these gifts, the grace given to the Apostles takes the first place"²⁶.

The priest is a Minister in the service of promoting and maintaining unity:

- whether it be on the inside of the small community;
- whether it be between the small community and the whole of the Christian community.

A key aspect of the mission of the Spiritual Counsellor is to help the team to build itself (and rebuild itself, if necessary) as a community in the image of the Church. A permanent challenge for the team is to preserve communion despite the diversity of people, mentalities and options, overcoming all problems of division...

26. Saint Jean Paul II, Exh. Ap. *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI* (20)

A permanent tension in the team lies between its being closed to, or open to, the Church, and that includes: formation, availability, participation and apostolic commitment. **For this reason the Spiritual Counsellor keeps the team open to all the needs and dynamism of the Church.** The Counsellors - through their priestly status and their involvement in the local Church - promote and help this necessary inclusion in Diocesan pastoral work.

«The priest is also a sign that the team is not a club created for its own ends; it is incorporated into the Church and stems from the Church. (...)

I also try to help the team to open itself up to the ecclesial dimension of the Movement. The responsible couples also do this in their particular way. For my part, I insist above all on how to regard the Church: a faithful gaze that goes beyond human limits. At times I draw a parallel with the way that members of the team look at their spouse, their children, or other people.»

Father Olivier de GERMAY²⁷, 2004

It is the priest who provides the guarantee of ecclesiality of the team.

He received his ministry from the Bishop; he ensures the relationship with the apostolic ministry of the Church and its hierarchy. To be part of the Church is to be part of a local church or diocese. Because of this, faced with the lack of priests, we ask ourselves: *“How do we ensure the relationship of the team with the hierarchy, with the Church?”* This is an important question to deal with and resolve.

27. Cfr note 21

3

The art of Spiritual Accompaniment”²⁸ in Teams of Our Lady

So far we have thought about the significance of the presence and mission of the Spiritual Counsellor in Teams of Our Lady. Father Miguel Paya²⁹ made this synthesis: *“in its essence the Spiritual Counsellor in the team is a priest and an advisor. The second role can be deputised, but not the first”.*

It is therefore appropriate to initiate in the Movement a reflection on the “how” in matters of “spiritual accompaniment”, for two fundamental reasons. One is that, in view of the fall in the number of priests in many countries, spiritual accompaniment will progressively fall to a greater number of advisors who are not priests. Moreover, to help team members to progress on the path of love and holiness, a spiritual accompaniment of high quality is required, whether or not it is a priest who provides it.

Pope Francis put it this way: to make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze *“the Church will have to initiate everyone - priests, religious and laity - into this “art of accompaniment”, which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5) (...).” Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of accompanying others are familiar with processes which call for prudence,*

28. Cfr. Pope Francis: Exh. Ap. EVANGELII GAUDIUM (169-173)

29. Cfr. note 25

*understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit to be able to protect the sheep from wolves who would scatter the flock.*³⁰

The psalmist, helps us to understand the art of accompanying a group of couples, when he says: *“today when you hear His Word, don’t close your heart as in the wilderness.”*³¹

Today

We perceive here the **vigilant mission of accompaniment**: to be attentive to that vital relationship between the eternal God and the today that we have to live. This means benevolently bringing ourselves back to the presence of the Kingdom in our lives. In doing so, accompaniment, done gently and cautiously, takes on a somewhat prophetic role. It is a question of daring to speak freely in order to refocus involvement in this tension between God and the today that we have to live.

Listen!

Here we look to Mary as the perfect model of listening.

Listening is more than hearing. Listening involves first of all silencing our own opinions or feelings to make room for the other to express himself/herself. A good accompaniment doesn’t take over the discussion or interrupt inopportunistly and doesn’t make quick judgements that are often devoid of discernment.

When accompanying a Team of Our Lady, listening involves first **listening to the Lord in prayer**, nourishing what the team members are experiencing: their joys, their difficulties, their misfortunes... Seeing how these events can be linked to this or that particular passage of the Scriptures. It is in this way that the Advisor may exercise useful listening at the team meeting.

30. Cfr. Pope Francis: Ap.Exh. *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* (169 & 171)
31. Cfr. Psalm 95 (94), 7-8

In this context, **listening by the Advisor (the person who accompanies the team) does not replace the role of the animating couple for the meeting**, but is complementary to it. It is an in-depth look at what the members of the team say. It means asking for clarification in case of lack of understanding or misunderstandings that may give rise to distractions or arguments. Rephrasing can often help dissipate some misunderstandings or inaccuracies, sources of distraction, or disputes. Listening is also encouraging a dialogue in which all can express themselves in their own way, in their own time, by helping to bring out what is hard to share. **Quality accompaniment promotes confidence** that gradually allows all to respect one another and sometimes to succeed even in sharing something more intimate. Listening is not self-deception through fake transparency, but allowing everyone to keep their share of their ‘secret garden’, which may be slowly unveiled.

What makes the task a little more delicate is that it is not an individual accompaniment. The Advisor must **be attentive to each Member of the team, and at the same time to communion**, dialogue, respect and trust between the members. It is obvious that listening, an essential and vital instrument for spiritual accompaniment, is rooted in the meeting prayer.

The Word

God speaks and acts at the heart of this world. Here lies the strength of Christian faith: discerning in the midst of the world and its ambiguities, places, times and the people that make one more and more free in Christ, until I am able to cry as St. Paul did: *“it’s no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (GAL 2:20). The accompaniment will try to **help to discover how God acts within the team and its members from three perspectives**: Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments, and events.

- Quantify how passages of **Scripture** can be lived in body and soul by the team members. Help them realise this. Accompaniment should play a key role on this path of taking on and embodying the Scripture.
- Check how the **sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance** help to chart the way. In this, the accompaniment can ensure that the sacramental life of each couple nourishes the grace of the sacrament of marriage. Discover how each husband and wife, being signs of the covenant of Christ with the Church, can further seal their union through the frequent practice of the sacraments “for the journey”. Accompaniment that stimulates “couple prayer” and the “sit down” will lead couples to the grace of Reconciliation and to the Eucharist, and thus will enlighten them.
- Check how world **events** may be signs of spiritual growth, even of a more or less radical conversion in some aspect of the couple’s life. Is the team not too focused on personal and family problems? How do they show solidarity with what is happening in the world? Accompaniment will help be discerning about this.

These are three “functions” where it will always be important to work discreetly and quietly, with an accompaniment that is part prophet, part witness, and part service. A beautiful task that gently and firmly, listening to the Trinity, asks for the grace to know how to awaken, supervise and revitalise the “Christification” of each member of the team.

4

Is the lack of priests, a new appeal by the Spirit to the Church and to the Teams of our Lady?

The growing number of teams and the reduction in the number of priests make the presence of a priest accompanying each team more and more difficult, especially in some countries. We therefore have to seek answers to this difficulty, **since the lack of priests should not prevent the formation of new teams or the well-ordered progress of the existing ones.**

On the other hand, it is necessary to deal with this situation in a common way to keep the Movement’s unity and identity and also avoid teams resorting to uncertain solutions, forgetting the principles, or where there is no real and urgent need.

4.1. Father Caffarel’s vision and guidance

In 1961, Father Caffarel had already noticed the problem³²: “*three teams in a small town in France have to share the only priest who remains in the region*”; *in Brazil, there are couples which have been ready for months to form a team, but cannot, because they haven’t found a priest yet...*”. Father Caffarel, as usual, says bluntly: “*the question is clear; it is impossible to avoid it: can the monthly meeting of a team take place without the presence of a priest?*”. He recognizes that the 1947 Charter did not contemplate these situations, but “*let’s not fool ourselves, this difficulty will happen more and more: either we stop forming new teams, or we agree to having teams without the assistance of a priest at every meeting,*

32. Henri CAFFAREL: “Pénurie”. Monthly TEAMS letter, 1961-5: XIV/8

or even without ever having a priest". For him, the option is clear and he expresses it by asking himself: "will this lack of priests stop or slow down the expansion of the movement?". Obviously not. This is a problem and the movement will fix it as it has always done, **case by case, with the responsible couples, following each experience closely.**

«Will this lack of priests stop or slow down the growth of the movement?

(...) That is the problem: it has to be resolved in each particular case, in union with the leadership of the movement. Following our usual custom, we are going to look closely at the experiences of the first teams before recommending a solution. In one place, a long established team will give up having its chaplain at every meeting in favour of a new team starting off; in other places, the priest will only attend every second or third meeting.

My wish is that for every team this should be the occasion to ask themselves if they value at its true worth the value of the presence of their chaplain, if they know how to get the maximum benefit from his support as a priest and if they are avoiding placing too great a burden on him.

To Teams that have to accept these restrictions, I would say: don't be simply resigned to them, learn how to discern God's intentions. Pascal wrote: "If God were to give us masters, we would have to obey them wholeheartedly. But such, unfailingly, are necessity and events". Seek therefore to understand what Providence has in mind in permitting this shortage of priests with which you are afflicted.

In these teams, it is true, the responsible couple will feel they have a heavier responsibility to bear; team members will be obliged to be more generous in their care for each other, and to have a more perfect brotherly love: but will there not be an advantage in this? Very probably also, the couples will be more conscious of their ignorance and will more inclined to make their questions more precise so as to have them ready for the priest at his next visit: In that case also there is an advantage. So what at first sight appeared seemed purely and simply as a deficiency to be overcome, will be revealed as a source of spiritual profit; but so the ordeal may be useful, it will be necessary that the couples do not allow their opinion of the value of the presence of a priest to be diminished nor develop a presumptuous self-sufficiency, but they must meet these demands with a spirit of faith, ingenuity, humility and generosity".

Father Henri CAFFAREL, 1961

Father Caffarel is not seeking the impossible "replacement" of the priest. For him, the solution is generosity in maturity: learning to share and making a greater effort. He believes that if the teams give the right value to the priest's presence, they will be more willing not to hoard this fundamental treasure. He calls on the maturity of the teams who are affected by the shortage: to accept and understand its meaning, to act with more responsibility, to work for better formation... This is what we would call today "**pedagogy of absence**".

Always guided by Father Caffarel's drive to work together to find what is best for couples and for the Church, at all times, everywhere and in all circumstances, on the basis of lived experiences³³, **the current International Leaders of the Movement have established the following order of priorities** to ensure Teams' spiritual guidance.³⁴:

1st: Always **try to ensure** the full support of a priest Spiritual Counsellor in the life of each team.

2nd: **Integrate into the team** a Spiritual Advisor, always ensuring that the team is linked to a priest, or...

3rd: **Facilitate** the partial participation of a priest in the life of the team.

The Sector is the key level to implement this guidance. Its leaders will be aware that the use of other options should be adopted only after all possibilities for the first option have been exhausted.

The Sector is also a Community, and at this level, using connections and mutual assistance, the Sector responsible couples must find adequate answers, case by case, for teams that don't have access to a Spiritual Counsellor.

33. In this respect we can highlight the contributions: of the Brazilian Super Region (with 420 Spiritual Advisors, according to the 2015 Statistics), which in July 2013 sent to the ERI a report called : "The Temporary Spiritual Advisor" whose conclusions were presented at the Rome 2015 International College ; and of France-Luxembourg-Switzerland SR which in 2015 created a reflection team whose remarks were also sent to the ERI

34. This document was approved by the ERI in March 2017 at their Munich Meeting (RR Germany).

4.2. Always ensure the full support of a priest Spiritual Counsellor in each team's life

This is part of the ideals of the Movement, that each team counts on the participation of a priest as Spiritual Counsellor. This is not an option on a par with others. In a Team of Our Lady, which is a community that reflects the Church, **the link with a priest is not interchangeable with someone else; there is no alternative.** We have to take into account his possible absence (which implies a certain mystique and pedagogy), but we can't replace him.

A team must never give up on the integration of a priest. The Movement's Structures and Resources must always help maintain the desire of this encounter between couples and priests to build communities that are a sign and a fruitful instrument of the Church.

To count on a priest as a Spiritual Counsellor is especially important for new teams who need to understand and feel the Movement's charism and mystique from the beginning. The Sector Responsible Couples should pay special attention to this need.

Trying to integrate a Spiritual Counsellor into each team is a great undertaking that requires raising the awareness of both couples and priests.

4.2.1. Raising awareness and motivating couples

Father Caffarel wanted teams to listen to John the Baptist's warning to the Jews: *"There is among you someone you don't know"* and that they should make an effort to learn more about priesthood, just as the priests have done to discover the greatness of the sacrament of marriage.

This motivation **would begin by teaching couples the deep meaning of a priest**, from whom we sometimes strip away his mystery, perhaps because of our closeness to him. By achieving this knowledge, we could make further efforts to attract Counsellors, and to share them should this prove necessary.

"When civilization becomes more technical and materialistic, when the temptation to despair tightens men's throats, then, in the depths of the soul, there stirs an irrepressible need of something else, for the sacred, for mystery. "That man in the street who asks you for a light for his cigarette, let him speak: in ten minutes he will ask for God", says Duhamel.

I am not sure that "good Catholics" have the same interest in priests. And this also poses a problem. Are they too close? (...) For them the priest is stripped of his mystery. They judge him according to the standards they use to judge others. Certainly they have a good relationship with him, with a shade of defensive reserve, they gladly proclaim their admiration for some priests, but I am not sure that they think highly of and honour the priest's priesthood.

Do we need to warn them that the worst is yet to come? Would French Catholics, then, like Graham Greene's Mexican Catholics, devotedly kiss the consecrated hands of a poor, alcoholic priest, the last one left to them?...

"Would not this ignorance of the true character of the priest explain the lack of priestly vocations in our Catholic families?"

Father Henri CAFFAREL, 1955

At every level of the movement, team, sector, region, province and super-region, one can work continuously and progressively to improve the awareness and motivation of couples as regards the role of priests:

- The first task would be **Prayer for vocations** and concrete awareness raising for our children and grandchildren to make them wonder about the Lord's call.

- **The mission among young people:** accompaniment of Young Teams of Our Lady, for example, should include a component on discerning vocations, in addition to possible future preparation for marriage.
- **The incorporation of modules concerning priesthood in the Formation Plan Sessions,** especially in meetings for new teams and in formation specific to Sector Couples, whose role is crucial if each team is accept the mandatory model of a Priest Spiritual Counsellor.
- **By means of effective organisation and good connections:** it is important that, in a way appropriate to each level, Responsible Couples maintain good up-to-date information on Spiritual Counsellors who belong to or have belonged to the movement, stay in contact with them, know about their general personal situation and their pastoral life... In this way there can be an on-going and appropriate invitation to retain their connection with the Movement.



4.2.2. Raising awareness and motivating priests

Relationships with the hierarchy should be the starting point. The Teams' leaders should provide their bishops with evidence of a solid and persuasive communion with them, to achieve recognition of the legitimacy of our Movement as part of the Church offering, at the same time offering, "availability for mutual collaboration"³⁵. Through frequent and close contact, they will do everything possible so that the bishops know and experience the teams in their dioceses and appreciate the charism of a Movement that supports married couples as well as priests, that trains and encourages these couples to pursue the Church's mission.

By having a **personal relationship with the priests**, couples who testify to a coherent and committed life can enable the latter to discover the amazing evangelising potential of a small community:

- **By hospitality** (one of the Movement's identifying signs) in the service of friendship with the priest and even of his pastoral service. Listen again to Father Caffarel: *"the couple, by the practice of hospitality, contributes to the life and growth of Christ's mystical body. It is an essential, specific, irreplaceable, apostolic mission of the couple (...)* Next to the priestly Ministry, the Ministry of the Word, Acts of Charity... there is a 'Ministry of hospitality' in the Church. And by whom would it be exercised, other than by the Christian Couple? (...) For so many contemporary people who wouldn't even think of coming into contact with the parish community, the clergy or the sacraments, a Christian Couple is a haven of the universal Church. A 'sacrament' of the Church."³⁶
- The New Evangelisation consists of going out into the street, but also of welcoming those who become attracted by the fraternity that the group radiates.³⁷

35. Saint John Paul II, exh. ap. *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI* (30)

36. F. Henri CAFFAREL: *"Knock, and it shall be opened to you"*. L'Anneau d'Or, N° 111-112, special "Marriage, that great sacrament", May - August 1963

37. Msr. Dominique REY, Congress on the New Evangelization (Diocese of Solsona and Vic, 2012)

- **By showing what team membership can bring to the ministry of the priest.** Briefings for priests who are *future Spiritual Counsellors*³⁸ cannot omit this important source of motivation, built on the experience and the testimony of thousands of priests worldwide.

«My first impression is that it is a serious Movement, that is clear in its objectives, clear about its methodology and tenacious in its purpose. I experience every team meeting as a moment of oxygenation of the spirit, in relationships of all kinds. I see the team as a community of learners. You learn a lot of things in the team: to listen, to disagree in a Christian way, to talk sincerely about the difficult issues in life, to be confident that the community is able to help...

It makes me very happy to discover motivated people in teams who want to grow in faith, in their encounter with Christ, in their belonging to the Catholic Church. The great affection that families have for me frightens me a little, especially when one realises all that a priest can mean in the life of a community, and is afraid of disappointing them... But, at the same time, this esteem is the best stimulant for living this Ministry in its fullness, which, as St Paul says, we bear in jars of clay.

I feel I am in a religious, balanced, prudent spiritual movement, without extremes or suffocating activism. To think about Teams of Our Lady fills me with joy, with a wish to meet other people with their feet on the ground, since in the clergy, we sometimes live a very rarefied existence. In Teams, I have found that what is specific to the priesthood suits me, rather than organisational or economic interests. They provide a wonderful atmosphere in which to be a priest and exercise one's priesthood above any other concerns.»

Father Raphael De BRIGARD³⁹, 2008

38. Cfr.: Worksheet "Information for Priests Spiritual Counsellors", in the Specific Formation Plan of TEAMS (ERI, 2011)

39. Parish priest of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, in the diocese of El Chicó, Archbishopric of Bogotá.

Cultivating the missionary dimension of Teams of Our Lady, helping priests to follow through to the end of their mission, can be a decisive form of motivation for them in their relationship with the Movement.

Father Caffarel was committed to demonstrating that the two sacraments contemplate each other with admiration, in a spiritual communion that feeds their respective vocations. He also encouraged us to keep our charism "of being dedicated to the Church" in a dynamic way. The idea of the team as a Christian community should remind us that **all communion is essentially missionary and that being fruitful is an essential requirement of Christian and ecclesial life**⁴⁰: "communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission."⁴¹ So, we should commit to being attentive both to each other and the world and act together in it.

Until now, as couples of Teams of Our Lady, we approached priests to request their accompaniment rather like consumers of a service. Perhaps the best, most decisive way to motivate a priest would be **to show him a community that is prepared to join him in seeking ways of activating and sharing the mission of its members**. Let us remember again what Father Caffarel asked of couples where priests are concerned: "value them, embrace them, support them, and pray for them". What application could the phrase "support them" have these days within the framework of Pope Francis's call to put "Charisms at the service of a communion that evangelizes"⁴²?

4.3. Integrating a Spiritual Advisor into the team, always ensuring the team's link to a priest

It is obvious that the teams that have the grace of fully counting on a Spiritual Counsellor benefit from both a *guiding hand* and the *presence of a priest*.

40. Cf John 15, 2;5;16

41. Saint John Paul II, exh. ap. *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI* (32)

42. Pope Francis, exh.ap. *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* (130)

But what should be done if **teams find themselves obliged to pursue their journey without the priest's regular presence at their meetings?** This situation can have more or less significant consequences in the teams' communion and spiritual growth depending on their seniority, level of formation and commitment... It is obvious that the need for spiritual accompaniment exists above all, but not only, when a team is starting out. The absence of a Spiritual Counsellor should be an exception, otherwise Father Caffarel's words "*let's find out together*" would lose all their meaning.

We can consider two situations:

- Either the team is made up of couples who have enough formation to go on alone.
- Or the Team needs "Spiritual Assistance"
 - until a priest Spiritual Counsellor is found who can participate regularly in the Team's meetings
 - or as long as the couples and the Spiritual Advisor wish it, keeping contact with the Sector's Responsible Couple and Spiritual Counsellor.

It is up to the Sector Couple, in agreement with their Spiritual Counsellor (or equivalent responsible levels) to **help the teams concerned in their discernment and to find, in agreement with them, the best solution** for each specific case.

In both cases, it is the Sector's Spiritual Counsellor (or the Region's Spiritual Counsellor, if there is no Sector) who with all the priests Spiritual Counsellors, and in conjunction with the teams concerned must settle in a collegial way, the **way to ensure the presence of a priest in each and every one of the teams**. In each case it is necessary that this presence be identified with a specific individual priest over the long-term, and not fulfilled by a priest Counsellor undertaking a stipulated short-term responsibility⁴³.

For all these reasons, it is very important that experiences "in the field" are reported back to Regions and Super Regions so that they can revisit the situation in the light of the founding charism.

43. The suggestions made in paragraph 4.4. "**Partial participation of a priest in a team's life**" could be a way of ensuring provision of a priest to those teams that have a Spiritual Advisor.

Mission and profile of the Spiritual Advisor

The idea of a "Spiritual Advisor" who is not a priest, is relatively new for Teams⁴⁴, as there is no reference to this subject in the founding documents or in the Canonical Statutes⁴⁵.

The scarce Teams literature that exists on this subject explains that **the mission of the "Spiritual Advisor" is to allow the creation of new teams and to support the balanced functioning of existing teams in cases where** it is not possible to provide a priest.

Thus, the Spiritual Advisor does not appear as either a free choice or an obligation for each individual team, but is the Movement's response to the concrete need of those teams who need one in order to grow in faith and love. This position can be maintained with one clarification: **in the absence of a priest, it is desirable for every team to rely on a well-trained Spiritual Advisor**. The total absence of spiritual accompaniment should be an exceptional situation, because it would be a very real risk to the vast majority of the teams.

Both Priest Counsellors and Advisors who are not priests provide spiritual guidance to the teams assigned to them, but the latter cannot provide for the totality of the priest's mission.

On the other hand, **the role of a "Spiritual Advisor" is completely divorced from piloting or liaising, and it is limited to supporting individual base teams**, having no part to play in Responsibility or Service teams⁴⁶.

44. It was established in the ERI document "The Priest Spiritual Counsellor - 5" (1993)

45. The TEAMS Canonical Statutes in force (approved by a Decree of the Pontifical Lay Council -29th April 2014) only have recommendations regarding the Priest -Spiritual Counsellor in article 5, about "Team's life" and in article 7 about "Priest Spiritual Counsellors"

46. Only if finding a priest represents insurmountable difficulties, can the possibility of having a Spiritual Advisor who is not a priest in a Responsibility or Service Team be considered.

The Spiritual Advisor is called by the movement not based on “what he/she is”, as the Spiritual Counsellor is, but **based on his/her capabilities and adaptation to the concrete needs of a given team.**

For this reason, and also to avoid any confusion with the mission of the priestly ministry, or with the vocation of the married team members, the spiritual guide must meet the following **conditions**:

- It is always **only one person**, never a couple
- S/he should have a theological **formation** and some **pastoral experience**
- S/he should have **good access** to the Church hierarchy
- Depending on **their state of life**, they could be⁴⁷:
 - A seminarian with advanced formation
 - A deacon
 - A consecrated person, male or female
 - A lay man or woman
- **Deep commitment** to the Movement’s fundamental ideas will be also required:
 - A life of prayer and spiritual discernment,
 - A positive outlook on marriage;
 - Knowledge of the Movement’s Charism and Pedagogy
- Acceptance of a **link with the priestly ministry** – with a priest – in a manner determined by the Sector or Regional Spiritual Counsellor.

47. The Brazil SR, which has most experience in resorting to Spiritual Advisors insisted strongly on this order of preference, so the ERI considers it a very valuable guideline.

4.4. Partial Participation of a priest in a team’s life

In the consultations undertaken in preparing this document, some Super-Regions not only experience difficulties in finding Priests Spiritual Counsellors for new teams, but also in finding Spiritual Advisors who were not priests. Faced with the growing difficulty of securing ideal solutions, **our state of mind will have to change and find less proprietorial way for priests to participate in a team’s life**, while remaining faithful to Father Caffarel’s prophetic direction⁴⁸.

A team that has the good fortune to make its journey with a priest should pay attention to the Sector’s needs and be ready to modify its way of working, should the case arise, in order to answer these needs.

The Sector’s Responsible Couple and Spiritual Counsellor should encourage some reflection among team members on this issue and encourage them to address this topic very openly within the team.



48. Cfr written by Father Caffarel as mentioned in paragraph 4.1 “Penurie” (Shortage)

Several solutions can be considered:

- The presence of the team's Priest Spiritual Counsellor at every two or three meetings.
- The priest Spiritual Counsellor's presence at the beginning and at the end of the year, while maintaining contact with him in between and calling on him if there is a serious problem.
- A well-established team could volunteer to give up the priest's continuous presence, with his agreement, so that he is available to a newly formed team.

This would allow:

- Either a priest's presence in the team to be less demanding and so facilitate the decision of priests who hesitate to join;
- or ensure the presence of a priest for several teams.

In any case, it could and should also be a chance to value the significance of his presence in the team.



5

Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors: organisational issues

5.1. Call and permanence in the team

The Spiritual Counsellor

"The priest Spiritual Counsellor in a team is chosen by the team members from among the priests who legitimately exercise their priestly ministry in accordance with Canon 324 § 2⁴⁹". This is the tradition included in section 7 of the new Canonical Statutes since that first meeting on the 25th of February 1939, prepared by Pierre and Rozenn de Montjamont to which Father Caffarel was invited⁵⁰.

Teams of our Lady is a Movement for couples with priests. The priests are part of the Movement through the team with whom they share their life; in this respect they belong to the movement in a free, indefinite and stable way.

In short, the priest is Spiritual Counsellor to the team, not to the Movement.

49. Code of Canon Law, canon 324 § 2: *A private association of the Christian faithful can freely choose a spiritual advisor, if it desires one, from among the priests exercising ministry legitimately in the diocese; nevertheless, he needs the confirmation of the local ordinary.*

50. On this subject, it is necessary to explain that in some Oriental Catholic Churches (and in other Catholic Churches) where there are Teams, some priests are married. In those cases and to avoid misunderstandings, the priest as a Spiritual Counsellor can only participate as an individual in the life of the team as a Spiritual Counsellor. Nevertheless he can participate with his wife in another team, where he will be a couple like the others. This same guideline applies to married Spiritual Advisors.

The Spiritual Advisor

The approach to a Spiritual Advisor will be made in consultation between the team and the Movement (which will always be approved by the Responsible Couple and the Sector or Regional Spiritual Counsellor). Any sense of imposition is to be avoided: through the liaison function and in close contact with the team concerned, the Sector will identify and assess their needs as well as the options within the Sector in order to choose the person best suited to accompaniment. If the team itself proposes a Spiritual Advisor, the Sector (which is considered the most appropriate level of responsibility) will make sure that this choice is appropriate.

The Spiritual Advisor receives his appointment from the Movement or is confirmed to serve within a given team. **It doesn't seem appropriate to strictly limit the duration of this accompaniment:** the team and the Spiritual Advisor, which are in close connection with the Movement, decide if the spiritual accompaniment should continue as it is, or in some other way.

When it is thought necessary, **the Sectors and the Regions should define this service** in order to encourage appropriate candidates suitable to the profile, to call upon them where necessary, keeping them connected to the Movement and providing them with formation.

But **the most important thing is to ensure a priestly presence in teams that are assisted by a Spiritual Advisor.** To do this, we can talk about some good practices:

- "Formalise" the admission of a Spiritual Advisor into the team. As it is a service in some way connected with the priestly ministry, this needs to be made evident by means of a formula of commitment and a sign of mission (or renewal where this is the case).

"Christifideles laici" (23) suggests that the concept of "Ministry" of accompanying could be conferred by a priest Spiritual Counsellor "... When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons [...] can also supply for certain of their offices [...]"

The task exercised in virtue of supply takes its legitimacy formally and immediately from the official deputation given by the Pastors."

- The Sector Spiritual Counsellor has a special responsibility for ensuring the priestly model for all teams. To do this he should take an interest in teams' situations at sector meetings and in liaison between the latter and teams' Responsible Couple.
- As the Sector Spiritual Counsellor has a temporary mission, he alone cannot ensure the necessary stable model for teams whose journey is made with a Spiritual Advisor. Therefore, as stated previously, it is necessary that this presence is embodied over the longer term by an individual priest, who is specifically identified.
- It is necessary that Sector Couples encourage the collegial work done in the team by both Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors, so that their joint mission of spiritual guidance may be pursued.

A re-visiting and sharing of these practices and other experiences can be made by the Super Regions in order to enrich the Movement's reflection.

5.2. Life in the team itself

When the Charter says: "Each team must secure the help of a priest", it refers to **someone who shares this team's life** and not simply a priest "somewhere" with whom they can establish some relationship.

"The Spiritual Counsellor is not a "chaplain". In any case, his role is not limited to celebrating the Eucharist at every meeting. This must remain exceptional and reserved for special occasions, possibly the Review of the Year Meeting. Nor is he the director or the head of the team, but he actively collaborates with the latter to build gradually, without neglecting anyone, a real community of people that think, feel and act as Christians growing in maturity and commitment.

«The Spiritual Counsellor is Christ's presence in the "domestic Church" that is the team. As such, his role is not authoritarian nor should he assume the leadership of the group. He should be careful neither to impose his own style, his personal ideas, even if they are brilliant, still less to use his superiority to manage the team according to his ideas or his urgings. His role is to enliven it and to foster love between the couples and guide their lives based on faith and the Gospel.»

Father Joaquín SANGRÁN⁵¹, SJ, 2010

These "requirements" of team life for Spiritual Counsellors also apply to Spiritual Advisors: both participate actively and wherever possible in the life of the small community that is the team which, over time, promotes opportunities for meetings, contacts, and many and varied forms of sharing.

The monthly meeting is the high point of the team's life. The Spiritual Counsellor or Advisor prepares it with the Responsible Couple or the Animating Couple, who take into account all the team's needs, concerns or unanswered questions.

During the meeting, the Counsellor or Advisor contributes to its being in every respect a real Christian meeting. He will be specifically careful to maintain unity in diversity.

Like any other member of the team, the Counsellor or Advisor participates freely but generously in all parts of the meeting. The prayer which he chairs, even if it is led by a couple, is the special part of the meeting where he can bring to fruition his task of building a community; but at all times he animates, illuminates, and offers his opinion with optimism and hope.

51. Spiritual Counsellor of the Spanish SR 1981-1997. († 2015)

5.3. Teams of Responsibility and Service

In our Movement all the responsibilities and services are exercised as a team, in a spirit of collegiality and communion, in a climate of prayer and discernment. Therefore teams should be able to count on spiritual accompaniment.

While individual teams count on a Spiritual Advisor who is not a priest, **accompaniment in responsibility and service teams is restricted to Priest Spiritual Counsellors**⁵².

In these cases, the Priest Spiritual Counsellor is chosen by these team's Responsible Couple. It is up to the priest to take whatever action may be necessary as regards his hierarchical superiors in order to accept this position. The duration of the service is identical to that of the responsible couple.



52. Cfr. note 46

«What can we expect from a Spiritual Counsellor in a service team? We may well ask ourselves this question. It is a great responsibility if we consider what the Movement, which is well aware of its charism and pedagogy, in order to collaborate to the support and growth of Teams, represents in the Church and in the world. Therefore the Spiritual Counsellor must keep himself up to date not only on Christian doctrine but also on the Movement's guidelines, and processes that develop at the regional, super-regional and worldwide level. This is very important. It is also important to attempt to accompany the responsible couples at events organized by the Movement, and especially those intended for the formation of Spiritual Counsellors and growth in the realities of the charism.

Given the fact that service teams exist for the sake of other teams, personal familiarity and a relationship with the other priest counsellors is important in order to accompany, assist, respond and enliven them. When a new priest is invited to become a team's Spiritual Counsellor, he must be willing to share not only his own experience, but also the guidelines of the Movement and the core documents. In some ways he is regarded by the other Counsellors as a model.

But he must always remember that in the Movement there is no hierarchy in the ordained ministries. No Spiritual Counsellor is superior. Within his area of responsibility, he is only a servant. He should not see himself or feel that he has the power of command or authority over other priests who are also Spiritual Counsellors.

In his task of facilitator and trainer he must be particularly vigilant about looking for ways for the spiritual accompaniment of teams that have no Spiritual Counsellor and, whenever possible, he must keep inviting other brother priests to become counsellors in Teams.»

Father Ricardo LONDOÑO⁵³, 2012

53. Spiritual Counsellor in Bogotá (Hispanic America SR). Spiritual Counsellor of the ERI Satellite Teams 2006-2012.

5.4. Formation

«Teams of our Lady are a formation school for couples. They are meant not only to deepen the knowledge of our faith, but also to practise human and Christian discernment, bringing into play both reason and feeling, in the search for a closer coherence between faith and life.»

Second Wind, 1988

From this perspective of the Second Wind, often evoked in the Movement, Teams represent a formation school for couples... and also for Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors.

The movement drew up a Formation Plan at international level⁵⁴ where a core of essential elements that make up the common heritage of all teams is postulated:

- **Faith and life:** Deepening the life of faith and topics concerning the life of the couple, the family, the Church and society;
- **Vocation and Mission.** Living as a couple with Jesus Christ, who is the Way to holiness, and answering the Lord's calls, bearing witness to the sacrament of matrimony.
- **Teams of Our Lady's Pedagogy:** Knowing and practising the Movement's charism and pedagogy.
- **Service:** enlivening and supporting couples who undertake the tasks necessary for the Movement's life.

54. ERI: "Teams of Our Lady's Formation: a Way" (October 2011)

The methodology of the Plan is based on listening to the Word, testimony, exchanging experiences, flexibility and progressiveness. The Plan brings together different **types of formation**, within three frameworks:

- Initial Formation
- Permanent Formation
- Specific Formation

Of course, the presence of the Spiritual Counsellors in these formation sessions is essential insofar as they are part of the responsible and service teams in charge of carrying them out. Without their presence, the spiritual dimension of the formation would not be the same.

But above all, **Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors must all be invited and encouraged to participate with their teams in the programmed formation activities.** The Formation Plan is useful and open to all.

There are Formation Sessions arranged specially for Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors. These are described below:

Initial Formation

- **Information Meeting for Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors**⁵⁵. Before they join the Movement **they need to be provided with good initial formation** about the charism, pedagogy and organisation of Teams of Our Lady, as well as their specific mission, especially regarding preparation and accompaniment at meetings.

In the case of a Spiritual Advisor, it is very important to indicate clearly the nature and extent of their service.

At this meeting, they will be given the official document approved by the ERI, "The Spiritual Counsellor and Spiritual Advisor".

55. ERI: Specific Worksheet "Information for Spiritual Counsellors". In the Formation Plan, this worksheet is part of "Specific Formation" and not of the "Initial Formation" as it is presented here.

- **Piloting: This formation is fundamental and essential for all team members, but also for Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors.** That is why, if a new Counsellor or Advisor is incorporated into a team that has already been piloted, the Sector Couple will ensure that s/he follows a course that is adapted to their own piloting⁵⁶.

- **New Teams Gathering:** this is where the immersion in Teams of Our Lady pedagogy culminates, revealing at the same time an overall vision of the Movement. **The Spiritual Counsellor or Advisor's participation together with his team is to be highly recommended.**

Permanent Formation

Throughout the various stages of their lives in teams, the Formation Plan offers all team members several **gatherings that help them to progress** on their path to holiness: by deepening their conjugal spirituality, by invigorating a sense of service and mission and breathing new life into the members whenever necessary⁵⁷.

It is to be recommended that Spiritual Counsellors or Advisors encourage their teams to participate in these gatherings when they are invited and, if possible, attend themselves.

Specific Formation

These courses are designed to **prepare couples called to a mission or to a responsibility** in the Movement⁵⁸.

It is recommended that formation sessions for Sectors Couples include a module on the mission of the Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors, in accordance with the concepts and guidelines of this document.

56. Based on the Piloting Worksheets proposed by the ERI in the Formation Plan, each SR/RR develops its own piloting Programme.

57. These refer to the following Gatherings: "Teams at the beginning of their way", "Teams in the Movement" and "Second Wind".

58. These are basically Formation Sessions for: "Information Couples", "Pilots" and "Liaison Couples", "Teams Responsible Couples", "Sector and Region Responsible Couples".

The Plan also contains a proposal for specific formation for Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors:

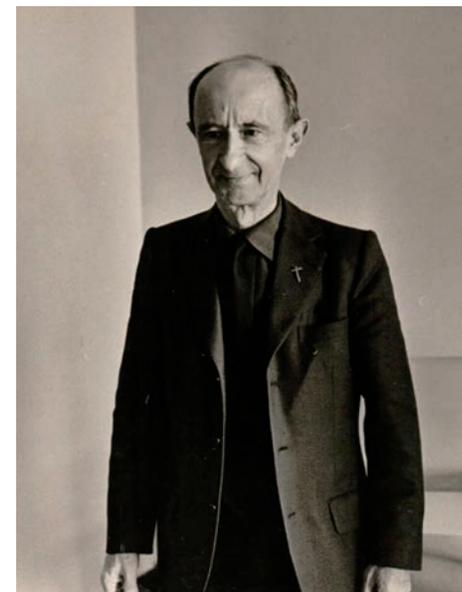
- **Meetings of Spiritual Counsellors or Advisors.** These are days of reflection and exchange of experiences within and between teams and the leaders of the movement. They are also appropriate meetings at which to learn the objectives and directions of the Movement, and reflect on it in the broader context of the life of the Church.

These meetings can be scheduled at different levels of organisation, from the sector up to the SR/RR. Depending on the more specific objectives pursued at each meeting, it is possible to invite both Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors.



- Although not described in the current plan, **other training activities** intended for Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors may be desirable, even necessary. Pope Francis, in his exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*, stressed the challenge for “a more adequate formation... of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers” to better accompany the process of growth of couples and families, in the complexity of today’s world⁵⁹.

To do this, the Formation Responsible Couples may **seek the assistance of specialists** (often to be found within the movement) such as theologians, animators of prayer groups, psychologists, therapists, sexologists, communicators...



59. Cfr. Pope Francis, exh.ap. *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* (102) y *AMORIS LAETITIA* (202) - (204)

Conclusion

In its path of growth in love and union with Christ, each team needs a person trained for its spiritual accompaniment; this refers to the concepts of otherness, perspective, mirroring and discernment. **Each team also needs to be linked to a priest,** not necessarily by his presence at every team meeting. The priest manifests Christ and ensures unity with the Church. The Charter says specifically: “Each team will ensure the participation of a priest”.

In the vast majority of cases, and it is a huge wealth for our movement, this spiritual accompaniment is provided by a priest, and his priestly ministry is embodied in this support which somehow exceeds this accompaniment. Teams of Our Lady should always encourage this form of community which is very rich for the Movement, for team members and for the priests.

In a world where the number of priests continues to fall, spiritual accompaniment by other well-chosen people must be ensured for a certain number of teams. This practice, which already exists, will increase and should be welcomed and supported. And it is also an opportunity for Teams of Our Lady, because it will be a source of enrichment for team members and for the whole Church.

In the case of accompaniment by a person who is not a priest, special attention should be paid to keep the team in touch with the priestly ministry. The form that this link may take is still at the stage of “let’s find out together”.

All members of the Movement should deepen their knowledge of the greatness and the mystery of the priestly sacrament, and love and support the irreplaceable figure of the priest, in accordance with the wishes of Father Caffarel. At the same time, **the figure of the Spiritual Advisor who is not a priest should not be devalued** as if it were a lesser evil, a solution that is of lesser quality and less worthy. Spiritual Advisors, like the Priest Spiritual Counsellor, are members of the teams, even if they are not members like the couples. Experience in the Movement has shown that in individual teams, both couples and Counsellors, are members limited only by their free will, as long as they choose to remain. This approach should not change, and can also be applied to the mission of Spiritual Advisors, because by depreciating their mission it becomes harder to find them, and there is a risk that many teams would no longer benefit from this service.

The structures of responsibility in Teams of Our Lady, including those designed to stimulate formation activities, should fervently **support Spiritual Counsellors and Advisors** in their important mission.

The relationship between married couples and priests is a fundamental characteristic of the Movement. As such, Responsible Couples should keep the new experiences in Teams spiritual accompaniment under **systematic re-examination.**

International Leading Team
Munich, March 2017

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