

Serving in the imitation of Mary

SUMMARY

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY TOPIC	4
INTRODUCTION	6
GENERAL STRUCTURE	10
STRUCTURE OF EACH MEETING	12
MEETING 1:	16
They have no more wine	
MEETING 2:	26
They no longer have a home	
MEETING 3:	35
They no longer have a country	
MEETING 4:	43
They no longer have education	
MEETING 5:	54
They no longer have their health	
MEETING 6:	63
They no longer have dialogue	
MEETING 7:	73
They no longer have company	
MEETING 8:	81
They no longer have respect for Creation	
REVIEW MEETING:	90
The new wine	

ACRONYMS

AG	Ad Gentes
AL	Amoris Laetitia
AS	Admirabile Signum
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CL	Christifideles Laici
CV	Caritas in Veritate
DCE	Deus Caritas est
EG	Evangelii Gaudium
FC	Familiaris Consortio
FT	Fratelli Tutti
GE	Gravissimum Educationis
GS	Gaudium et Spes
LG	Lumen Gentium,
LS	Laudato Si'
MM	Misericordia et Misera
PC	Patris Corde
RM	Redemptoris Mater
RVM	Rosarium Virginis Mariae

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

Dear family of Teams of Our Lady:

In the life of **TEAMS OF OUR LADY**, in various parts of the world, the beginning of the working year or new course occurs at the end of the summer in the northern hemisphere. That is why the study theme that the **ERI INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBLE TEAM** delivers to the movement, considers that in some areas it will be studied by team members in the period between September 2022 and July 2023, and in others between February and December 2023. This year's theme of study is, of course, consistent with the roadmap that we have set since the 2018 gathering in Fatima. This year has as its focus: "**Serving in the imitation of Mary**".

We have already referred on several occasions to the fact that the mystique of our movement is nothing other than the spirit that drives us to work according to God's will. There is a fundamental premise that establishes an imprint, a disposition that identifies us: **we are a Christ-centred movement**. We meet in the name of Christ who, through his Spirit, nourishes our faith and enhances it, allowing us to be in fuller communion with God every day.

So then, why **OUR LADY'S TEAMS**?

Let Father Caffarel himself respond:

"You come together to seek Christ, to imitate Him, to serve Him. You will not succeed without guidance. And there is no better guide than Mary. I would like us, in our teams, to nurture a faith in the all-powerful tender care of Our Lady, and that every couple experience the trust and security that little children feel in the presence of their mother. I would like this to be one of our characteristics. Then I would have great confidence for the future [...]. Teams would then be protected against intellectualism and a criticising mentality, which is one of the first benefits of the Christian's intimacy with Our Lady. Hearts will be kept humble: what could the Evil One do before Our Lady?"

It was for this reason that Father Caffarel in 1947, when he promulgated the founding charter of our movement, adopted the name **TEAMS OF OUR LADY** and placed the movement under her protection. Seven years later in 1954, (seven years is the age of reason, as Father Caffarel used to say) at Lourdes on the feast of Pentecost, this initiative was ratified by the Teams of Our Lady by consecrating the movement to her.

On this, Father Caffarel in the editorial entitled A GREAT DATE said:

"St. John, after hearing the words of Jesus: "Son, behold your mother", took you to his house. May all the homes of our teams be open to you, Mary: stay with us. Teach us about your Son. Teach us to love and imitate him. Watch over our children and make many priestly and religious vocations flourish among them. May your prayer obtain for our families, as for the apostles gathered in the Upper Room, the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And may it henceforth be impossible for us not to go, like the apostles, to proclaim the Magnalia Dei, the wonders of God, and especially those of the sacrament of marriage, to those who do not know them".

This study topic, as the introduction indicates, will be a journey that will sensitise us to imitate Mary in all facets of being team members and in our service. Then like her, we can be vehicles of tenderness and mercy, wherever we can identify that wine is lacking.

We would like to give special thanks to the Oceania Super Region who worked with the ERI in the conception and development of this theme. Thanks to all the couples and priests who gave us their valuable contributions and to the anonymous team members who bared their souls by giving their life testimonies so that this theme could become a reality. Now, it is up to each of you, couples and spiritual counsellors of the Teams of Our Lady, to rewrite it, this time from your own experiences and reflections, so the themes may come to life – life in abundance, incarnate and fruitful.

At the time of writing this study topic for the movement, our hearts are heavy, as yours would be too, by news of the devastating war that is ravaging the Ukrainian people. The entire Ukrainian population, and especially our brothers and sisters in Teams, count on our support, solidarity and communion in spirit and prayer.

As Father Caffarel did 75 years ago, we place in her intercessory hands the solution to the conflict, and the whole movement in the arms of Our Mother, the Virgin Mary. She is the guardian of all the sorrows of the world, ratifying our desire to serve her and imitate her so that she may continue to be the light and guide on our journey towards God.

So be it,

Clarita and Edgardo Bernal
International Leading Team- ERI
Paris, March 2022

INTRODUCTION

The General Orientation addressed to all members of Teams of Our Lady at the International Gathering in Fatima in 2018, invited us not to be afraid, and to go and carry out the mission we have as couples and as a Movement.

The specific orientation for the year 2022-2023 is: "***Serving in the imitation of Mary***".

This is also the title of this study topic because the Virgin Mary lived a life of service. After her son Jesus, she is the greatest example of service that humanity has ever witnessed. She declared herself the humble servant of the Lord and submitted to God's will through her YES.

At the end of her dialogue with the angel Gabriel, sent by God to announce that she would be the mother of Jesus, Mary replies: "*I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me*".

In giving this answer, Mary shows that her whole existence was directed to service. She made herself the servant of others out of love, serving with discretion, humility, and piety.

As outlined by the ERI, this study topic has a social character, and uses as its main reference, several texts of the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* - on fraternity and social friendship. According to Pope Francis, this is part of the social teaching of the Church.

With this Encyclical, published in October 2020, the Pope ardently states his desire:

"It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. "Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together".[6] Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers, and sisters all". (FT, 8)

This study topic is not a study of Mariology, a study of the figure, mystery, mission, and significance of Mary in salvation history. However, with this study topic we draw closer to Mary, her special virtues, her exemplary life as the most faithful model of a missionary disciple of her son Jesus, and intercessor for the needs of all peoples. Mary's example enlightens and guides the life and mission of all Christians.

This study topic focuses on Mary's humanity, for she is, like us, a person with whom we can identify. Her example helps us to deal with the real problems of today's world. We can ask ourselves: how do Mary's actions inspire us in our daily life?

Mary is our Mother, the one who takes care of all of us so that "the wine will not be lacking," as she did at the marriage feast at Cana. So that we, and our brothers and sisters, may not lack

anything, we can follow her example. In this way we can become more aware of where "wine is lacking" in our environment and in the reality in which we live.

The episode of the Wedding at Cana inspires each of the chapters proposed in this study topic. Emphasis is given to the passage: "*They have no more wine*", a necessity perceived by the mother of Jesus, so that the feast would not end before the scheduled time.

Looking around us, we can ask ourselves: what are the needs that Mary perceives and communicates to us? Where is the wine lacking? In the social reality of our country, of our world, what are the insufficiencies, the scarcities, those things lacking that prevent the feast from continuing?

It is important from the very beginning of this study topic, to understand that it is focused on the need to be compassionate and merciful in the realities that surround us, as our Mother Mary knew how to do. Without attending to them and being touched by them, our joy cannot be complete.

It is not a matter of seeing life from a negative point of view; quite the contrary!!!

It is about not being content to live with the darkness that surrounds us. If we have darkness around us, it is precisely because we are not bringing the light that we are in a position to provide.

In this way, we can understand that this study topic is not to be seen as pessimistic. It does not have a negative connotation. The common thread that connects the different chapters is "They have no more....". However, this is a window and an opportunity to allow our celebration to be complete. It can only be complete to the extent that all of us, together with all our brothers and sisters, can participate in it, by overcoming inequalities.

We cannot think that the needs of the world can be solved only by our participation. As St. Mother Teresa said, volunteering in Calcutta is like being a drop of water in the ocean; but without that drop, the ocean would be incomplete.¹

Thus, each meeting invites us to meet with our base team to reflect in depth on the challenges that surround us in the various dimensions of human life, in all the aspects that challenge us in this universal "Calcutta". Each of us can contribute that "drop of water that can make a difference in the ocean", not only of our existence, but of all those with whom we share life in our Common Home.

¹ See at: <https://www.regnumchristi.org/es/una-gota-de-agua/>. Published on the Web site on: July 11, 2019. Researched on February 11, 2022. This phrase is attributed to the following fact: in 1979, returning from Norway after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa of Calcutta stopped by the Missionaries of Charity house in Rome, where a journalist asked her a provocative question: Mother, you are seventy years old. When you die, the world will be as it was before. What has changed after so much effort? Mother Teresa then answered him: You see, I never thought I could change the world. I just tried to be a drop of clean water on which the love of God could shine. Do you think that is not enough? Then the following phrase was created, which is attributed to Mother Teresa: "What I do is a drop in the middle of an ocean. But without it, the ocean will be smaller". News found in "Aleteia Brasil" - published on 02/13/17. See: <https://pt.aleteia.org/2017/02/13/mude-tudo-ao-seu-redor-adote-o-conselho-da-gota-limpa-da-madre-teresa-de-calcuta/>.

In our reflections as a couple and as a team, we must always ask ourselves: how can we fulfill the mission to which we are called, always inspired by the example of Mary?

Mary, clothed in the Word, had not only the openness to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, but also the strength and character to be a woman of action, an example of discipleship for all of us, and a model to be followed in our contemporary world. The events of the Wedding Feast at Cana give us a glimpse of Mary's bond with her son Jesus, full of understanding, trust, mercy and compassion.

Therefore, in summary, this study topic is developed around Mary's virtues, attitudes and teachings, with the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* by Pope Francis and some texts by Father Caffarel as a backdrop. The aim is to remain in communion with the current reflections of the Holy Father and the Church.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis uses the Parable of the Good Samaritan as a backdrop, stating that this story is still repeated today. In so many places in the world, there is a lack of housing, education, health, dialogue, food, employment, care for creation, freedom, and the promotion and protection of human rights. Regarding the care of the injured person, there are only two characters in the parable: (FT, 70)

- Those who care for the suffering of others, and
- Those who pass by the needs of others.

With whom do we identify? What should we do? What does the Gospel ask of us?

May we be concerned about sharing what we have, what is "ours", with those in need, with those whose lack of wine takes away or hurts their dignity as human persons.

As we take up the challenge to serve and be merciful to those around us, let us remember Pope Francis' words to our Movement:

[...] "Indeed, I would like to insist on this missionary role of the Teams of Our Lady. Every committed couple certainly receives a great deal from their Team experience, and their conjugal life is deepened by refining itself through the spirituality of the Movement. However, after receiving from Christ and from the Church, a Christian is irresistibly sent out to witness to and pass on what he has received. [...]"

Christian couples and families are often the best placed to proclaim Jesus Christ to other families, to support, fortify and encourage them. What you live as couples and as families — accompanied by the very charism of your Movement — the profound and irreplaceable joy that the Lord enables you to feel in your domestic intimacy in joy and sorrow, in the happiness of your spouse's presence, in the growth of your children, in the human and spiritual fruitfulness that He grants you, all this is to be witnessed to, proclaimed and communicated outside so that others, in turn, may set out on this path.

In the first place, then, I encourage all couples to put into practice, and to live in depth, with constancy and perseverance, the spirituality followed by Teams of Our Lady." [...]"

"I also exhort you to continue to be close to wounded families, who are so numerous today, due to unemployment, poverty, health problems, mourning, worry over a child, the imbalance caused by an estrangement or absence, a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they are most vulnerable."²

² Pope Francis. Address to participants in the Meeting Sponsored by The Teams Of Our Lady - Équipes Notre-Dame, Clementine Hall, 10 September 2015.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

Nine meetings are proposed for this Study Topic.

The following is a brief outline of each meeting, including objectives and Bible text references that can be used by the base team.

Meetings	General Objectives	Biblical References
<p>Meeting 1 They have no more wine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To become aware of what the "lack of wine" means in the different realities that surround us. ▪ To know Mary's pedagogy for discerning the different realities where "the wine is lacking". ▪ To experience and live the virtue of solidarity, which the mother of Jesus demonstrated at the Wedding at Cana. 	<p>John 2,1-11</p>
<p>Meeting 2 They no longer have a home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To become aware of the "absence of wine" for many individuals and families who do not have decent housing. ▪ To discover the creativity of Mary and Joseph in the face of adversity, finding themselves homeless for the birth of their son Jesus. ▪ To experience and live out the virtue of humility that the mother of Jesus demonstrated in this context. 	<p>Luke 2,1-7</p>
<p>Meeting 3 They no longer have a country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To become aware of the "absence of wine" of those who have been forced to abandon their country. ▪ To understand that in God's plan there is no room for indifference because we are all brothers and sisters. ▪ To experience and live the virtue of Mary's resilience. 	<p>Matthew 2,13-18</p>
<p>Meeting 4 They no longer have education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To become aware of the "absence of wine" of those who do not have access to quality education. ▪ To reflect on the importance of an integral education that includes both technical knowledge and human and Christian values. ▪ To understand the value of ongoing formation as an 	<p>Luke 2,46-52</p>

	<p>essential part of spiritual growth - individual and as a couple.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To contemplate and experience the example of Mary as mother and educator. 	
<p>Meeting 5</p> <p>They no longer have their health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To become aware of the "absence of wine" in people who suffer from some illness and disease. To recognize that there are people who live without the minimum sanitary conditions. To experience the availability of Mary who goes to meet her cousin Elizabeth to be with her. 	Luke 1, 35-45
<p>Meeting 6</p> <p>They no longer have dialogue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To become aware of the "absence of the wine" of dialogue between individuals, couples, families, in society, in our Church, between nations. To understand that radicalism and polarization do not build dialogue and fraternity. To experience and live the virtues of listening and dialogue, and the human sensitivity of Mary. 	Luke 1,26-38
<p>Meeting 7</p> <p>They no longer have company</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To become aware of the "absence of wine" of those who feel lonely. To realize that there is a difference between loneliness and solitude. To experience the virtue of Mary's serenity before the Cross. 	John 19,25-30
<p>Meeting 8</p> <p>They no longer have respect for Creation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To become aware of the "absence of wine" in everyone's responsibility to care for our Common Home. To experience a spirituality that guides us on the path of caring for and cultivating the earth. To experience and live the virtue of Mary's perseverance as defender of life. 	The Book of Revelation 12,1-4
<p>Review Meeting</p> <p>The new wine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To evaluate what miracles of "new wine" have happened in your team throughout this year. To realize what, during the year, we have not been able to listen to and do in the face of all that Jesus has said to us. To understand, inspired by Mary's trust and hope in the Holy Spirit, that everything can be transformed, starting with each one of us. 	Acts of the Apostles 1,12-14 2,1-4

STRUCTURE OF EACH MEETING

1. OBJECTIVES

This Study Topic provides some objectives to be lived and achieved in each meeting. Each objective is within the proposed framework of reference: "*Serving, in the imitation of Mary*".

These objectives are intended to strengthen the unity of our Movement internationally in the study of this topic. This does not mean, however, that the Study Topic should be treated in the same way by all base teams. The richness of this unity comes precisely from its diversity. Each country or Super Region needs to consider its own cultural, social, economic and religious context. But in God we are one; hence the importance of the Movement adopting the same Study Topic for all base teams.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

The introduction provides a first look at the theme of reflection proposed for each meeting, consistent with the established objectives. All couples, and especially the Team Responsible Couple, should carefully consider these ideas before each meeting.

The Word of God

The biblical text of each meeting is related to the proposed theme, and it is suggested this should be a starting point for all Team members for their participation in the meeting. If possible, do a prayerful reading of the Word of God (*Lectio Divina*).

The four steps of the *Lectio Divina* are:

- a) **Reading:** read, study, become familiar with the biblical text.
- b) **Meditation:** discover what God has to say to me.
- c) **Prayer:** enter into dialogue and loving communion with God.
- d) **Contemplation:** put into practice the Word of God, discovering "new ways" of being and of assuming life (through transforming commitment), especially during that month.

The biblical text is followed by a short explanation, so that we can understand with faith and wisdom the meaning of the text, thus guiding our path of spirituality and holiness.

Texts for reflection

Various texts are offered for deepening the reflection on the proposed theme, either by Pope Francis, Father Henri Caffarel, or other documents that can serve as a basis to facilitate the

answering of the questions. If it wishes, the base team itself can choose other texts that it considers important for deepening the exchange of ideas about the topic.

Testimony

A short testimony of a member of the Teams of Our Lady of the Oceania Super Region is always presented and relates to the theme of the meeting.

Questions for the Sit-down

For the Sit-down, which is to be done before the monthly meeting, there are links to the theme of the meeting. These are additional links to the questions related to this Endeavour, usually related to the virtue of Mary, considered at each meeting.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

According to the Guide to the Teams of Our Lady, a team meeting is "the high point of the life of this little community. The presence of the risen Christ is there—alive, attentive to all, and loving each team member as he/she is", with all that is good and bad in him, and willing to help him become what he wants to be.³

It is good to remember that the team meeting is composed of five parts. The order can be changed to suit the life of each team itself, but none of the parts should be removed:

- Welcome and meal
- Sharing/pooling
- Reading of the Word of God, meditation and prayer
- Sharing on Endeavours
- Exchange of ideas on the study topic

Welcome and meal

Each meeting begins, with the arrival of each couple and the Priest Counsellor or Spiritual Advisor, and with the practice of hospitality and welcome by the couple who receive the team members into their home, which can be followed by a prayer.

In the plan for each meeting, a prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* is suggested, and this can be adopted by the team. It is the Prayer to the Creator, and its objective is to maintain unity with the spirit of the Encyclical Letter. It is the synthesis of what is being sought with this Study Topic.

³ Guide to the Teams of Our Lady, 2018 Edition, n° 5.3.1 (The Monthly Meeting).

The meal is a special moment within the meeting, when the team experiences the joy of being together, celebrating, eating, and praying.

Sharing/pooling

This is an essential time for couples to get to know each other better, and to help each other by sharing their lives in common.

At a time when we need more than ever a peaceful and welcoming dialogue between couples, it is suggested that at this moment couples relate the important events that have occurred since the last meeting, confronting the reality of living their life through the Gospel.

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

This time begins with a reflection or meditation on the Bible passage proposed for each meeting, which each couple can prepare in advance to deepen their experience with God, and to meditate on His Word, following Mary's example.

The personal meditation and/or the couple's meditation on the Bible passage can be followed by Liturgical Prayer, or any other prayers the base team considers appropriate for that time.

For the Liturgical Prayer the Responsorial Psalm of each day's Mass is suggested, as a way for the "small *ecclesia*" - Base Team - to connect with the wider Church.

Sharing on the Endeavours

In sharing the Endeavours at the meeting, there must develop an atmosphere of spirituality and fraternal listening, full of charity and mutual support.

It should not be forgotten the Endeavours should all be lived throughout the month. In some meetings, a specific Endeavours can be highlighted, which the theme of the meeting inspires to be lived with more intensity.

Exchange of ideas on the study topic

"The study topic is a way for us to further deepen our faith".⁴

With this in mind and the pursuit of holiness in our daily lives, this is a time to exchange ideas using all or some suggested questions for each team meeting.

It should be noted that the questions are intended for all team members, coming from different cultures. They may therefore need to be adapted or changed according to the team's wishes, and with the help of the Priest Counsellor and/or the Spiritual Advisor.

⁴ Guide to the Teams of Our Lady, 2018 Edition, nº 5.3.1 (Discussion on the Study Topic).

It should be noted this reflection is also done in light of the challenges and attitudes of Mary presented at the beginning of each meeting.

Final Prayers

At the end of each meeting, the prayer for the canonization of Father Henri Caffarel and the Magnificat can be prayed. Or, if the base team so wishes, these prayers can be said at other times during the meeting.

Meeting 1: They Have No More Wine

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of what the "lack of wine" means in the different realities that surround us.
- To know Mary's pedagogy for discerning the different realities where "the wine is missing".
- To experience and live the virtue of solidarity, which the mother of Jesus demonstrated at the Wedding at Cana.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

To say this phrase, "*They have no more wine,*" we must be present in the situations where it (wine) is really lacking. And the mother of Jesus was there, present at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. (Jn 2:1-11). She noticed that the wine was missing and that it would be shameful for the young couple on their very special day. With full trust in her Son, Mary said to those who were serving, "*Do whatever he tells you.*"

The mother of Jesus knew her son well and expected him to be a supportive friend who would respond to the needs of that couple. She interceded for the wedding feast and Jesus thus performs his first sign, satisfying human expectations, and his disciples believed in him.

As Pope Francis says: How is it possible to celebrate the wedding and to feast, if the wine that expresses the abundance of the banquet and the joy of the feast is missing? Imagine ending a wedding party by drinking tea! It would be a shame! Wine is necessary for the feast.⁵

Here is a great challenge: it is important to be there, at the wedding party, and to observe carefully; we need to be attentive to the needs of that reality where we find ourselves.

How can we know what is missing for us as a couple, for our family, for our church community, for our base team, for our co-workers, for our neighbors, for the people who have no housing, or work, or health, or education, or are migrants, if we are not close to these realities and situations of these human needs?

How can we know what is missing if we don't know how to be present in these realities: If we don't know how to put ourselves in the place of the other who needs something fundamental for his or her human dignity, if we don't know how to listen without judging, if we don't know how to understand, smile, vibrate and cry together with the other?

⁵ According to. Pope Francis. *General Audience*, St Peter's Square, 8 June 2016.

In the example of the wedding feast at Cana, Saint John presents Mary's intervention in the public life of Jesus and highlights her part in the mission of her Son.

The account in this Gospel is an invitation for all of us to think about how our path of service (or our mission) has enabled Jesus to realize, through our collaboration and solidarity, his signs.

Our society and our days are often apparent celebrations, with apparent joys, but where the essentials are often missing. Jesus offers us what is important: closeness, love, respect, mercy, compassion... For this to become real and possible, Jesus counts on our help, our cooperation, our solidarity, our generous service and sharing.

In fact, the power of Mary's intercessions has been highlighted by many throughout the history of Christianity. She is known as the first of the disciples; a path of discipleship that began with her willing and generous response to the Angel Gabriel, "*Let it be done to me according to your word*" (Lk 1:38).

Her service was that of a mother who cared deeply for her Son. Throughout his life, she supported him to continue his mission until his death on the cross (Jn 19:23-27). After his death, Mary did what she could to support the disciples, and remained with them (Acts 1:14).

We can thus imagine how Mary, throughout her life, was a constant and reliable support to others in their time of need, especially when "they had no more wine."

Following in Mary's footsteps: solidarity

What is this "being there" for us as a Christian couple and belonging to the Teams of Our Lady? It is true that this "being there" depends very much on each person, each couple and each family, and the stages of their lives.

- "Being there" when a spouse needs love, presence, affection ...
- "Being there" when a couple needs our support, welcome, generosity ...
- "Be there" when our children need our attention, care ...
- "Being there" with our parents when they grow old ...
- "To be there" in our Parish, contributing to some pastoral work...
- "Being there" where marriage and family values are being rejected ...
- "Being there" at the service of the sector, of the region in our Movement ...

However, what about when reality demands our presence and action in society?

- "Being there" when we find a person or family without a home, a house, or a shelter to live in ...
- "Being there" when we come across a migrant or a refugee asking us for help ...
- "Being there" where we see children, young people, and adults without quality basic education and without access to the necessary school materials ...
- "Being there" when we find people whose health is compromised and whose dignity

is not respected ...

- "Being there" when people demand an attitude of listening, openness, and acceptance ...
- "Being there" when we see people who live alone, in loneliness or in different forms of abandonment ...
- "Being there" where life on Earth is being threatened and destroyed ...
- "Being there" where the other needs us, and we need them ...

This "being there" is also an invitation to develop and live in our existence what Pope Francis calls "*the art of accompaniment*", which is characterized by the delicacy with which we can approach the sacred ground of the other, making it ours without invading it, without imposing ourselves, without feeling superior, but with a deep and humble sense of compassion and mercy.

We can follow Mary's example. To do this, we need to clearly understand the importance and power of welcoming and solidarity, compassion, and mercy, sharing love and showing support through simple and concrete actions.

Pope Francis reflects on this important quality of Mary:⁶

" If we imitate Mary, we cannot keep our arms folded, only complaining, or perhaps dodging the hard work that others do, and which is our responsibility. This is not about great things but about doing everything with tenderness and mercy".

When couples love each other, they nurture and support each other and their children to live "life to the full" (Jn 10:10); they thus reflect the unity and beauty of God's deep love for human beings.

The dignity of couples as a sign of love is important for the Church and society. St. Paul describes the love and unity of the couple as a sign of Christ's love for the Church (Eph 5:21-33). It is a visible sign of God's love from all eternity.

As couples, this love challenges us to be supportive, generous and loving towards all. We learn about these qualities from our parents and other people who have been important in our formation, such as grandparents, teachers, paid workers and volunteers. These give their time and effort to build these human and Christian values.

Through love, generosity, and solidarity, couples can reach out to care for people in all their forms of distress and need, "where the wine is missing": people who live in poverty, who are homeless, who live amidst the horror of family and community violence, who are refugees, and in situations caused by so many environmental disasters.

Our monthly team meeting is part of this dynamic of living in community so that we, and those around us, are not left feeling empty and abandoned, but strengthened to share what we are and what we have.

⁶ Message of Pope Francis to the President of the Cuban Episcopal Conference on the Occasion of the Day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Feast of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. Vatican, 8 September 2014.

The Word of God (Jn 2:1-11)

Three days later there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. When they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the wedding was all finished, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'. Jesus said 'Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet.'

His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'. There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water', and they filled them to the brim. 'Draw some out now' he told them, 'and take it to the steward.' They did this; the steward tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from – only the servants who had drawn the water knew – the steward called the bridegroom and said: 'People generally serve the best wine first and keep the cheaper sort till the guests have had plenty to drink; but you have kept the best wine till now'. This was the first of the signs given by Jesus: it was given at Cana in Galilee. He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him.

We are facing the first sign of Jesus Christ. After presenting the divine origin of the man from Nazareth, the Word who became flesh, after telling the Baptist's testimony about him, and after narrating the call of his first disciples, the Evangelist John presents the first great sign of the Son of God. However, that sign is surprisingly different from what we would have expected. It is about providing more than 600 liters of good wine for a feast.

Let's face it: with all the problems of hunger that existed and still exists in the world, not to mention the serious problem of alcoholism, it is reasonable to wonder whether he could have done something more useful. What would the Baptist, the ascetic of the desert, have said when faced with such a sign?

This question allows us to conclude that, certainly, the fourth evangelist has a much higher purpose in describing this as the first sign of Jesus. The importance of wine at a wedding feast in Jesus' time helps us to understand what this purpose is. Wine was an element of joy and satisfaction. The lack of it would not have ended the party, it is true, but it would have limited much its success and, consequently, would have left the bride and groom with a feeling of frustration for all their lives.

Mary realizes this, asks Jesus about it. And with some reluctance at first, he solves the problem by performing a "sign".

It is important to say that he did not perform this sign alone; he counted on the support of the people present. So, we have Mary who notices and intercedes; those present who collaborate, and Jesus who performs the sign. Is this just a pious reminder of Jesus at a wedding in Cana of Galilee? It would be expecting too little from John the Evangelist who makes a point of naming what Jesus performed as a "sign" and not a miracle.

This significant first "sign" of Cana comes to us in the context of a world disenchanted by the "lack of wine". And there are many facets of this lack of wine in the feast of life. The wine of human dignity, of social rights, of the appreciation of the Common House, among many others, is missing.

The missing wine has changed, but not the protagonists. Mary continues interceding in solidarity; Jesus who is the same "yesterday, today and forever" continues ready to act and we are the participants of this feast of humanity, and thus responsible for collaborating with Jesus to continue changing sadness and disappointment into joy and hope.

Let us entrust to Mary, example of solidarity guided by faith, all the anguish and hopes of those who "have no more wine," and may she instill in us the courage to invoke the Holy Spirit, builder of unity in the Church and among men, to help build a world of justice, peace, fraternity, and solidarity.

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

The theme of solidarity is one of the most important ones highlighted by Pope Francis in recent years. Numbers 114-117 of the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (FT) are dedicated to a profound reflection on the meaning and scope of solidarity in our day. Says the Pope:

I would like specially to mention solidarity, which, "as a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation. I think first of families, called to a primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on. They are also the privileged milieu for transmitting the faith, beginning with those first simple gestures of devotion which mothers teach their children.

Teachers, who have the challenging task of training children and youth in schools or other settings, should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life. The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age... Communicators also have a responsibility for education and formation, especially nowadays, when the means of information and communication are so widespread". [FT, 114]

At a time when everything seems to disintegrate and lose consistency, it is good for us to appeal to the "solidity" born of the consciousness that we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future. Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. And service in great part means "caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people". In offering such service, individuals learn to "set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable... Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, 'suffers' that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people". [FT, 115]

The needy generally “practice the special solidarity that exists among those who are poor and suffering, and which our civilization seems to have forgotten or would prefer in fact to forget. Solidarity is a word that is not always well received; in certain situations, it has become a dirty word, a word that dare not be said. Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history, and this is what popular movements are doing”. [FT, 116]

So, the word "solidarity" means much more than a few sporadic actions of generosity. It is much more, Pope Francis says. It is not just a matter of helping others: it is about justice. To be in solidarity and to bear fruit, the interdependence among all - either everyone is saved, or no one is saved! - needs strong roots in the human and in nature created by God; it needs respect for faces and for the Earth.

Father Henri Caffarel⁷

In a text, entitled "Riches", published in the French Monthly Letter of May 1948, Father Caffarel says the richness we receive - material or spiritual - are there to be shared. Like Christ, the Christian is concerned about others. He does not close in on himself to selfishly enjoy what he has, but is open, welcoming, in solidarity, attentive to others. He lives and works, in union with Christ, "for the glory of God and the salvation of the world."

"In many ways, we are privileged - even if many of us are more threatened today than before by the scourge of unemployment and precariousness. If, however, we feel secure, having nothing to fear, do we think of those who are not?

In response to my editorial in "l'Anneau d'Or" n° 20 ("Restlessness"), I received the following letter:

"I am the typical passive subscriber, the mother-of-a-family-too-busy-to-write! This time, however, I reacted strongly when reading your article.

'Your lack of concern worries me,' you wrote. Well, worry, and that is the correct word, gnaws at our heart! The world around us is so full of poverty-stricken people, how can we feel at peace? Are there still many people living happily, contentedly, in the midst of their peaceful family community, where the essentials of life are not wanting, where everyone feels comfortable among people who love each other and are pleasantly 'well-mannered'? I really thought that belonged to a different age. As for me, it is so hard to put aside a few moments of peace and quiet! So, I put my head between my hands and say: 'My social situation, my honestly acquired (and very relative) fortune, is the way God wanted it; moreover, am I not generous within my means, etc., etc. ...?', and I continue a little reassured.

⁷ Henri Caffarel. French Monthly Letter of May 1948. (Translation by the writing team).

But not for long. A beggar woman rings the doorbell (I am sure she is a professional, I don't owe her anything? Ah, but what if she has hungry, cold children in her house? Mine are so happy by the fireplace... Is that the plan of providence: their misery? my comfort?) and everything is thrown into question. [...]

We are aware that we are little, sinful, capricious, restless, indecisive, sad to perceive evil without having the courage to remedy it. Now, after having tried to calm those who were tranquil, could you not try to calm the restless ones? This anguish is so heavy! It would be so comfortable to remain calm!"

How Christian this comment sounds! There, caught in real life, is the restlessness that characterizes the disciple of Christ. Faced with the misery of the world, he discovers his wealth and asks himself, restlessly: 'why me, why not them?'

How rich you are, you to whom I address myself - even if you have no material wealth. Rich in your culture, in your education, in your relatives, in your friendships, in your home where love reigns. Rich in the infinitely more precious goods: faith, grace...

And all around you, a terrible poverty: hungry bodies, hungry hearts, hungry souls.

Are you haunted by the question: why me, why not them? Are you haunted by the will to share? You will tell me, "They don't ask me for anything." Do you really believe that they are the ones who should take the initiative?"

Testimony

The following testimony shows us the importance of having an open mind and heart to understand and value those around us and to be supportive of their needs.

Our relationship had developed and grown since we first met three years earlier. So, even though we had debts and very few possessions, we decided to get married soon after my husband had finished his studies. Our parents were very happy about our marriage plans and gladly paid for the wedding reception. I made my own wedding dress, and we had the reception in my aunt's garden. Our parents thought we had a good life ahead of us even though we were starting with very little. Our wedding guests understood this too, so we were very pleased to receive practical and useful gifts for the home we were setting up together.

We began our married life in a small furnished flat. Later we took up the offer of a rented house close to my husband's work, so he did not have to travel far, especially when he was called out to work during the night. We could only afford to buy a mattress, a refrigerator and not much else. We ate our meals sitting on folding chairs at a card table. Married life was good. We enjoyed hosting my husband's parents, picnic style, in our new home. Then sometime later, my parents came to visit from their home in another part of the country. They could see we were happy together, but they also saw our sparsely furnished home. We tried to reassure them that we didn't mind having an empty house and that we saw the furnishing of our home as a long-term project. However, they were determined to help us and finally, we were persuaded to go shopping with them to buy some furniture and a floor covering for our bare sitting room. We were overwhelmed by their generosity, but it was wonderful to be able to provide more comfort in our home when we hosted our families and friends.

Whenever we hear the story of the Wedding Feast of Cana, we are reminded of our early married life. Indeed, we see ourselves reflected in the newly married couple of the Gospel. No doubt, the young couple would have been most grateful and felt completely overwhelmed by Jesus' generous and loving act of providing the best wine for the wedding guests. In the same way, we were overwhelmed by the generosity of my parents in quietly helping us in our situation.

Mary's actions at the wedding feast in Cana are a powerful role model for us. Over the years, there have been many times when we have become aware that our children are struggling either financially or in other ways. We have seen their need and just as our parents did, we have responded as best we can, even when it has been difficult to do so. Mary's example of sensitivity to the needs of others is something we will always remember. We can be confident we can turn to her whenever we are empty, or our hearts are wounded. She will intercede on our behalf with our God.

Questions for the Sit Down

Pope Francis says in one of his catechesis, that in the midst of crisis, a solidarity guided by faith allows us to translate God's love in our globalized culture, not by building towers or walls that divide and then crumble, but by weaving communities and supporting truly human and solid growth processes. And in this solidarity helps.

I ask a question, continues the Pope: do I think about the needs of others? With what actions do I respond in my heart?⁸

In this month's Sit Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour, the couple can reflect a bit on how they show compassion, generosity and solidarity to others: in their own home or in the wider community, in the team, in the workplace, in the sports club, etc.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,

⁸ Pope Francis. *General Audience* - Catechesis: "Healing the world" - 5. Solidarity and the virtue of faith. San Damaso courtyard, Wednesday, 2 September 2020.

dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

As part of the meeting, the meal should be done according to what has been agreed by the team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that have been significant in the life of the individual or of the couple, and those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share how you - individually or as a couple - have been encouraged to live different forms of solidarity during this month (What were these actions? In whose favor were they carried out?).

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting: The Wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11)

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

The sharing of the Endeavours is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a time of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a time of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about living the Endeavours in this month.

- What is the "wine" we are missing individually and as a couple in living the Endeavours?
- How do I help my spouse in practicing the Endeavours?
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this month?

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

- How does Mary inspire us to be truly missionary disciples of her Son Jesus?
- How can we, as a couple or as a team, practice Mary's solidarity with other couples in our parish or diocesan community so that they feel welcomed into the Church?
- What are the challenges that we must overcome individually and as a couple in order to be more in solidarity in society with those who "have no more wine"?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

Meeting 2: They no longer have a home

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of wine" for many individuals and families who do not have decent housing.
- To discover the creativity of Mary and Joseph in the face of adversity, finding themselves homeless for the birth of their son Jesus.
- To experience and live out the virtue of humility that the mother of Jesus demonstrated in this context.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

In the previous meeting we reflected a little on solidarity. As Pope Francis told the participants of the World Meeting of Popular Movements in October 2014, solidarity is much more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It is thinking and acting in terms of community. It is fighting against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, denial of social and labor rights. It is to face realities to which we are all called to transform.

And the Pope continues:⁹

"This meeting of ours responds to a very concrete desire, something that any father and mother would want for their children – a desire for what should be within everyone's reach, namely land, housing and work. However, nowadays, it is sad to see that land, housing and work are ever more distant for the majority. It is strange but, if I talk about this, some say that the Pope is communist.

They do not understand that love for the poor is at the center of the Gospel. Land, housing and work, what you struggle for, are sacred rights. To make this claim is nothing unusual; it is the social teaching of the Church. I am going to dwell on each of these briefly since you have chosen them as the core issues for this meeting. [...]

Second, Housing. I said it and I repeat it: a home for every family. We must never forget that, because there was no room in the inn, Jesus was born in a stable; and that his family, persecuted by Herod, had to leave their home and flee into Egypt. Today there are so many homeless families, either because they have never had one or because, for different reasons, they have lost it. Family and housing go hand in hand. Furthermore, for a house to be a home, it requires a community dimension, and this is the neighborhood ... and it is precisely in the neighborhood where the great family of humanity begins to be built, starting from the most immediate instance, from living together with one's neighbors". [...]

⁹ Pope Francis. Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements, 28 October 2014.

For those who have a home to live in, it may be hard to imagine what it is like to have lost or not have a fixed, safe, and healthy place to live. However, homelessness or those who do not have a shelter, or a home represent a surprisingly well-diversified problem in our societies.

Based on reports, an estimated 2% of the world's population has nowhere to live. This equates to about 150 million people living on the streets, in temporary housing, in refugee camps, or in some other form of housing in transient and dangerous conditions. According to the Habitat for Humanity Movement, about 1.6 billion, or more than 20 percent, of the world's population may not have adequate housing.¹⁰

The causes and consequences of homelessness are many and complex, and raise important questions for all Christians, because, as we saw above, "family and housing go hand in hand."

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed in one of its studies that there is no single profile of homeless people in the world - developed and developing - where this problem is quite common. We can consider some examples:¹¹

- People and families made homeless by national or regional events such as famine, war, religious and ethnic persecution.
- People and families who were born into intergenerational poverty and are stuck in social structures that do not allow them to improve their situation.
- Homeless people living on the streets, and who are invisible to their community.
- People with illnesses and physical disabilities, usually rejected by family, friends, and employers, often leading them to addiction to alcohol and other drugs.
- Homeless people and families caused by various weather events.

People who have no home or a roof over their heads are sometimes referred to in impersonal terms, such as "the homeless," "the poor," "street people," or worse, as statistics and as a problem, rather than as real people.

We must learn to be less prejudiced against people who are homeless, remembering that they have names, personalities, hearts, and dignity. Anyone can become a person without a home, without a house.

Following in Mary's footsteps: humility

We may ask ourselves: *how would we respond or attend to a family without a home whose names are Mary and Joseph, and whose son is called Jesus?*

¹⁰ Gioietta Kuo. Yet another emerging global crisis- Homelessness. Published by The Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere - MAHB, August 2019, accessed December 8, 2021; Available at: <https://mahb.stanford.edu/library-item/yet-another-emerging-global-crisis-homelessness/>.

¹¹ OECD. Homeless Population - Affordable Housing Database. Last Updated 27/05/2021. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: www.oecd.org/fels/family/FHC3-1-Homeless-population.pdf?clen=455380&chunk=true.

In Luke's Gospel account of Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph experienced what it was like to be a homeless family, as a decree from Emperor Augustus ordered that everyone had to return to their own town to register for the census that was being taken.

When Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem, Mary was ready to give birth, but there was no room for them in the inn. Jesus is born as a "homeless" baby. This is not how the arrival of the Messiah would have been imagined by his parents and the religious leaders at the time.

We can say that the circumstances of that birth remain the same even today. The question is: we try to hide and even deny this reality.

Do we see the homeless as people to be avoided, or pitied, or who should simply be the object of our charity? Should we not instead recognize the intrinsic dignity of every human person? Are we or are we not all brothers and sisters?

Pope Francis, in commenting on the value of the nativity scene, invites us to feel and touch this reality of people and families without a home:¹²

"Coming into this world, the Son of God was laid in the place where animals feed. Hay became the first bed of the One who would reveal himself as "the bread come down from heaven" (Jn 6:41). Saint Augustine, with other Church Fathers, was impressed by this symbolism: "Laid in a manger, he became our food" (Sermon 189, 4). Indeed, the nativity scene evokes a number of the mysteries of Jesus' life and brings them close to our own daily lives. [...] (2,b)

In a particular way, from the time of its Franciscan origins, the nativity scene has invited us to "feel" and "touch" the poverty that God's Son took upon himself in the Incarnation. Implicitly, it summons us to follow him along the path of humility, poverty and self-denial that leads from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross. It asks us to meet him and serve him by showing mercy to those of our brothers and sisters in greatest need. (3,d)

Mary teaches us, in giving birth to the savior in a stable, that humility makes us all equal, because it brings us closer to the essential: Jesus Christ.

The Church is called to be on the peripheries - material and existential - to care for those whose dignity is compromised, without prejudice or fear, without proselytizing, but ready to witness that we are all brothers and sisters.

The Word of God (Lk 2:1-7)

Now at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So, Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she birth to a son, her first born. She

¹² Pope Francis. Apostolic Letter *Admirabile Signum*, on the meaning and importance of the nativity scene. Given in Greccio, at the Shrine of the Nativity, on 1 December in the year 2019.

wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

If the son of God had come with power, in the radiance of his glory, he would certainly not have been exposed to rejection; we would all have necessarily welcomed him. But it would not be God; it would be an idol.

A God is believed to be of enormous greatness, extraordinary height and terrible appearance. These are the characteristics of the idol, common to all religions.

Jesus, the child God, is first of all next to the small stone that brings down the idol (cf. Dan 2:31-34). The sign to recognize him will be different: his enormous greatness will be that of the tiny newborn, his enchanting splendor will be the fragile cry of the child who experiences adversity outside his mother's womb, and his trembling appearance, that of a trembling body in the manger.

In a manger, yes, together with the animals, it is precisely there that the Word made flesh comes into the world. Joseph, Mary and Jesus divide humanity into before and after in a place intended for animals, because there was no place for them among human beings.

This shocking and uncomfortable scene sets a benchmark for our faith. It is the gateway to the "house" where he lives, and how we are able to know him. Jesus is born homeless. To look for him today in palaces, in the great centers of power, in the high places of society, is a huge mistake. We will find idols in sumptuous and wealthy environments, but not the Word who became flesh.

Let us not lose sight of Mary, the humble woman, who embodies in herself the life of many mothers who live homeless in big cities, hidden under viaducts, exploited in rural areas, exposed in conflict zones.

The comfort of our homes, the convenience of our air-conditioned environments, the sophisticated structure of hospitals can blind and insensitive us to realize that many children, just like Jesus, the one who said that "as often as you have done this to one of the least of these who are my brothers, you have done it to me" (cf. Mt 25:40), remain homeless in the world of skyscrapers and large condominiums.

Realizing that Jesus lacked the "wine of the roof" cannot only be a reason for pious contemplation at Christmas time. The "wine of the roof" is still missing and is a challenge to us. Let us go to the mangers of today; there is our God, not our idols, and let us do our part so that everyone, at the feast of life, has the right to the wine of the dwelling.

To be devoted to Mary is to imitate her deep humility. There is no genuine devotion to Our Lady without humility. The saints were men and women who, following Mary's example, lived humility in their daily lives.

Let us ask Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, that as we pray the Magnificat, we may delight in our hearts with the passages about humility: "for he looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid" and "the Lord raises up the lowly.

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

The following text is taken from Pope Francis' address to participants at the World Meeting of Popular Movements in October 2014.¹³

He challenges us to come out of ourselves to welcome others, and not to use euphemisms to hide the reality of those who do not have decent housing, those who suffer and who do not have their dignity respected by different economic, social or political interests.

[...] "We live nowadays in immense cities that show off proudly, even arrogantly, how modern they are. But while they offer wellbeing and innumerable pleasures for a happy minority, housing is denied to thousands of our neighbors, our brothers and sisters including children, who are called elegant names such as 'street people' or 'without fixed abode' or 'urban camper'. Isn't it curious how euphemisms abound in the world of injustices! A person, a segregated person, a person set apart, a person who suffers misery or hunger: such a one is 'urban camper'. It is an elegant expression, isn't it? You should be on the lookout – I might be wrong in some cases; but in general, what lurks behind each euphemism is a crime.

We live in cities that throw up skyscrapers and shopping centers and strike big real estate deals ... but they abandon a part of themselves to marginal settlements on the periphery. How painful it is to hear poor settlements are marginalized, or, worse still, earmarked for demolition! How cruel are the images of violent evictions, bulldozers knocking down the tiny dwellings, images just like from a war. And this is what we see today.

You know that in the crowded slums where many of you live, values endure that have been forgotten in the rich centers. These settlements are blessed with a rich popular culture where public areas are not just transit corridors but an extension of the home, a place where bonds can be forged with neighbors. How lovely are cities that overcome unhealthy mistrust and integrate those who are different, even making such integration a new factor of development. How lovely are cities that, in their architectural design, are full of spaces that unite, connect and foster recognition of the other.

So, the line to follow is neither eradication nor marginalization but urban integration. Moreover, not only must the word "integration" replace all talk of eradication; it must also supplant those projects that aim to varnish poor neighborhoods, prettify the outskirts and daub make-up on social ailments instead of curing them by promoting genuine and respectful integration. It is a sort of cosmetic architecture, isn't it? And it is the trend. So let us keep on working so that all families have housing and so that all neighborhoods have adequate

¹³ Pope Francis. Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements. Old Synod Hall, 28 October 2014, paragraphs 12-14.

infrastructure (sewage, light, gas, asphalted roads); and I go on: schools, hospitals or first aid clinics, sports clubs and all those things that create bonds and unite; and as I have already said, access to health care and to education and to secure tenancy.

Father Henri Caffarel

In his book "Take Mary as your Spouse", Father Caffarel describes Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. A journey they make together, encountering all kinds of difficulties, which they accept, humbly, in the face of circumstances, so that their son Jesus may be born with the security they were able to find.¹⁴

"Life went on, contemplative and active, in the house of Nazareth. The end of the pregnancy was approaching, and everything seemed to predict that the child would be received amidst the humble and sweet things prepared for him, that he would cast his first glances on the walls of this house where the love of his parents had built a home.

And abruptly, unexpectedly, the blow of fate. "In those days a decree was promulgated by Caesar Augustus, determining the census of the whole world." [...]

And they both obey. Mary, would you be obliged to take the census? That is not certain. But she doesn't want to leave Joseph. After having waited so long together, could they be separated at the arrival of the child? It is the two of them that will take the road. [...]

They arrive in Bethlehem exhausted with fatigue; apparently, they do not know anyone who can give hospitality. Joseph then stops in front of the inn: ...an open-air quadrangle where the animals are crowded, surrounded by a wooden porch to shelter people. But "there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). No doubt, the census had attracted many people; but it is for them that there is no room; the wealthier ones found lodging. Mary's condition inspired nothing but pity, and hoteliers do not like to accommodate either births or deaths. Whatever the good reasons (there are always good reasons!), "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him" (Jn 1:11).

Mary and Joseph go ahead. God's intention is even more incomprehensible than they think. Does He want the child to be born in total denudation? They abandon themselves to this will that directs them, but a kind of great violence of love takes hold of them for this little one who has nothing of what others have - nothing but the love of his father and mother. This love must fill everything, suffice everything.

Someone pointed out, not far away, a cave dug into the side of a rock; it served, or had served, as a stable, and could shelter vagrants. Joseph piles up the straw so that Mary can lie down there. Helped by Joseph, Mary gets off her dusty mount with difficulty; she lets herself slide to the ground. Joseph looks around: where will they put the child to keep him safe from the cold? In a corner, at half height, is a manger for the cattle, half carved in rock, half molded in clay... An armful of the softest straw, the cloths carefully taken out of the luggage, form a kind of cradle.

¹⁴ Henri Caffarel. Take Mary home as your wife. See chapter: "The Road to Bethlehem". (Translation by the writing team).

House of Nazareth, house so lovingly prepared, how far away you are! But since the Father has willed it this way, let it be done as He wills. There is nothing left but to wait..."

Testimony

This testimony shows us how important dialogue and cooperation between religions and churches is for building a better future and bringing hope to people in need.

In 2019, we heard about a new initiative, in Bendigo (a town in the Australian state of Victoria), regarding a winter night shelter for homeless people. The concept had been initiated in the Christian Churches in the United Kingdom, in cooperation with local communities. It was to be used on winter nights from June to August, using accommodation in churches. The idea was to provide food, shelter and dignity. The program is now in its third year.

Getting involved in this initiative meant becoming fellow walkers with the homeless: listening to their stories, listening with interest, serving and sharing meals. However, we were also walking companions with other volunteers.

In many ways, we were blessed ourselves. It helped us realize how much God had given us: love, forgiveness, family, and abundant blessings. We also learned how unresolved traumas impact people's lives. One or two traumas can lead to becoming homeless, having mental health issues, addictions, and more. We were drawn into the lives of our guests and their experiences.

As guests developed a sense of hope, some were able to move into some form of more permanent accommodation, and some chose to seek help. They developed a sense of community together.

We were enriched by the ecumenical group evolving and humbled by the generosity of people who believed in the Program, and showed it by cooking meals or donating funds, practical supplies, gifts, and more.

Questions for the Sit Down

"The presence of the poor and the lowly in the nativity scene remind us that God became man for the sake of those who feel most in need of his love and who ask him to draw near to them. Jesus, "gentle and humble in heart", was born in poverty and led a simple life in order to teach us to recognize what is essential and to act accordingly. The nativity scene clearly teaches that we cannot let ourselves be fooled by wealth and fleeting promises of happiness".¹⁵

In this month's Sitting Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour, let us ask ourselves about our ability to live with only the "essentials" in our home, housing our family and friends.

¹⁵ Pope Francis. Apostolic Letter *Admirabile Signum*, n^o 6b.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming Couple: Dear brothers, sisters and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual, or of the couple, or of the family, and those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share how you have been a sign of God's presence for the members of your team since you last met.
- Share how you - individually or as a couple - have been encouraged to live out different forms of welcome this month (What were these actions? In whose favor were they carried out?).

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting: The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-7)

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Sharing is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a moment of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a moment of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about the experience of the Endeavours this month.
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this month? What was this "most effort"?
- Share how the Endeavours helped you live the virtue of humility, following Mary's example.

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

In Pope Video nº 14, February 2, 2017,¹⁶ Pope Francis asks for people who find themselves in situations of vulnerability and helplessness. Thus, he states:

"We live in cities that build towers (buildings), shopping centers, do real estate deals, but abandon a part of themselves on the margins, on the peripheries", comparing the reality of some and others in modern societies.

"As a consequence of this situation, large masses of the population find themselves excluded, marginalized: without work, without horizons, without a way out. Do not abandon them!"

"Ask with me for all those who live in ordeal, who are exhausted, especially the poor, the refugees and the marginalized, that they may find welcome and support in our communities."

After these words and appeal from Pope Francis, take some time to reflect:

- What was our reaction to Pope Francis' video clip?
- How do we respond when we see someone without a safe place to live?
- Are we prejudiced against people living on the streets? What is the feeling that comes up when we approach these people?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

¹⁶ The Team that wants, can follow these words of Pope Francis through the following link: [The Pope Video | The Pope Video is a global initiative developed by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network \(Apostleship of Prayer\).](#)

Meeting 3: They no longer have a country

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of wine" of those who have been forced to abandon their country.
- To understand that in God's plan there is no room for indifference because we are all brothers and sisters.
- To experience and live the virtue of Mary's resilience.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

The August 2021 report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees¹⁷ states that at the end of the previous year, there were 20.7 million refugees worldwide and more than 48 million people displaced within their own countries due to situations of conflict and violence. Also, according to the report, it is estimated there are 4.2 million stateless people, i.e., those who do not have their nationality recognized by any country.

These numbers give us an idea of the scale of the humanitarian crisis involving migrants and refugees around the world. However, we need to go beyond and realize, behind these numbers, there are real lives, entire families subjected to suffering and risky situations. In this context, there are not a few who lose their lives.

On the first trip of his pontificate, Pope Francis traveled by boat to the island of Lampedusa, the nearest land for many fleeing North Africa. Pope Francis was horrified by the number of people who had died in this attempted crossing. He threw a wreath into the sea to honor those who had perished, visited the people who were stranded on the island, and prayed with them over an altar made of wood from shipwrecked boats.

For Pope Francis, the boats were a symbol of the lack of justice and compassion. For him, the problem was not reduced to the issue of human traffickers or the protection of borders. The central problem was the indifference and lack of value given to those human lives.

He challenged our consciences by saying that "... we have fallen into the globalization of indifference. We get used to the suffering of the other, it does not concern us, it does not interest us, it is not our responsibility!".¹⁸

Eight years later, on his trip to Cyprus and Greece, the Pope notes that little had changed on

¹⁷ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3942822?ln=en>. Accessed: 06/12/2021.

¹⁸ Pope Francis. Homily at the Holy Mass for the victims of the shipwrecks on his trip to Lampedusa (ITALY), Sports Camp "Arena", in the Salina Quarter, July 8, 2013. See: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

the migration issue and passionately asks us to take heed of the stories and dramas of refugees.¹⁹

How should we, who are Christians, respond to people who seek protection from violence and persecution? In answering this question, we are guided by the scriptures and the social doctrine of the Church.

We can begin with the Old Testament, where the respect and care that should be given to the stranger, the foreigner, is established. The law called upon citizens to show compassion and solidarity with the stranger. In the Book of Leviticus, we find the following exhortation:

"If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself – for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God". (Lev 19:33-34).

It is no accident, therefore, that Jesus places welcoming the stranger as one of the good works considered in the final judgment:

"Then the King will say to those on his right hand: Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you made me welcome". (Mt 25:34-35).

Following in Mary's footsteps: Resilience

In the narrative of Jesus' childhood, the evangelist Matthew shows us the Holy family forced to leave their homeland to escape the persecution and massacre ordered by Herod, taking refuge in Egypt; from there they return only when there was no longer any danger (Mt 2:13-19).

What trauma must this have caused the family? Being uprooted, fleeing with only the few things they could carry. Did they have a donkey to help carry their few belongings or to support the mother and baby? Where did they find shelter? The nights in the desert are cold and the days are hot. Did anyone along the way offer them water, food or shelter? We don't know if they traveled alone or in a small group, but they certainly couldn't have stayed in touch with their family members at home.

What we can be sure of, however, is that Mary and Joseph accepted and trusted God's Word and took the child to the safety of Egypt, despite all the difficulties that this represented, because they did not know what they would encounter along the way, nor where they would stop, nor how long it would take them to return.

If we are to follow Mary's example, we too must be prepared to trust God's Word and step out of our "comfort zone" to do what we know is right. Such trust makes us resilient in adversity, able to face it with serenity.

"The Gospel does not tell us how long Mary, Joseph and the child remained in Egypt. Yet they certainly needed to eat, to find a home and employment. It does not take much imagination

¹⁹ Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Cyprus and Greece (2-6 December 2021). Visit to the refugees; Address of his Holiness Pope Francis, "Reception and Identification Centre" in Mytilene, Sunday, 5 December 2021.

to fill in those details. The Holy Family had to face concrete problems like every other family, like so many of our migrant brothers and sisters who, today too, risk their lives to escape misfortune and hunger".²⁰

Mary and Joseph lived their experience in a foreign land with confidence and patience, in an attitude of listening to the Word of God that would show them the way and the way to act.

We can imagine these parents, so open to the Word of God, as well as the experience of living in another culture, must have helped Jesus to develop his welcoming attitude toward those who lived on the margins of society.

The Word of God (Mt 2:13-18)

After they had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him'. So, Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt. Herod was furious when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or under, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men. It was then that the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled: A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loudly lamenting. It was Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were no more.

Joseph was a dreamer. Dreaming is usually synonymous with unreality; so much so that the dreamer is considered to be someone who lives alienated from reality while contemplating a fantasy world. When we are asleep, how many times do we wake up suddenly in the middle of the night, surrounded by unusual, disconnected, and confusing thoughts. Generally, the next day, we do not remember them. This is precisely because they do not portray the real world we live in.

This passage tells us about a dream, but about a different dream. Joseph's dream is God's dream! It is the dream of Life! The order is clear: get up. It is not a simple sleepy awakening, full of confused echoes. It is a clear command to stand up in readiness. And it must be so, because Joseph's dream is a vital dream, death is approaching.

Contemplating Joseph's agony with the angel's message, immediately brings us to consider Mary's challenge. She was awakened in the middle of the night by her husband who, panting, must have conveyed to her the words of the angel. Certainly, this would have generated legitimate fear, fright, ... among so many other feelings that can come together in the heart of a mother.

We can imagine that her first reaction, proper of the maternal instinct, must have been to hug her son tightly against her breast. What a beautiful scene to meditate on!

And that is how they left for Egypt. This is another strong scene. To imagine a decision made in haste, in the middle of the night, abandoning your homeland, your relatives, your friends;

²⁰ Pope Francis. Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, n° 5.

in fact, a whole life built up over years. Faith in God's dream required courage from both Joseph and Mary, and in addition, resilience. How much adaptation was required in the midst of so many adversities!

What must refugee life have been like? Now it is not the house that is missing, it is the homeland. Now the challenge is not to find a manger, but to survive in a foreign homeland.

There are many women today who are contemplated in Our Lady's existential experience. Their resilience is echoed in the current drama of countless refugees. They are journeys interrupted by lack of strength, boats that do not reach their destinations... lives that are lost along the way. And if they do reach their destination, what a challenge in a foreign land! How much remembrance of the homeland left behind!

In the figure of Our Lady of the Exile, let us contemplate the face of so many women who, with their children clutched to their chests, fleeing from death, seek the uncertainties of a foreign land as the only hope for life. Mary, lady of resilience, pray for us!

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

Pope Francis has shown a deep concern for migrants and refugees. Here were selected some of his words on this issue.

Complex challenges arise when our neighbour happens to be an immigrant.[109] Ideally, unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development. Yet until substantial progress is made in achieving this goal, we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfilment. Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. For "it is not a case of implementing welfare programmed from the top down, but rather of undertaking a journey together, through these four actions, in order to build cities and countries that, while preserving their respective cultural and religious identity, are open to differences and know how to promote them in the spirit of human fraternity". (FT, 129)

Almost every day the television and papers carry news of refugees fleeing from hunger, war and other grave dangers, in search of security and a dignified life for themselves and for their families". In each of these people, forced to flee to safety, Jesus is present as he was at the time of Herod. In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers and prisoners, we are called to see the face of Christ who pleads with us to help. If we can recognize him in those faces, we will be the ones to thank him for having been able to meet, love and serve him in them.²¹

This is the ideal of the new Jerusalem, where all peoples are united in peace and harmony, celebrating the goodness of God and the wonders of creation. To achieve this ideal, however, we must make every effort to break down the walls that separate us and, in acknowledging our profound interconnection, build bridges that foster a culture of encounter. Today's migration movements offer an opportunity for us to overcome our fears and let ourselves be enriched by

²¹ Pope Francis. Message for the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2020.

the diversity of each person's gifts. Then, if we so desire, we can transform borders into privileged places of encounter, where the miracle of an ever wider "we" can come about.²²

We are in the age of walls and barbed wire. To be sure, we can appreciate people's fears and insecurities, the difficulties and dangers involved, and the general sense of fatigue and frustration, exacerbated by the economic and pandemic crises. Yet problems are not resolved and coexistence improved by building walls higher, but by joining forces to care for others according to the concrete possibilities of each and in respect for the law, always giving primacy to the inalienable value of the life of every human being.²³

The Holy Mother of God herself experienced the hardship of exile (Matthew 2:13-15), lovingly accompanied her Son's journey to Calvary, and now shares eternally his glory. To her maternal intercession we entrust the hopes of all the world's migrants and refugees and the aspirations of the communities which welcome them, so that, responding to the Lord's supreme commandment, we may all learn to love the other, the stranger, as ourselves.²⁴

Father Henri Caffarel

These texts by Father Caffarel give us two perspectives, starting with that of one who arrives in an unknown place, for whom a friendly gesture makes all the difference.

We cannot help feeling forlorn when we arrive in a strange city (at the docks, the railroad or bus station, the airport) and know that nobody is there waiting for us. By contrast, if we are greeted by a cheerful face, if others reach out to help us, we have a wonderful sense of consolation. We are delivered from the cruel impression that somehow we have lost our way, that we are completely astray. The strangeness does not matter anymore—the customs, the language, the vast disconcerting city. It is not so hard to be a stranger to everybody else, providing there is one person who thinks of us as a friend. The other perspective leads us to consider our union with God, who infuses us with love and hope, capable of creating gestures of solidarity.²⁵

I have been speaking to you of the Christian who lives by hope, as if he were an isolated being. In reality, he is immersed in the vast created universe, and he knows it. He wants to be at one with all creatures. He hears the muffled groans of those who, St. Paul tells us, aspire to share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Christian lends them his heart and his voice so that, within him, their groaning may become hope.

The Christian senses his union especially with his brothers and sisters. He feels that he is united to all the poor of the earth in their search for bread, for a roof over their heads, for a homeland, for a little love and respect, and (often without knowing it) for a God. He feels that he is united to all the rich, too, whose power, wealth, and pleasures bring them only disappointment. It is their nature, too, to aspire to an absolute happiness. In the midst of all who are deprived of authentic hope, the Christian is the brother in whom their desires, despairs and disappointments are melded into a prayer of hope.²⁶

²² Pope Francis. Message for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2021.

²³ Pope Francis. Address on the Visit to the Refugees, Apostolic Journey to Cyprus and Greece, 2-6 December 2021.

²⁴ Pope Francis. Message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2018.

²⁵ Henri Caffarel. *Being Present to God: Letters on Prayer*. Letter 01 - You Are Expected.

²⁶ Henri Caffarel. *Being Present to God: Letters on Prayer*. Letter 72 - And this hope will not leave us disappointed.

Testimony

Since August 2012, people arriving by boat, seeking asylum in Australia, have been sent to camps on the islands of Nauru and Manus, awaiting the definition of their case. Unless they are considered refugees, these people are not settled in Australia.

Through our Parish's social justice group, we became aware of the possibility of directly supporting asylum seekers who were detained on the islands. We were already supporting the work coordinated by a nun of the Brigidine²⁷ order who organizes groups to offer some religious or community support to these men. For several years we have contributed food parcels, clothing, telephone credit, and messages of support. One Christmas, one of our group was allowed to visit the detention center. We prepared homemade cookies and the parish craft group sent small gifts and cards with messages of support. Gradually, with the involvement of the St. Vincent de Paul organization, the local community on the islands also gave support to the men in detention.

Amidst severe health problems, both physical and mental, several of the men were eventually released on transit visas without any support. They were expected to find housing and work at a time of severe restrictions caused by Covid. Our parish group invited one or two of them to move into our neighborhood. We took in one of them (whom we will call "N") during October 2020. With the help of local agencies, we supported him in getting medical care, finding housing, training, and work, and helping him get his driver's license. We have become friends.

We have been constantly touched by the kind and sincere thanks we have received from N. His enthusiasm to learn and try to build a life here, despite the events, has been amazing to us. We only wish we could help and provide more security for his future, as he must find a third country to accept him permanently. Recently, in a testimony at our parish's Sunday Masses, he thanked those who had sent messages of support and material goods for the detainees. "It gave us hope when no one seemed to care about us."

Questions for the Sit Down

Pope Francis tells us:

"I realize that some people are hesitant and fearful with regard to migrants. I consider this part of our natural instinct of self-defense. Yet it is also true that an individual and a people are only fruitful and productive if they are able to develop a creative openness to others". (FT, 41).

In this month's Sitting Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour, let us ask ourselves about our capacity to welcome people coming from other cultures.

²⁷ If you want to know about the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP), go to: <https://basp.org.au/you-can-help/>.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in your life as an individual or as a couple, and those that help you confront your reality with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share experiences in which you carried out actions in favor of the migrants in your reality (what were the actions; in whose favor were they carried out). Try to present the meaning of these events for your life.

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting: The flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13-18)

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Sharing is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a time of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a time of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about living the Endeavours this month.
- How do I help my spouse in practicing the Endeavours?
- "You are no longer guests or pilgrims, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). Sin exiles us. How have the Endeavours helped you to get back into God's fellowship?

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

- The "stranger" can be understood as anyone who is not part of our family or circle of friends. From this perspective, do you consider yourselves to be good and welcoming neighbors? What specific qualities characterize such a person?
- How do we respond to Pope Francis' call at Fratelli Tutti to welcome the "stranger" unconditionally, "without counting the cost"?
- Sometimes committing to a cause can entail being rejected by others. Have we had this kind of experience when welcoming someone considered to be on the fringes of society? How do we deal with it?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

Meeting 4: They no longer have education

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of wine" of those who do not have access to quality education.
- To reflect on the importance of an integral education that includes both technical knowledge and human and Christian values.
- To understand the value of ongoing formation as an essential part of spiritual growth - individual and as a couple.
- To contemplate and experience the example of Mary as mother and educator.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

In 1948, the United Nations approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 of this Declaration begins with a very clear and simple proposition: "Everyone has the right to education".

This Declaration provided world leaders with a very concrete guide to the principles that all countries should achieve. However, in the decades since that Declaration, the reality has been disheartening. A basic, quality education is still lacking in many countries, despite the continuing concerns raised by human rights leaders.

The Second Vatican Council, in its declaration on Christian education, reaffirms this Universal Right to Education for all men, of any origin, condition and age, since it is part of the dignity of the person.

It emphasizes the progress of the various sciences, and that they should help in the harmonious development of the physical, moral, and intellectual qualities of children, young people, and adolescents, so they can take part in social life armed with the necessary and opportune instruments. Thus, they will be able to insert themselves actively into the various groupings of the human community, opening themselves to dialogue with others and cooperating with the common good of all.

For this reason, the conciliar document states:

"Consequently, it earnestly entreats all those who hold a position of public authority or who are in charge of education to see to it that youth is never deprived of this sacred right. It further exhorts the sons of the Church to give their attention with generosity to the entire field of

education, having especially in mind the need of extending very soon the benefits of a suitable education and training to everyone in all parts of the world".²⁸

Education is therefore offered in the school, family, and social spheres, because a person's education is the duty of the state, the family, and society.

Nelson Mandela, for example, alludes to the important role of education as a mechanism for changing society. He states:²⁹

"Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world."

Mahatma Gandhi observed:³⁰

"By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning."

These ways of understanding education are accompanied by a rather subtle message, that the purpose of education should be much more than just "going to school," or receiving some instruction. Education needs to develop the whole person, and the family's mission is paramount in this regard.

Education must aim at the full development of the human person, understood in its entirety - in the physical, psychological, cognitive, affective, moral, ethical, aesthetic, cultural, spiritual, and personal aspects.

Pope Francis has been one of the leaders of a new Global Education Pact, to promote an education capable of dialoguing about how we are building the future of the planet and the need to invest the talents of all in a change capable of maturing a new universal solidarity and a more welcoming society.

The objective of this Pact is ³¹

"to rekindle our dedication for and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding". I invited everyone "to unite our efforts in a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity".

Pope Francis' concern, in view of the current educational reality in the world, emphasizes the need to join efforts to achieve a broad educational alliance that offers an integral formation that can be summarized: in knowing oneself, one's brother, creation and the Transcendent, because "we cannot hide from the new generations the truths that give meaning to life.

²⁸ Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, on October 28, 1965, n^o 1, about the Universal Right to an Education.

²⁹ Nelson Mandela Foundation. "Lighting your way to a better future". Planetarium, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, July 16, 2003. Accessed: December 8, 2021. Available at: http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS909.

³⁰ "Education and Peace: A Gandhian Perspective". Accessed December 8, 2021; Available at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/education_peace.htm.

³¹ Pope Francis. Address to the Participants in the Meeting "Religions and Education: Towards a Global Compact on Education". Clémentine Hall, 5 October 2021, 3rd paragraph.

As Team couples, we have a non-transferable educational mission: by our testimony and action, we are responsible for the transmission of human and Christian values, starting with our family, and for those who do not have the grace of receiving a heritage of faith from childhood in their family environment.

As the Book of Proverbs tells us: "Instruct a child in the way he should go, and when he grows old he will not leave it". (Pr 22:6).

As team members, we also have at hand a great treasure, a school of ongoing formation, both to deepen our knowledge of our faith and to practice human and Christian discernment that moves both our reason and our heart in the search for a closer coherence between faith and life, for the living of married spirituality.

The pedagogy proposed by the Teams of Our Lady offers us a set of formation tools to help us on our way to holiness in and through marriage.

Following in Mary's footsteps: Educator

The concept of formation derives from the Latin word *formatio*. It is the action and effect of "to form or to be formed": to give form to someone or something.

Formation also refers to the way a person was raised from childhood and adolescence, that is, the kind of education he or she received in order to become a mature and independent person. In this context, education is the continuous process of developing a human being's physical, intellectual and moral faculties in order to better integrate into society and into one's own social group.

Our formation as a person begins when we are small children, where a large part of our formation and education comes through the family, from our parents.

And how did Mary and Joseph care for Jesus' growth? In wisdom, age, and grace. We can see that Mary and Joseph experienced all the events of family life with their Son.

Thus, we can look to Mary and Joseph as models of nurturing parents, who protect and accompany Jesus on his journey of growth and development, "in wisdom, age and grace before God and men" (Lk 2:52).

He was the Son of God but came into the world born of a woman. He was nurtured by the love and protection of Mary and Joseph, as a baby and as a child. It was Mary who provided Jesus with the first foundations of education. She taught her young son how to be a loving God, who cares deeply for everyone and especially for the poorest.

We can also reflect on Mary's own formation and learning from a young age, when she was faithfully instructed by her own parents. It was through her education that she began to develop her deep relationship with God and to understand His will.

Mary receives the important mission of being the mother of the Messiah, of educating him humanely. By pronouncing her "Yes", she begins a pedagogical process of progressive

maturation of her faith, becoming the first disciple of her Son Jesus. In this process, God gives Mary the necessary graces to confidently understand the promises he would fulfill through Jesus, she who made herself the servant of the Lord.

Mary's response set the course for a future unknown to her at the time, but the impact of her "Yes" continues to have an untold and fruitful influence on the lives of people today. Her free acceptance of being the Mother of God led Mary on a path of profound learning and personal transformation as she stayed with Jesus through the key events of her life. Mary lets herself be educated by God.

The challenge for each of us as Christians, in our personal circumstances, is not to be afraid to say "yes", to allow ourselves to be educated by God, because trust is in the heart of those who have great faith in God's designs and will.

Today, Mary's example continues to inspire couples, who are the first teachers or educators of their children on their path of growth and development. But to be good teachers, couples also need to take care of their own formation and development, especially of the faith.

The wisdom of an educator is, above all, in knowing how to listen and, like Mary, to keep in the heart this learning that comes from life and from living with one's own children and with other people. Education is not about pouring knowledge on others, but about making this knowledge emerge from people so that they can be "themselves", unique beings in the image of God.

Mary, as Mother educator of the faith, sees to it that the Gospel of her Son penetrates us, shapes our lives each day, and produces in us fruits of holiness. We need her to be more and more the pedagogue of the Gospel for the couples and families of our time.

The Word of God (Lk 2:46-52)

Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' 'Why were you looking for me?' he replied, 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' But they did not understand what he meant.

The hidden life at Nazareth resumed He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men.

The scene for our meditation is contextualized in the perspective of the religious pilgrimages that were made every year to Jerusalem. Jesus is part of his family's obedience to the Law of the Lord.

When the feast days are over, the family of Nazareth returns home. Mary, at a certain point, even though she imagines that the child is with his relatives in another part of the caravan, which were huge at the time of Jesus, decides to look for him and does not find him. Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem and there he is, the adolescent Jesus, in the Temple, with the teachers.

Any mother meditating on this passage can easily intuit Mary's feelings at that time. The possibility of losing her son is so shocking that it is Mary, the woman of silence, who speaks on this occasion: "your father and I were anxiously looking for you!"

Here we have the first lesson. Mary has the mission to educate her son, not to dominate him. Surely, she must have had the desire for a harsher scolding. However, she knows that the educational process goes through the conscience formed in respect and not through the violent constraint of punishment.

Back in Nazareth, the scripture says that Jesus "was growing in wisdom, age and grace before God and men". Here we have a perfect description of the goal of the education that Mary seeks to offer her son. Before God and before men means to say that education must be integral. Mary educates Jesus integrally. She knows that the knowledge before men will only be complete when the values before God are truly assimilated.

It is very common to find families that strive in every way to give their children an education of excellence. And this is correct. The problem is that the dream of attending an important university causes our concern to focus on the technical content. Many times, this ends up leaving aside essential humanistic values.

We are forming a generation capable of managing large undertakings; but may be fragile and vulnerable in the most basic human relationships. Men and women may be accomplished professionally, but unhappy and incomplete in the simple and essential aspects of life.

Before God and men... these choices are fundamental. Technical knowledge must be of the best quality possible, especially for the most vulnerable in society who need support from the State to achieve this goal. But concurrently, we must also prioritize human and faith formation. These are the pillars on which technical knowledge is based, and these will lead to either the fulfillment or frustration of life.

May Mary, lady educator, intercede so that we may always have the possibility of an integral education.

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

Pope Francis speaks clearly about the importance of having a balance of education in a child's development. It should include moral, spiritual, and social aspects of life. He goes on to discuss the importance of education in bringing people out of poverty, so that they can shape their own future. He also talks about subsidiarity, a fundamental principle that requires decisions

to be made by the people closest to and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community.

[...] "I think first of families, called to a primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on. They are also the privileged milieu for transmitting the faith, beginning with those first simple gestures of devotion which mothers teach their children. Teachers, who have the challenging task of training children and youth in schools or other settings, should be conscious that their responsibility extends also to the moral, spiritual and social aspects of life. The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age... Communicators also have a responsibility for education and formation, especially nowadays, when the means of information and communication are so widespread". (FT, 114)

"Some people are born into economically stable families, receive a fine education, grow up well nourished, or naturally possess great talent. They will certainly not need a proactive state; they need only claim their freedom. Yet the same rule clearly does not apply to a disabled person, to someone born in dire poverty, to those lacking a good education and with little access to adequate health care. If a society is governed primarily by the criteria of market freedom and efficiency, there is no place for such persons, and fraternity will remain just another vague ideal". (FT, 109)

"This charity, which is the spiritual heart of politics, is always a preferential love shown to those in greatest need; it undergirds everything we do on their behalf. Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized and, as a consequence, the poor to be acknowledged and valued in their dignity, respected in their identity and culture, and thus truly integrated into society. That gaze is at the heart of the authentic spirit of politics. It sees paths open up that are different from those of a soulless pragmatism. It makes us realize that "the scandal of poverty cannot be addressed by promoting strategies of containment that only tranquilize the poor and render them tame and inoffensive. How sad it is when we find, behind allegedly altruistic works, the other being reduced to passivity". What are needed are new pathways of self-expression and participation in society. Education serves these by making it possible for each human being to shape his or her own future. Here too we see the importance of the principle of subsidiarity, which is inseparable from the principle of solidarity". (FT, 187)

Father Henri Caffarel

In many of his reflections, Father Caffarel speaks of the importance of parents as the first educators of their children, and he challenges parents to consider how much they love their children. He insists on the recommendation that parents must never cease to "generate" and to "educate" their children. Education consists in making this person who has been generated grow, in whom there is an infinitude of human order and a divine infinitude, produced by the grace of Baptism.

"He is not a father only when he takes the initiative to call to life an immortal being. Day after day he must continue to give life to his child. Education is a prolonged creation. After having engendered a body, the father must awaken to life an intelligence, a heart, a conscience. It is

a far-reaching work. Each day he will ask himself: 'Am I truly a father? Are my examples, my words, my reproaches, my forgiveness, my demands, my advice, creative?'

It is worth him asking himself whether he remains alive, because only life is life-creating. You only give life by giving your life. So many parents seem to ignore this. They are content, like the sculptor who handles his chisel, to carve out a being they call their child. This is not education; this is not how life is given.

But the father is not the only one to undertake and bring to completion this work of education. The mother is at his side. For the development, as for the birth of the child, both are needed, united in love. This is the great secret of education. The close collaboration of father and mother is the condition for its success. Their mutual love is the child's daily bread; deprived of it, there will be a groaning in the depths of his being, the groan of a starving heart."³²

Are you anxious for your children? I'm not asking if you are unhappy with them, but with yourself. If they fail in their schoolwork, what do you do first? Do you hold them responsible, or do you accuse yourself? Do you assume too quickly that you have done everything? As long as you haven't prayed with that fervour of heart which nothing discourages, as long as you have not done penance, it is not true to say that you have done everything. Perhaps, you have not done very much.³³

Father Caffarel had a great concern for the following question: "do you truly love your children?" What can we answer as Christian parents?

To be competent is also to love God. He who loves God the most is not he who cries "Lord, Lord...", but he who does His will and collaborates in His work. For God has done men the honour of willing to need their assistance: the earth will not bear its harvest without the labour of man, the child will not become an adult without education. But without competence, workers and parents are poor collaborators.³⁴

"The parents, astonished, wail and cry ingratitude. Or perhaps they understand, but too late, that their child has lacked nothing... except the essential thing: a genuine love. For to love a child is not to pamper him and provide for him; it is to understand him and to bring his personality to its own fulfillment.

For Christian parents, it is not only loving their children which is necessary but loving them in a Christian way. And this is something other than teaching them some virtues, some religious practices, some gentle early piety.

Christian parents must understand, and help their children to understand, the call of Christ to them. They must help them to become Christian adults, who respond to that

³² Henri Caffarel. Love and Grace in Marriage. Chapter III - Fruitfulness of Love, "Father's Vocation". (Translation by the writing team).

³³ Henri Caffarel. Love and Grace in Marriage - The Lack of Anxiety, p. 104.

³⁴ Henri Caffarel. Love and Grace in Marriage - The Obligation to be Competent, p. 99-100.

call by the joyful gift of their youthful freedom, who throw themselves into the great adventure of life, firmly resolved to adhere to the code of values of their Master."³⁵

Mary cooperated fully with God in this love and brought forth the Son of God. Her role in raising and guiding him was an act of love totally gratuitous. Mary grew in her understanding of Jesus and his mission, as she unraveled the mysteries revealed to her and accompanied Jesus through the events of his life.

Testimony

In this testimony we can clearly see the emphasis given to the professional training of people working in the health area, which was decisive in healing and saving the lives of their children.

Education has emerged as a wonderful gift in our family history. Without this gift, we would have lost our two children in a short period of time. I am not sure how I would have handled the gravity of those days. However, one thing I do know: my relationship with Mary has become closer and stronger.

Our journey as a family has been far from easy. One son was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 20 and another son suffered a stroke at the age of 16. Both were events that changed our lives.

As parents, we always prayed to God that our children would have good health. I remember praying for this throughout my life, but at the time of the medical diagnoses, I also prayed for the strength to be there with my sick children. Suddenly, I could understand Mary so much more. Seeing her son during the crucifixion was unbearable, but she had to trust that God would prevail in this traumatic event. My husband and I had to do the same.

In the case of our oldest son, the chemotherapy and radiotherapy were intense: seven months of treatment that disfigured a beautiful young man in the prime of his life. With hair loss and a slim body, we entrusted our son to the care of God and Mary.

Teams were crucial to us as a couple. Our team members kept in touch when we were run over by circumstances and hospitalizations were necessary. They dropped off food, kept in touch with us, and offered a shoulder to cry on. I am grateful that we joined Teams in 2000, as Team members have been our strength through their prayers and care.

However, we were not able to foresee a more serious family crisis. In 2013, our youngest son, age 16, suffered a brain hemorrhage that resulted in a stroke. When he came to find us at one o'clock in the morning, I knew intuitively that he was having a

³⁵ Henri Caffarel. *Love and Grace in Marriage - How do you love your children?* p. 30.

serious medical episode. During my call to the ambulance service, I cried out to God to save him.

Indeed, everyone who saved his life was available when we needed them, from the ambulance officers who recognized his symptoms at home, to the neurosurgeon who operated on his brain, to the Intensive Care Unit staff who monitored his recovery.

Today, our son is 24 years old and is our gift; we no longer take life and health for granted, but we thank God for the second chance we had with the "rebirth" of our two sons.

There is much more that we need to discover through education, and the future promises great advances in the field of medical cures. God has gifted us to learn, and we marvel at how much we already know.

We must continue to develop education so that everyone can have access to it and benefit from the good that comes from it. The gift of education has saved two of my children. May it continue to inspire people to improve lives. We pray that education will be used for good purposes, just as God intended.

Questions for the Sit Down

"Parents rely on schools to ensure the basic instruction of their children but can never completely delegate the moral formation of their children to others. A person's affective and ethical development is ultimately grounded in a particular experience, namely, that his or her parents can be trusted. This means that parents, as educators, are responsible, by their affection and example, for instilling in their children trust and loving respect. When children no longer feel that, for all their faults, they are important to their parents, or that their parents are sincerely concerned about them, this causes deep hurt and many difficulties along their path to maturity. This physical or emotional absence creates greater hurt than any scolding which a child may receive for doing something wrong." (AL, 263)

Both Pope Francis and Father Caffarel speak of the important role of parents and family in the education and integral development of children.

In this month's Sitting Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour, we should reflect on the education we have given or are giving our children.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice, and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence, and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus, forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual, or of the couple, or of the family; those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share how you - individually or as a couple - were encouraged this month to live out the virtue of being an "educator" (What were these actions? For whom were they carried out?)

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reflect on the passage from the Word of God provided before the meeting: Luke 2:46-52

Liturgical Prayer:

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

The sharing of the Endeavours is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a moment of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a moment of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about the experience of the Endeavours this month.
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this month? How

have you helped your spouse on this spiritual journey?

- Share how the Endeavours have helped you live the virtue of being an "educator" after the example of Mary.

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

- What challenges do you encounter, or have you encountered in the educational process of your children?
- Are there educational inequalities in your country? Why do some people have access to integral and quality education, and others do not?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

Meeting 5: They no longer have their health

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of wine" in people who suffer from some illness and disease.
- Recognize that there are people who live without the minimum sanitary conditions.
- Experience the availability of Mary who goes to meet her cousin Elizabeth to be with her.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

When we talk about being "healthy", we usually think about our physical health. However, living a healthy life implies much more than that. To be healthy, we need to consider our body, our mind, and our spiritual life.

This is an ancient understanding that we can find even in the Old Testament. For example, the book of Leviticus contains instructions about various aspects of life, which can be considered good recommendations in the matter of hygiene and health.

The World Health Organization understands health in a broader sense, which is not restricted to the absence of disease, but represents a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Thus, for health to exist, a healthy environment is necessary, ecologically, socially, nutritionally, mentally, and spiritually.

We need to pay attention to all these issues and keep them in balance if we are to live a full life. However, there is growing concern that our world has lost its connection to the health of body, mind, and spirit. Today we tend to compartmentalize these dimensions and believe that we can attend to them separately.

Despite the richness of our modern world, there is a growing lack of health, including malnutrition, preventable diseases, mental health, lack of care for the elderly and disabled, and even our planet.

Disease does not discriminate against anyone, it affects everyone: rich, poor, children, young, old. Although this is true, it does not mean that everyone has the same conditions to cultivate their health and to seek a cure for their illnesses. We live in a world of inequalities, where:

- Health is influenced more by economics and geopolitical decisions than by the needs of the human community.

- There is enough food produced by the nations of the world to feed everyone, but many people still starve.
- Access to health education and access to vaccines are determined not by need, but by a country's ability to pay for them.
- Mental health issues are often hidden from the community and lack treatment.

An estimated 4.3 billion people do not have adequate access to health services, which is just over half of the world's population.³⁶

Pope Francis makes it clear that these health inequalities must be addressed in our modern world:

"Often, as we carry on our semantic or ideological disputes, we allow our brothers and sisters to die of hunger and thirst, without shelter or access to health care. [...] These things are essential; they can no longer be deferred. (FT, 189)

However, we need to go beyond this and think of the sick "as people, not as numbers."³⁷ The sick person has a face and a story, experiences suffering, vulnerability, uncertainties, fears. In his miracles, Jesus showed that it was not enough to heal physical illnesses. It was equally important to restore the person to wholeness. In the story of the healing of the paralytic, Jesus asks, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk?'" (Mk 2:9).

We are called to approach and accompany the sick on their journey in their search for integral recovery. As Pope Francis tells us,

"Such closeness is a precious balm that provides support and consolation to the sick in their suffering. As Christians, we experience that closeness as a sign of the love of Jesus Christ, the Good Samaritan, who draws near with compassion to every man and woman wounded by sin. United to Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit, we are called to be merciful like the Father and to love in particular our frail, infirm and suffering brothers and sisters".³⁸

Following in Mary's footsteps: availability

Looking at Mary's life, we perceive her perfect availability to God's plans. She, who opened herself to the action of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation of the Word, manifests her availability also in welcoming the unexpected in the birth of Jesus in a stable or in the flight to Egypt. This virtue was still present when the ways of Jesus seemed strange to her, as in the reunion of the Child in the temple and in his public life. Finally, the availability to remain as Mother of the Church, guiding and accompanying us with her intercession.

³⁶ World Health Organization. See: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/self-care-health-interventions>.

³⁷ Pope Francis address to the Catholic Association of Health Care Workers, May 17, 2019 (only in Portuguese, Spanish and Italian). (Translation by the writing team).

³⁸ Pope Francis. Message for the XXIX World Day of the Sick, 2021.

We can see that her openness to God is the source of her availability and care for humanity. At the Annunciation, Mary defined herself as "servant of the Lord", first disciple of her Son, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).³⁹

In the narrative of the wedding at Cana we see this availability of Mary. Her sensitivity allowed her to notice the lack of wine; but she did not limit herself to that; there too she was "servant of the Lord," putting herself into action on behalf of others who were in need. However, the scene that perhaps most shows us Mary's availability is that of the Visitation. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Word sets out without delay to care for her cousin in need.

This availability of Mary represents a gesture of total surrender, of perfect subjection to the will of God. We may ask ourselves: how did Mary attain such great virtue? It was, without a doubt, the grace of God that endowed her with this special virtue so that she could fulfill her unique vocation of being the Mother of the Son of God. God gave her a special grace: her Immaculate Conception.

Without this emptying, this humiliation, this lowering of herself and making herself totally available for God's action, nothing could have been done from Mary.

Therefore, the contemplation of Mary's life presents us with a model of the "art of accompaniment" that we are also called to exercise with those who are weakened in their health condition.

The Word of God (Lk 1:35-45)

The Holy Spirit will come upon you 'the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God'; 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

³⁹ According to. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Church of the Pilgrim Church, n° 41.

Mary, saying YES to God, welcomes into her womb the Word who became flesh. "Behold the handmaid"...thus Mary declares herself the handmaid of the Lord, because she is willing to obey, to leave room for the Word, to let it live and grow in her, until it fills her whole life: it belongs totally to Him. It is in this condition that she receives the news that her elderly cousin Elizabeth was also pregnant like her. Mary's response, serving and available, full of the Spirit of God, could not be any other: she sets out on a journey. A way to where? The way of service!

It is true that pregnancy is not an illness or a disease. But it is also true that, even today, it requires special care when the age is advanced. Let us imagine this in Jesus' time. Mary makes herself available to serve. She finds Elizabeth and stays with her for three months. She overcomes her own weaknesses to anticipate what her Son, who was being conceived in her womb, would affirm years later: I was sick and you took care of me (cf. Mt 25:36).

Surprises that weaken temporarily, that make us more fragile, can happen at any time in life. Be it a risky pregnancy, an unexpected accident, a serious illness and so many other unexpected situations expose the dependence and impotence of the human being. Dependence, it is true, on a decent health system that can respond to the immediate demand with quality and efficiency; dependence on people willing to help in situations that were simple and ordinary in life; dependence on the available and supportive presence, capable of a consoling word.

Mary traveled an enormous distance to be this presence. It could not be otherwise; it is the coherence with the word of God that dwells in her. What about us? Faced with the Word that challenges us daily, how do we place ourselves before the sick?

It is worth noting that many times those who need our availability are not more than 100 kilometers away, as Mary was from Elizabeth. Many times, those who need help are beside us, sharing the same roof.

May Mary, the lady of availability, intercede for us so that we may be more sensitive to those who need us.

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

Pope Francis challenges us to look beyond ourselves, to show compassion for the health and well-being of others. It is also a call for us to build a world in which health inequities are overcome.

"Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still "illiterate" when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies. We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly. (...) (FT, 64)

“What is more, caught up as we are with our own needs, the sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy since we have no time to waste on other people’s problems. These are symptoms of an unhealthy society. A society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering”. (FT, 64-65)

"All too quickly, however, we forget the lessons of history, ‘the teacher of life’.[34] Once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation. God willing, after all this, we will think no longer in terms of “them” and “those”, but only “us”. If only this may prove not to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing. If only we might keep in mind all those elderly persons who died for lack of respirators, partly as a result of the dismantling, year after year, of healthcare systems. If only this immense sorrow may not prove useless, but enable us to take a step forward towards a new style of life. If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices, beyond the walls that we have erected." (FT, 35)

[...] "I think of our many brothers and sisters throughout the world who have no access to medical care because they live in poverty. For this reason, I urge healthcare institutions and government leaders throughout the world not to neglect social justice out of a preoccupation for financial concerns".⁴⁰

"We are increasingly aware that many evils can be avoided if greater attention is paid to the style of life we adopt and the culture we promote. Prevention involves taking a farsighted look at human beings and the environment in which we live. It means aiming for a culture of balance, whose essential factors – education, physical activity, diet, the protection of the environment, respect for the “health codes” practiced by the various religions, timely and precise diagnosis, and so many others – can help us to live better, with fewer health risks”.⁴¹

Father Henri Caffarel

For Father Caffarel, a healthy soul is an integral part of a person's overall health. He tells us about how "spiritual anemia" affects those who do not nourish their faith.

I am referring to the balance that, little by little, is established in those who pray. Not only a spiritual balance, but of the whole personality, of the whole organism. It is not surprising that the human spirit is invigorated by the Spirit of God, that the organism, which does not lie beside the spirit but is imbued with it, regains vitality and balance when the spirit is strengthened. The health of the soul is a condition for psychological and physical health, which is even more undeniable than the reverse. In view of these considerations, therefore, I return to my diagnosis: so many of the organic or psychological patients are predominantly patients of the soul, of the malnourished soul, of the soul disconnected from its life sources.⁴²

⁴⁰ Pope Francis. Message for the XXVIII World Day of the Sick 2020, 11 February 2020.

⁴¹ Pope Francis. Address to Participants at the International Conference Organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture on Regenerative Medicine, Sala Regia, 28 April 2018.

⁴² Henri Caffarel. New letters on prayer. "To seminarians". (Translation by the writing team).

Father Caffarel also warns us not to get carried away with complacency.

"Today, in our great Western nations, one has to look for misery to find it. It exists, no doubt, but so carefully kept out of our way! Hospitals and asylums are founded to help the sick and disabled, but also so that the sight of them does not create the risk of insinuating a misgiving in our desire for comfort, does not prevent us from sleeping. A 'consumer society' feels obliged to hide the spectacle of suffering, misery, and death. So, if we want to remain in the truth of our planet, we must not remain isolated from misery for too long, nor cover our ears to the pathetic and salutary question posed by the spectacle of evil and death."⁴³

Testimony

This testimony talks about a couple, deeply shaken by the disease, but who do not let their faith and spirituality be shaken, relying on the support of their family and their base team.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in March. This was followed by surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy lasting eight months. Then, the day after my first quarterly checkup, my husband, Greg, was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia.

This put our family back on the merry-go-round, starting with chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant, and then dealing with the multitude of complications due to a depressed immune system. Initially the diagnosis put us in a state of shock, but then our stoic family history kicked in.

Greg and I had a unique experience. In less than 12 months, we had both been diagnosed with cancer and thus both became a patient and a caregiver. I believe I speak for both of us when I say that as a patient, you feel calm, focused and in control. However, as a caregiver you feel helpless, unable to heal or help another's pain, totally out of control. As patient and caregiver, we were able to support and truly understand each other; consequently, providing the one thing needed for life - hope.

Greg's spirituality increased during the eleven and a half months of his illness. During this time, he found comfort in some of the practices he grew up with, such as the Rosary and Novenas. We both dealt with the situation by turning to our faith, asking the Holy Spirit for help, and this was answered by giving us strength to deal with the situation.

But in a situation like ours, we could not handle it alone. Our team has constantly supported us and continues to stand by me on my journey. As a team, we have faced many battles together. And I can only hope that I have also given the love, support and friendship that they have given me in my time of need.

Greg passed away in February, less than two years after my diagnosis.

Today I have my health, my children and my grandchildren, and my world is flowing

⁴³ Henri Caffarel. New letters on prayer. "A great book of meditation". (Translation by the writing team).

well. And because of the love we share, I have been able to overcome Greg's physical loss and become even more aware of love, family and friends, even more grateful for my faith, and more appreciative of my existence.

The greatest gift was having Greg with me for 26 years and now I have him watching over me for the rest of my life.

Questions for the Sitting Down

"Time spent with the sick is holy time. [...] With lively faith let us ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the grace to appreciate the value of our often-unspoken willingness to spend time with these sisters and brothers who, thanks to our closeness and affection, feel more loved and comforted."⁴⁴

In this month's Sitting Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavours, the couple can reflect on their readiness to serve and support their sick family members and friends.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus, forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

⁴⁴ Pope Francis. Message for the 23rd World Day of the Sick 2015.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual or of the couple.
- Share experiences related to sickness and disease that you have had as a couple. Try to present the meaning of these events for your life and for your spiritual growth.

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting: Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:35-45)

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Sharing is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a moment of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a moment of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about experiencing the Endeavours this month.
- What are the Endeavours that require "more effort" on our part?
- Have the Endeavours been, for you, a preventive remedy to combat the state of "spiritual anaemia"?

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

- Does your lifestyle and that of your family - food, sports, leisure, ... - favor a healthy life?
- Give examples of health inequalities in your own city or town. How does this reality challenge you as a couple? What has been your response?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

Meeting 6: They no longer have dialogue

1. OBJETIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of the wine" of dialogue between individuals, couples, families, in society, in our Church, between nations.
- Understand that radicalism and polarization do not build dialogue and fraternity.
- To experience and live the virtues of listening and dialogue, and the human sensitivity of Mary.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

In the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis lays the foundations for a new social coexistence, of dreaming together of a different world, with more justice and fraternity.

Dialogue among people of good will is one of the pillars for the world to achieve fraternity, because life is the art of encountering others.

Throughout his Encyclical Letter, he presents us with the different situations where dialogue is lacking, or where people are no longer able to dialogue.

For example, when people sit down to listen to the other, which is characteristic of a human encounter, what happens? We seem to live in a deaf world, because the speed of the modern world, the frenzy of life, prevents us from listening well to what another is saying. When the other is in the middle of his dialogue, we already interrupt him and want to reply, when he has not yet finished speaking. We must not lose the ability to listen, says the Pope. (FT, 48)

Another factor that prevents or hinders dialogue between people is the obsession with the accumulation of information, the impatient search for news on social networks, often false. This causes our conversations to revolve around the latest news. One no longer pays prolonged and penetrating attention to the heart of life, nor does one recognize what is essential to give meaning to existence. Thus, freedom becomes the illusion that the media sells us, confusing it with the freedom to navigate in front of a screen. The problem is that a path of fraternity, local and universal, can only be walked by free spirits who are ready for real encounters, says the Pope. (FT, 50, 200)

Another factor that hinders dialogue and creates intolerance, is the lack of respect for the various cultures that have been created over the centuries, which can end up turning our world into a victim of a cultural sclerosis. Therefore, we need to communicate, discover the riches of each, value what unites us, and look at differences as possibilities for growth in respect for all. Says the Pope:

"Patience and trust are called for in such dialogue, permitting individuals, families and communities to hand on the values of their own culture and welcome the good that comes from others' experiences". (FT, 134)

He continues further:

"Just as there can be no dialogue with "others" without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots". (FT, 143)

Another important factor hindering universal brotherhood and the emphasis on the common good in public policy, is the lack of dialogue in politics, of an interdisciplinary dialogue to address the various aspects of the current crisis, capable of overcoming vicious pressures and inertias, which do not lead to the necessary transformations of our society. (FT, 177-182)

What Pope Francis advocates is a "social dialogue for a new culture," a dialogue that is concerned with the common good of all.

He advocates:

[...] "Dialogue between generations; dialogue among our people, for we are that people; readiness to give and receive, while remaining open to the truth. A country flourishes when constructive dialogue occurs between its many rich cultural components: popular culture, university culture, youth culture, artistic culture, technological culture, economic culture, family culture and media culture". (FT, 199)

Pope Francis often describes our society as one where "the tones of voice are very raised," "where one is shouted at home and in the street," and where there is a "verbal violence when it comes to expressing oneself." The consequence of this, is that "this violence grows and becomes worldwide violence," so that today "we are at war." He calls it a "third world war".

Using as an example the political debates in electoral campaigns, where the person who is speaking cannot and does not succeed finishing his sentence, he says that "we see in the newspapers how people insult each other". And he concludes: "politics has never been so low" and that this way "the sense of social construction is lost, of social coexistence, because social coexistence is built with dialogue."

Pope Francis said that it is necessary to "lower the tone, to speak less and listen more" and that there are many "remedies against violence, but the first remedy is that before discussing, it is necessary to dialogue." "Wars don't start outside; they start in our hearts. When I am not able to open myself to others, to respect others, to talk to my neighbor, then war begins".⁴⁵

We must not forget that the practice of conjugal dialogue (Sit-down) in our Movement is an outstanding characteristic of its pedagogy, because it represents an important instrument to help couples grow in love for their spouse, for God and for others on their way to sanctity.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis. Address to "Roma Tre" University, 17 February 2017.

Following in Mary's footsteps: listening and dialogue

Of Mary's fundamental attitudes or virtues recognized by the Church, we find her ability to listen, welcome and meditate on the Word of God in her heart. This we can see throughout various biblical narratives (cf. Lk 2:19, 39, 51b), to the extent that it is said that Mary also grew in faith, wisdom, grace and spiritual "stature" throughout her life.

For Mary, it is not only a matter of listening, but of hearing in order to be able to promptly carry out in her life what she hears from God. By listening, she achieves unconditional adherence to the life of Jesus as his first disciple.

Not for other reasons, we have in Mary an example of discipleship and growth in faith after her firm and confident "yes" to God who summons her through the angel Gabriel. Mary is thus the first among those who "hear the word of God and put it into practice".

The condition for dialogue is the ability to listen because listening to the other requires patience and attention. Only those who know how to be silent like Mary, know how to listen.

As Pope Francis says,

"One cannot listen by speaking: mouth closed. To listen to God, to listen to the brother and sister who needs help, to listen to a friend, a family member. God Himself is the most excellent example of listening: every time we pray, He listens to us, without asking for anything and even precedes us and takes the initiative, answering our requests for help. The capacity to listen, of which God is the model, encourages us to break down the walls of misunderstanding, to create bridges of communication, overcoming isolation and closure in our own small world. Someone said: to make peace in the world we lack ears, we lack people who know how to listen, and from there, dialogue follows".⁴⁶

Mary is also an example for us of someone who knows how to listen to others and walk beside them in their needs, as she did with the apostles after Pentecost. Listening and dialogue are gifts from God, which allow us to be challenged and, at the same time, to humanize the relationships between people and overcome misunderstandings.

Dialogue not only brings people together, but hearts together, for it is through dialogue that friendship, companionship, true love, and appreciation for the person are created, but to dialogue, one must listen.

For our married relationship, let's ask Mary that we not lack the ability to listen, which is the simplest manifestation of charity towards our spouse. And then dialogue, because it allows us to know and understand each other's requirements, in order to welcome in our hearts, the will of God and to be available to do his will.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis. Address to the "Telefono Amico Italia" Volunteers. Clementine Room, March 11, 2017 (only in Portuguese, Spanish and Italian).

The Word of God (Lk 1:26-38)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God'. 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Mary gives us a perfect example of listening and dialogue at the moment of the Annunciation. As we contemplate the scene in Nazareth, we find a young woman in her home on an ordinary day of her life; suddenly a greeting: "*Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.*".

We know that the coming of the Messiah was awaited by the people of Israel. But we also know that many expected his arrival in a triumphal manner. God, on the contrary, chooses the human dialogical process in order to make himself, from the beginning, fully human.

Mary, as was to be expected from a young girl, was disturbed, confused, and thoughtful about the greeting. But, in a mature way, she begins a wonderful process of listening and dialogue. In her humility, Mary feels small, but she realizes that God's messenger has something very important to convey to her. She wants to serve God with all her heart and soul, but she wants to understand, she wants to make a conscious, free decision, and in a process of dialogue she finds the necessary conditions for this.

Healthy dialogue presupposes serenity and respectful freedom. Mary asks, she interrogates the angel: "*how will this happen?*".

She wants explanations that can only be given in listening and dialogue. The Archangel reassures her and explains the reasons. Mary, who knows well the messianic prophecies, within this dialogical process, understands that she will be the Mother of the Messiah. She does not delay in giving her answer, her yes, adhering fully to the Will of God: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.

Mary's attitude has much to teach us. Particularly when we live in times of polarization and intolerance.

Mary, Lady of listening and dialogue,

"open our ears; grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus among the thousands of words of this world; grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live, to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship".⁴⁷

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

In Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, the sixth chapter is dedicated to the theme of dialogue and social friendship. The Pope's first concern is to define what we mean or should mean by dialogue, or by the verb "to dialogue."

"Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word "dialogue".

And the Pope continues:

"If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue. There is no need for me to stress the benefits of dialogue. I have only to think of what our world would be like without the patient dialogue of the many generous persons who keep families and communities together. Unlike disagreement and conflict, persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagine". (FT, 198)

The Pope maintains that dialogue cannot be confused with a feverish exchange of opinions on social media (FT, 200), and that a lack of dialogue happens because and when no one is concerned with the common good, but with gaining personal advantage or imposing their own way of thinking. (FT, 202)

Thus, dialogue needs to be built together.

"Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. Based on their identity and experience, others have a contribution to make, and it is desirable that they should articulate their positions for the sake of a more fruitful public debate. When individuals or groups are consistent in their thinking, defend their values and convictions, and develop their arguments, this surely benefits society. Yet, this can only occur to the extent that there is genuine dialogue and openness to others. Indeed, "in a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together". Public discussion, if it truly makes room for everyone and does not manipulate or conceal information, is a constant stimulus to a better grasp of the truth, or at least its more effective expression. It keeps different sectors from becoming complacent and self-centered in their

⁴⁷ Recital of the Holy Rosary for the Conclusion of the Marian Month of May. Address of Holy Father Francis, St. Peter's Square, 31 May 2013.

outlook and their limited concerns. Let us not forget that “differences are creative; they create tension and in the resolution of tension lies humanity’s progress”. (FT, 203)

"In a pluralistic society, dialogue is the best way to realize what ought always to be affirmed and respected apart from any ephemeral consensus. Such dialogue needs to be enriched and illumined by clear thinking, rational arguments, a variety of perspectives and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view. Nor can it exclude the conviction that it is possible to arrive at certain fundamental truths always to be upheld. Acknowledging the existence of certain enduring values, however demanding it may be to discern them, makes for a robust and solid social ethics. [...] (FT, 211)

"Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter". I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which “the whole is greater than the part”. The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made". (FT, 215)

Father Henri Caffarel

COMMUNICATION⁴⁸

"Love between man and woman, that love which expresses itself in happiness, is reciprocity, dialogue, exchange, total communication. This is also very new for those who are living a young love. [...]

[...] Solitude told them in the negative what love teaches them today in the positive: that communication is the profound law of being, that the human person is "relational." Man exists with a truly personal existence, only to the extent that he exists for another - in the sense that contemporary philosophers give to this expression: “he exists for...” From now on, everyone says: “I exist, now I exist for you”!

To communicate, to communicate through spirit, from spirit to spirit, is a prodigious experience. But man is spirit incarnate. This communication takes place through body language. A look, a smile, a pressure of the hands, the gift of the body, everything becomes a means of communication. Attitudes and gestures, like words, are loaded with meaning. But the spirit must be present in all these physical activities. It must slip into them to transfigure them. It must ensure they do not degenerate into habits, automatism, or what would be worse, are no longer the expression of physical instinct alone.

⁴⁸ L’Anneau d’Or – LE MARIAGE, ROUTE VERS DIEU - Numéro spécial 117-118 – Mai – Août 1964 (pages 179-200), La communication. (Translation by the writing team).

[...] It is not only at times when it is easy and charming to put all things in common, that it is necessary to communicate, but throughout life. And if at first nothing seemed easier - it was like a relief - one very quickly becomes aware that the communication required by love goes far beyond a thought. It is much more than conjugating the verb "to love," than exchanging emotions, feelings, easy thoughts. It is your deepest being, your innermost self that must be revealed. To do this, one must discover it as it is, with its riches and its sufferings. And it is not only in the moments when it is delightful to receive, but every moment, that we must welcome the presence, the words, the gift of another.

Yes, communication, even between those who love each other, is difficult, sometimes cruel. But its cruelty is that of the educator who forces a being to overcome himself, to surrender all his virtualities. Those who accept to communicate, emerge in being. Those who refuse to do so condemn themselves to asphyxiation. In fact, only love can perform the miracle of making these closed-in people communicate, because the sin by which Adam isolated himself from creation, is also isolating himself from God." [...]

Testimony

In this testimony we clearly see that an initial lack of dialogue, creating difficulties and suffering, can be overcome by opening hearts to a respectful and loving dialogue.

I am the oldest of four daughters so as soon as I was old enough, I would help my father whilst he was fixing something in our home or constructing something in the garden outside our home. I enjoyed working with him. I learnt many practical skills as he explained what he was doing, and I watched him using tools to complete the work. He would tell stories about his own childhood in another country, and I was in awe of what he could do. Our time together was special, and I knew my help was appreciated. Indeed, I know this experience influenced me to pursue the career I took up after I left school.

In later years, my sisters shared the role of father's helper. I became less willing to be his helper because I was preoccupied with my own interests and activities. After all, I had to spend a lot more time on school homework and then university studies. As a teenager, I was developing some ideas about how I wanted to live my life that were different than the views I thought my father held. We began to argue, and it seemed like we couldn't agree about anything. We stubbornly held onto our separate views about everything and in so doing caused a lot of unnecessary stress and anger in our household. This tension developed to the point where I did not want to speak with my father, and I certainly wouldn't listen if he tried to be kind and loving towards me.

A cousin told me about a job I could do in another city. This sounded like a great opportunity and maybe a way forward for me to become more independent and more mature. My mother was excited for me, but my father did not want me to go. I could see he was worried about my safety, but I wanted him to trust me and feel comfortable about my move to another city. I realized I needed to begin listening to his concerns, and then reassure him that I respected his

concerns. We had several conversations where we both listened carefully to one another and shared our hopes and concerns. After this, he was happy for me to take up the position, and it helped him to know that I would start off living with my cousin and her family.

In Luke's gospel, we hear about Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth before their babies are born. The reading highlights for me that without listening there can be no dialogue. 'Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting' and she responded excitedly and lovingly by saying 'Blessed are you among women and blessed be the fruit of your womb.' The exchange between Mary and Elizabeth that is described in this reading is a powerful reminder that true and loving dialogue can only be achieved if we listen with an open and trusting heart. My father and I learnt this lesson the hard way. We endured needless heartache and caused unnecessary upset in our family because we were too stubborn to listen to each other and respect our different views. I thank God we learnt to listen to each other and in so doing heal our relationship.

Questions for the Sit Down

"Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. Yet it can only be the fruit of a long and demanding apprenticeship. Men and women, young people, and adults, communicate differently. They speak different languages, and they act in different ways. Our way of asking and responding to questions, the tone we use, our timing and any number of other factors condition how well we communicate. We need to develop certain attitudes that express love and encourage authentic dialogue". (AL, 136)

In this month's Sit Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour:

- Talk about how dialogue has helped you in crisis situations.
- Recall times when the absence of dialogue was harmful to your relationship.
- Reflect on the quality of your dialogue as a couple.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice, and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence, and war.

May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus, forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual, or of the couple, or of the family; those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share how you - individually or as a couple - have been encouraged to live different forms of listening and dialogue during this month (What were these forms? In whose favor were they carried out?).

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting: The announcement of the birth of Jesus (Lk 1:26-38)

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Sharing is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a time of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a time of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about the experience of the Endeavours this month.
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this month?
- Share how the Endeavours helped us to live the virtue of listening and dialogue after the example of Mary.

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

Dialogue is a free gift that preserves the beautiful things we hold in common with others. It nurtures our capacity to understand the meaning of what the other says, thinks, does. In this sense, we can reflect on the following questions:

- What are the barriers within our family that restrict open dialogue between the couple and with their children?
- What are the barriers within our Team that restrict an open and constructive dialogue that can promote mutual help and the spiritual and human growth of all?
- In a divided and polarized society, what is it like to be a witness to listening and dialogue, following Mary's example?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

Meeting 7: They no longer have company

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of wine" of those who feel lonely.
- Realize that there is a difference between loneliness and solitude.
- Experience the virtue of Mary's serenity before the Cross.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

"Being alone" and "feeling lonely" are very different things. In some languages there are even different words to express the feelings of these two experiences.

- "Being alone" describes the positive experience of being alone, sometimes as a choice. For example, seeking silence, reflecting, meditating, or praying. This is what, in some Latin cultures, is called solitude.
- "Feeling lonely" describes negative emotions of being alone due to isolation and separation. It is the true meaning of the word "loneliness".

From these ideas we can see that it is possible to be alone without necessarily feeling loneliness. Seeking solitude can be an important exercise in our spiritual journey and for our emotional balance.

Jesus understood well the value of spending time in solitude for silent contemplation. Scripture is rich in these examples:

- "In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there" (Mk 1:35).
- "When Jesus received this news, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot." (Mt 14:13).
- "Now it was about this time that he went out into the hills to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Lk 6:12).

At the same time, we realize that even if we can be surrounded by people, or become super-connected by social media, we can still experience deep loneliness, due to the absence of true human relationships.

“One of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation. If we look closely at other kinds of poverty, including material forms, we see that they are born from isolation, from not being loved or from difficulties in being able to love. Poverty is often produced by a

rejection of God's love, by man's basic and tragic tendency to close in on himself, thinking himself to be self-sufficient or merely an insignificant and ephemeral fact, a "stranger" in a random universe. Man is alienated when he is alone, when he is detached from reality, when he stops thinking and believing in a foundation. All of humanity is alienated when too much trust is placed in merely human projects, ideologies, and false utopias. Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another must be transformed into true communion. The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.⁴⁹

St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, from her experience of helping the poor, hungry and sick on the streets of India, who were abandoned and had no family, realized that the greatest suffering of human beings is to be alone, to feel unloved, to have no one. "*There is a terrible hunger for love*".⁵⁰

Consider how lonely Jesus felt during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and when Peter denied him three times. Imagine the feelings of loneliness that caused him to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). On the cross, Jesus "*experienced our deepest sorrows: failure, loss of everything, betrayal by a friend, even abandonment by God. By experiencing in the flesh our deepest struggles and conflicts, he redeemed and transformed them*".⁵¹

The social estrangement, resulting from the pandemic of COVID-19, has caused loneliness in many countries. People who had perhaps never known loneliness before, have suddenly experienced disconnection from family, friends, and their parish community. Technology has become the way we connect with others. In many places, even attending Mass was only possible online. Social isolation, although scientifically recommended at one time, has shown its negative effects on people's health.

But one cannot fail to recognize that it was also a time to reflect on things that really matter in our lives. Many found it a valuable opportunity to slow down and focus more on their spiritual life. Through contemplation and silence, it was a way to rest in God's presence and listen with their hearts. They found solitude and not loneliness.

Belonging to Teams of Our Lady gives us the opportunity to avoid loneliness, and also teaches us to embrace solitude. Teams provides us a community of people, who can share our joys and our struggles. The Team becomes like a family to us. Like any family, we need to be sensitive to the needs of other members of our Team. As a family within the Church, we also need to cast our gaze and our service to those around us suffering loneliness.

⁴⁹ Pope Benedict XVI. Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n° 53.

⁵⁰ A Call to Mercy: Hearts to Love, Hands to Serve, Image, 2016.

⁵¹ Pope Francis. Homily at Celebration of Palm Sunday of The Passion of the Lord. St Peter's Basilica, 28 March 2021.

Following in Mary's footsteps: serenity

Today, we can learn a lot from Mary's example. Like her, we need periods of solitude to understand the mystery of God's message in our lives, but we are also social beings who long for communion with others.

Mary also knew what it was like to feel alone. Consider her feelings at the time of the Annunciation when she tried to understand the angel's message; or when she and Joseph lost Jesus for three days before finding him in the temple. Let us especially consider her feelings when she was at the foot of the Cross and received the apostle John as her son.

Let us contemplate the serenity that Our Lady preserves before the cross. She was suffering a lot and tears were streaming from her eyes. A sword pierced her soul. But she remained in control of this sadness, she remained fully connected to God, and she remained serene. This message was very clear for Our Lady as she stood before the cross.

Those of us who know the pain and loneliness of losing, a child, a spouse, a parent, or even having a child who has grown up and left home, should be comforted by Mary's example.

Certainly, our serenity in solitude, had been built upon her moments of solitude. Scripture shows us that Mary was strengthened through silent contemplation. Although she did not always clearly understand God's plan, she reflected on these things as she waited patiently for God's plan to be revealed (Lk 2:18-19; 51-52).

Let us pray to the Virgin Serene that we may achieve this meekness of soul, in the midst of all the events, sorrows, and difficulties of life. May we become oriented toward God. May our emotions be ordered according to reason and faith, to help us in our sanctification as couples and families. May we attain the serenity of Our Blessed Mother.

The Word of God (John 19:25-30)

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son. Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home. After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said: 'I am thirsty'. A jar-full of vinegar stood there, so putting a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, 'It is accomplished'; and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.

Perhaps we are recalling some of the most contemplated scenes in Holy Scripture. Our Lady of Mount Calvary is facing one of the most profound and disturbing experiences of the human being: impotence in the face of death.

Mary is now a mature woman, quite different from the inexperienced young woman of Nazareth who heard the angel's announcement three decades earlier. Even so, it could not

have been easy to accept the arms of John, the beloved disciple, and no longer the arms of her Son: To witness him being denied a little water to ease his last sufferings, and finally, to watch him bow his head and stammer, "It is finished!"

The One whom Mary welcomed in her womb in Nazareth, whom she brought into the world in the manger of Bethlehem, whom she embraced in the flight to Egypt, can now not even be caressed on top of the cross. How could she face such a terrible situation? How is it possible to gain something out of this despair?

Mary teaches us that we can face such situations with serenity, through a deep divine intimacy. She remains there, standing by the cross, until the hour when they deliver her dead Son into her arms. Serenely, she welcomes him... not a word in Holy Scripture of unrest. In the future we will find her walking with the disciples, nostalgic, but serene.

Countless people go through the same experience, and countless couples find themselves alone. Some are surprised by an unexpected or sudden event. Others are worn out after a long illness. All are marked by feelings of powerlessness and of the finiteness of life. Life sometimes seems meaningless without their loved one at their side. Parents who, have buried their children; friends who have been separated by illnesses or unexpected accidents; grandparents who have lived their years well or badly and are now coming to the natural end of their journey on earth. There is much pain!

Mary teaches us not to deny pain, not to despair, not to be insensitive to what only God can explain.

May the Lady of Serenity help us to find this virtue, especially in the moments when we need it the most, and thus continue leading our lives in the direction of the Father.

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

Pope Francis explores the meaning of the family in different contexts. He discusses belonging to the family unit, a "family of families" in the Church, and then the whole human family.

[...] "No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together". Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all". (FT, 8)

[...] "Local conflicts and disregard for the common good are exploited by the global economy in order to impose a single cultural model. This culture unifies the world, but divides persons and nations, for "as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers".[9] We are more alone than ever in an increasingly massified world that promotes individual interests and weakens the communitarian dimension of life". (FT, 12)

"The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew". (EG, 1)

[...] "True, we are often sorely tested, but we must never lose our certainty of the Lord's love for us. His mercy finds expression also in the closeness, affection and support that many of our brothers and sisters can offer us at times of sadness and affliction. The drying of tears is one way to break the vicious circle of solitude in which we often find ourselves trapped. (...)

Sometimes too, silence can be helpful, especially when we cannot find words in response to the questions of those who suffer. A lack of words, however, can be made up for by the compassion of a person who stays at our side, who loves us and who holds out a hand. It is not true that silence is an act of surrender; on the contrary, it is a moment of strength and love. Silence too belongs to our language of consolation, because it becomes a concrete way of sharing in the suffering of a brother or sister".⁵²

Father Henri Caffarel

For Father Caffarel, prayer is a very special time of encounter with God, especially contemplative prayer. He never stopped teaching others to pray and passing on to them what he himself experienced.

"This God within you is not a silent God: He speaks, but to hear him you must be still. [...] Being quiet is difficult in our terribly noisy world. [...] It leads a restless song and dance that disturbs our prayer. However, inner silence is possible. To achieve it, one must train oneself with patience and gentleness... Listening requires a certain quality of silence, that is, contemplation. It is an attention that is fully awake, ready to detect the inner voice."⁵³

"For man, it is a great distress that loved ones can be absent, disappear. God, on the contrary, is present always and everywhere, freeing us definitively from loneliness if we know how to meet him. Like Christ, we should be able to say: "I am never alone" (Jn 8:16-29; 16:32). We are always sure to find him here, within us, and anywhere, at any time".⁵⁴

"The whole of family life will be animated by this priestly impulse that you are occupied with. Your work and your days will be dominated by the thought of God whom you must honour. [...] All events must be lived in this perspective of praise: work, meals, leisure, rest; and also, those 'great moments' such as the expectation and waiting for a child and its birth, marriage, sickness and death".⁵⁵

These words of Father Caffarel were addressed to widows, but everyone can find help in them when experiencing the pain of the loss of a loved one:

⁵² Pope Francis. Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, at the conclusion of the extraordinary jubilee of mercy, n° 13.

⁵³ Henri Caffarel. L'Anneau d'Or, Mai - Août 1957. (Translation by the writing team).

⁵⁴ Henri Caffarel. New letters on prayer. "In the presence of the present God". (Translation by the writing team).

⁵⁵ Henri Caffarel. Marital Spirituality. "The priesthood of the home", part "the worship of the family". (Translation by the writing team).

"I am not unaware of the depth of the sacrifice that has been asked of you, nor of your loneliness, nor of your difficult life, burdened with work and care. But it is precisely for this reason that I do not hesitate to tell you: do not remain immersed in grief, you whose heart has been so terribly wounded. Abandon, if you have not already done so, the cloak of sadness. Let the joy of Christ arise in you!⁵⁶

Testimony

This testimony shows us the importance of the support of other people in times of illness and difficulty but having prayer as a condition for feeling at peace and secure.

My wife was diagnosed with cancer in June 2020. We had been happily married for almost fifty years, and up to that point we both enjoyed good health.

I remember driving her to the hospital the morning of her surgery, and I remember the difficult time when I had to leave her at the reception because the rules due to COVID did not allow me to go any further. The last hug and pretending to be brave was a test. I felt lost and alone.

I retreated to the solitude of my car in the parking lot. I found I could not pray, so I put on a CD of the Rosary. Although I could not concentrate on the words and themes of the Rosary, I was blessed with a sense of peace and calm. The four hours passed much more quickly than I expected, and I admit that at times I drifted into a light sleep.

When I was advised that I could go to the Intensive Care Unit to see my wife briefly, I was amazed to find her awake and pain-free and to admit that she felt safe and at peace. What a relief!

She also told me how amazed she was at how calm she had felt when I had to leave her that morning. She felt supported by so many prayers from our family and our special friends on the Teams.

The next week was slow as we waited for the pathology results. When we received them, along with a comment from the surgeon that the results were excellent, we were so relieved and encouraged.

This experience confirmed to us that we are not alone. In the parking lot, I experienced loneliness - but not isolation - a sense of solitude and contemplation.

We are very grateful to God, our family and friends for supporting us during this otherwise lonely journey.

Questions for the Sit Down

"Show affection and concern for the other person. Love surmounts even the worst barriers. When we love someone, or when we feel loved by them, we can better understand what they are trying to communicate. Fearing the other person as a kind of "rival" is a sign of weakness and needs to be overcome. [...] (AL, 140)

⁵⁶ Henri Caffarel. Talk on love and grace. (Translation by the writing team).

In this month's Sit Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour, reflect on how you have experienced moments of loneliness in your married life.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice, and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence, and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus, forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual, or of the couple, or of the family, and those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share the experiences in which you have felt loneliness as an individual, as a couple, or as a family.

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting (John 19:25-30).

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

The Endeavours have been given to us to help us on the path to holiness. Some of them are also a path to a greater understanding of the experience of solitude or contemplation, such as personal prayer, daily reading of the Word of God, and the annual retreat.

- Share about your experience of the Endeavour this month.
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this month?
- Has living the Endeavours helped you to develop serenity in the face of adverse situations, suffering and loneliness?

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

- The loneliness of aging is very real. Are you facing it? Do you envision this possibility in the future? What are your feelings about it? What can you do to alleviate this difficulty?
- "Jesus tells us that we cannot flee from the Cross, but must remain at its foot, as Our Lady did. In suffering with Jesus, she received the grace of hoping against all hope" (cf. Rom 4:18).⁵⁷ How do these words challenge us?
- In the dynamics of life, we experience the desire to be alone, and to live together with other people. How do you balance these two needs?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

⁵⁷ Pope Francis. Homily Mass and Canonization of the Blessed Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, and the Blessed Maria Elisabeth Hesselblad, St Peter's Square, 5 June 2016.

Meeting 8: They no longer have respect for Creation

1. OBJECTIVES

- To become aware of the "absence of wine" in everyone's responsibility to care for our Common Home.
- To experience a spirituality that guides us on the path of caring for and cultivating the earth.
- To experience and live the virtue of Mary's perseverance as defender of life.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

In the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, on the care of our Common Home, Pope Francis presents some directions that run through the entire encyclical. For example: the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet; the conviction that everything is closely interconnected in the world; the critique of the new paradigm and the forms of power that derive from technology; the invitation to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress; the proper value of every creature; the human sense of ecology; the need for sincere and honest debates; the grave responsibility of international and local politics; the throwaway culture and the proposal for a new way of life. (LS, 16)

The Pope affirms that everything is interconnected or connected and therefore, human beings are not disassociated from the Earth or nature ("we ourselves are earth", according to Gen 2:7); all are parts of the same whole. Destroying nature is equivalent to destroying man. It is therefore not possible to talk about environmental protection without also protecting human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

It is very timely to recall what the Pope says from the book of Genesis:

"The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth, to "till it and keep it". As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual". [...] (LS, 66)

For the Pope, to "*tame the earth*" is not to favor a savage, domineering, destructive exploitation. "*To cultivate*" means to till or work a plot of land. "*To guard*" means to protect, to care for, to preserve, to watch over, in a relationship of responsible reciprocity between

human beings and nature. Destroying the natural order has repercussions on all living beings and everyone consequently suffers the consequences. (LS, 67)

Pope Francis makes a great appeal: this earth cries out against the harm we do to it because of the irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has placed on it. (LS, 2)

Human beings are at risk of destroying nature created by God and destroying themselves, by lifestyles, production and consumption that degrade the human and natural environment.

Speaking of sins against creation, the Pope states:

“For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins”. For “to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God”. (LS, 8)

So, we must act. We may feel as if our solitary efforts accomplish little. However, if we all act together, and change how we live in a myriad of small ways, we can make a difference. We can hold those who represent us accountable - by our votes and by our raised voices.

Let us remind ourselves that the previous Study Topic (2021-2022) was set against the backdrop of Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, where we were able to deepen our wonder and responsibility for the care of our Common Home.

In this meeting, the challenge is to learn from Mary how to become fertile soil, where many good fruits of God's love can sprout. As Pope Francis tells us:

"Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. She is the handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine should not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain". (EG, 286)

In the song of the Magnificat, Mary raised a cry to the Father. Still today, this cry needs to be addressed by each one of us, so that all people can awaken to a true and real commitment to God's creation, to the life and dignity of human beings and to of all creation. It is important to emphasize that this commitment and mission belongs to all of us.

Following Mary’s footsteps: Defender of Life

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council affirms that Mary's motherhood "in the economy of grace" continues uninterruptedly, even after her Assumption into heaven. Thus,

"By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home.

Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix".⁵⁸

This gives us the certainty that Mary cares for each of us and cares for each of her children. She wants none of her children to lack the wine of life, of human dignity, of quality education, of health, of employment, of food, of dialogue...

She is especially concerned for those who are abandoned, marginalized, our poorest brothers, those who are in the existential peripheries, because "in God's heart the poor have a preferential place, so much so that even He 'made himself poor' (2 Cor 8:9). (EG, 197)

Mary, as Mother and defender of life and of all creation, knows the heart and the needs of her children, and therefore she is an effective help, in whom we can trust, because at the same time she intercedes and brings closer to Christ all those who entrust themselves to her.

In one of his speeches, Saint John Paul II affirms that⁵⁹

[...] "And with the achievement in these lands of Christ's mandate, with the multiplication everywhere of the children of divine adoption through the grace of baptism, the Mother appeared too. In fact, the Son of God, and your Son, from the Cross indicated a man to you, Mary, and said: "Behold, your son". And in that man, he entrusted to you every person, he entrusted everyone to you. And you, who at the moment of the Annunciation, concentrated the whole program of your life in those simple words: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word", embrace everyone, draw close to everyone, seek everyone out with motherly care. Thus, is accomplished what the last Council said about your presence in the mystery of Christ and the Church. In a wonderful way you are always found in the mystery of Christ, your only Son, because you are present wherever men and women, his brothers and sisters, are present, wherever the Church is present".

The Christian gaze on life and creation allows us to perceive its transcendent value, which is why the great love of God - author and owner of life - confers on every man and woman an infinite dignity. That is why he also gave us a mother, the Mother of his own Son, to take care of each one of his children with love and affection that match the value and dignity that we have for Him.

We have many examples and witnesses that Mary continues her maternal work of listening to the calls, pains, joys, and concerns of all the people. Her maternal gaze, full of tenderness and mercy, continues to be directed especially to the most suffering, being a loving and caring presence.

For us, members of the Teams of Our Lady, and for all those who work in defense of life in all its aspects, Mary is the inspiration and the necessary intercessor. She is the ever attentive and active Mother who invites us to follow her example in a constant struggle to defend human

⁵⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, nº 62.

⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II. Homily delivered in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City, during the Solemn Concelebration with the Participants of the III General Conference of the Latin American Bishops gathered in Puebla, January 27, 1979.

life. Today more than ever, all of Creation in our Common Home, which also continues to be threatened in so many different ways.

The Word of God: Rev 12:1-4

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, adorned with the sun, standing on the moon, and with the twelve stars on her head for a crown. She was pregnant, and in labor, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth. Then a second sign appeared in the sky, a huge red dragon which had seven heads and ten horns, and each of the seven heads crowned with a coronet. Its tail dragged a third of the stars from the sky and dropped them to the earth, and the dragon stopped in front of the woman as she was having the child, so that he could eat it as soon as it was born from its mother.

The book of Revelation arouses feelings of dread and fear in many people. In fact, this is a completely opposite perception of the holy author's intention. In the passage we are contemplating, we find a clear example of the consoling, not despairing, character of the last book of Holy Scripture.

Mary appears here powerful, victorious. Clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet, for she is the Lady of all creation. Queen of heaven, she is worthily crowned with stars and reigns sovereign at the side of her son Jesus. From there she intercedes for us. In the same way that she begot and cared for the child, she cares for all of creation.

Mary's intercessory care is essential. The existence of another sign narrated in the passage helps us to understand this importance.

The monstrous figure of the fire-colored dragon with several heads and horns, which sweeps away part of the earth with its tail, is not a mythical animal or a children's cartoon character. The dragon is the evil that sought to take the child God from Mary's arms, and that today continues to seek to destroy all of her work.

The dragon continues to appear in the greed of peoples, in their disrespect for the environment, in their lack of fraternity, in hunger, and in wars.

Who do we turn to? To Mary, because in front of her, the dragon is paralyzed.

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, calls Our Lady "The Queen of all creation." He says:

"Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power. Completely transfigured, she now lives with Jesus, and all creatures sing of her fairness. She is the Woman, "clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars". Carried up into heaven, she is the Mother and Queen of all creation. In her glorified body, together with the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty. She treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart, and now understands the meaning

of all things. Hence, we can ask her to enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom". (LS, 241)

May Our Lady teach us to have more respect for the work of Creation.

Texts for reflection

Pope Francis

"To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves. Yet we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single-family dwelling in a common home. Such care does not interest those economic powers that demand quick profits. Often the voices raised in defense of the environment are silenced or ridiculed, using apparently reasonable arguments that are merely a screen for special interests. In this shallow, short-sighted culture that we have created, bereft of a shared vision, "it is foreseeable that, once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars, albeit under the guise of noble claims". (FT, 17)

"When we speak of the need to care for our common home, our planet, we appeal to that spark of universal consciousness and mutual concern that may still be present in people's hearts. Those who enjoy a surplus of water yet choose to conserve it for the sake of the greater human family have attained a moral stature that allows them to look beyond themselves and the group to which they belong. How marvelously human! The same attitude is demanded if we are to recognize the rights of all people, even those born beyond our own borders". (FT, 117)

"Development must not aim at the amassing of wealth by a few, but must ensure "human rights – personal and social, economic and political, including the rights of nations and of peoples". The right of some to free enterprise or market freedom cannot supersede the rights of peoples and the dignity of the poor, or, for that matter, respect for the natural environment, for "if we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all". (FT, 122)

"Since conditions that favor the outbreak of wars are once again increasing, I can only reiterate that "war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples. (...) The Charter of the United Nations, when observed and applied with transparency and sincerity, is an obligatory reference point of justice and a channel of peace. Here there can be no room for disguising false intentions or placing the partisan interests of one country or group above the global common good. If rules are considered simply as means to be used whenever it proves advantageous, and to be ignored when it is not, uncontrollable forces are unleashed that cause grave harm to societies, to the poor and vulnerable, to fraternal relations, to the environment and to cultural treasures, with irretrievable losses for the global community. (FT, 257)

Father Henri Caffarel

Society of Consumption⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Henri Caffarel. Five evenings on interior prayer. See fifth encounter, Part 3: Pray or perish. (Translation by the writing team).

"Let us briefly analyze the situation of humanity which, for the sake of simplicity, I will divide into rich and poor countries.

Let us first consider the 'rich countries'. In order to ensure their own present and future prosperity, and their security, which they know is precarious, they have huge financial needs. They therefore rely on an indefinite and accelerated growth of production, and thus on a corresponding increase in consumption. The expression "consumer society" expresses the reality well. Always producing more, always consuming more, is the implacable law to which the rich countries have enslaved themselves. At the end of the year, each country proclaims as a title of glory: production has increased by 5, 10, 15%. And if, on the other hand, there is a recession, it is immediately a nightmare, a curse, a panic that governments alternately try to put to sleep or excite, according to the interests of the moment.

And since it is essential that the multiple appetites of the consumers do not lose their greed, the "rich countries" endeavour to mobilize the media and advertising, carefully combined, in order to entertain and exacerbate the consumers' appetites. At the same time, governments preach austerity to ease their consciences at low cost. And, in fact, the bulimia of consumers never ceases to grow: "a trap-door effect" is produced. The wheel only turns in one direction.

But production requires natural resources. That is why the "rich countries" have undertaken the exploitation of the planet. It would be fairer to say: they have plundered the planet. They embarked on the adventure as if natural resources were inexhaustible. And then they discover that oil and precious minerals are running out, that even drinking water is in danger of running out. They panic at the idea of rationing raw materials that would jeopardize their production. It is easy to guess that they are looking for ways to get hold of these vitally needed natural resources, and the threat of war is looming.

For their part, the "poor countries" have become aware that their natural riches have given the "rich countries" an extraordinary increase in their standard of living, while they have often remained in extreme poverty and will continue to be so if nothing changes. They rebel. Anger erupts. And then the great confrontation between the two halves of humanity looms on the horizon. Not two halves: one quarter and three quarters. It is worth noting that while the world's population is growing at a breakneck pace (in 35 years it will have doubled from three to six billion people), it is almost exclusively in underdeveloped countries. The great invasions of history were a minor thing compared to the unleashing of the hungry multitudes that threaten to overwhelm the rich countries." [...]

Testimony

The testimony shows us the importance of having "virtuous habits" as a lifestyle, and the need to engage in social movements that are concerned with the care of our Common Home.

As a couple, we have been working for the last twenty years with the care of the Earth. We were once quite oblivious to the impact of our lifestyle on the environment. But we have slowly changed, inspired by the First Peoples of the world, such as the Australian Aborigines, with their deep reverence for their land and humility before the created universe. Also, we became increasingly aware of the destructive impact of our consumerist society on the environment.

And so, we began to practice what Pope Francis calls "virtuous habits." Previously, we had only one trash can. Now our Community Council provides three containers for different types of waste.

We also eat less meat, avoid using chemicals in our home and garden, and so on.

This is good and necessary, and as the Pope says, it helps us to be aware of the need to be more prudent in our use of the Planet's resources. But we know that this is not enough.

Our children are now our greatest influence. They are distressed by the dire prospects of global warming for their own children. They are part of environmental groups and have already lobbied politicians.

They also challenge us as their parents. They firmly hope that we will join them in urging our governments, businesses, and the community to take urgent action on climate change. The lives of our grandchildren are at stake. For them it is not an abstract issue.

We have always kept in mind that Teams of Our Lady is not a Movement of action, but a place where we seek to fuel ourselves to be active people. Teams teach us - through the wonderful gift of the Sit Down - to hear God's voice in our own story. Our Team meetings also call us to listen deeply to our friends as they share their stories.

Now we are seeking to use these gifts of the Movement to listen more attentively to the signs of the times and do more for what our grandchildren joyfully call "Mother Earth." We are just beginners on this journey!

Question for the Sit Down

According to Pope Francis, if all of humanity needs to change, first of all, each of us needs to change our lifestyle, our ecological ethics, our spirituality in relation to caring for the Common Home, our Christian spirituality lived in sobriety, our ability to live together with others and in communion, our relationship with Sunday living, our relationship with Mary - Mother and Queen of all creation.⁶¹

In this month's Sit Down, in addition to the questions proper to this Endeavour, we should ask ourselves if our lifestyle contemplates caring for Creation.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, welcome to this team meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer from the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*: (FT, 287)

⁶¹ Cf. Pope Francis. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* - on care for our Common Home, "My appeal" – n^o 13-16.

A Prayer to the Creator

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice, and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence, and war.
May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus, forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team.
It is a moment of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual, or of the couple, or of the family; those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share how you - individually or as a couple - have been encouraged to live different ways of caring for our "Common Home" this month (What were these ways? In whose favor were they carried out?).

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reflect on the passage from the Word of God given before the meeting: The Woman and the Dragon - Rev 12:1-4

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

Sharing on the Endeavours

Sharing is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a moment of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a moment of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about the experience of the Endeavours this month.
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this month?
- Can the Rule of Life help us to have more respect and care for Creation?

Questions for the exchange of ideas on the Study Topic

As the Bishops of Portugal teach us, the earth "is a loan that each generation receives and must pass on to the next". (FT, 178)

- As a couple and family, do we need an "ecological conversion"? On what points or aspects?
- What attitudes must we take on to imitate Mary as defender of life?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat

Review Meeting

The new wine

1. OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate what miracles of "new wine" have happened in your team throughout this year.
- To realize what, during the year, we have not been able to listen to and do in the face of all that Jesus has said to us.
- To understand, inspired by Mary's trust and hope in the Holy Spirit, that everything can be transformed, starting with each one of us.

2. PREPARATION FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Introduction

As we begin this Team's year, we have been placed before the great scene of the wedding feast of Cana, when Mary's human sensibility realized the lack of wine at the feast. Her words to her Son - "*They have no more wine*" - were born out of solidarity with those bride and groom who would be exposed to an embarrassing situation.

Throughout the year, we were invited to use Mary's virtues to notice the various situations where "wine is missing" around us - couple, family, team, church community, society. More than just seeing, we were called to action by Mary's words to the servants of the feast: "*Do whatever he tells you*".

But what did Jesus say to each one of us? Only clothed in the Word of God, like Mary, can we perceive what the Lord is asking of us. Only then, can we know which "jars" to fill, so that Jesus can transform the water into new wine.

Our mission, as members of the Teams of Our Lady, is to love the world the way Jesus loved it. Jesus challenged the established authorities who had lost their way; he focused on the ordinary everyday person; he valued women; and he cared for the poor and marginalized. For us today, who are these people? That is a question we all need to answer with sincerity.

Living out this love, as Jesus calls us to do, can be challenging, difficult, and often at odds with the prevailing culture. Being a true follower of Jesus requires us to step out in faith and to confront the unknown.

In this last meeting, we are asked to take stock, to review the path we have taken, the transformations that have occurred, and the difficulties encountered. It will be a moment of

thanksgiving and penance, but, above all, it is an occasion to look ahead and set the right course to continue the journey.

This is what the Guide of the Teams of Our Lady says about the Review Meeting:

"The last meeting of the team year is a review meeting. It gives the team the opportunity to reflect and review its life openly and in a Christian spirit. It looks back on its progress during the past year and prepares for the following year".⁶²

Therefore, the review meeting is considered a moment of sharing and mutual help in which each team member to evaluate their spiritual journey and the progress made in living their Christian and married spirituality. It is a time to set goals or resolutions, to improve the spiritual life individually and as a couple.

Also, it should be a time to examine how the different parts of the meeting have been lived out during the year, and to identify ways to improve for the coming year.

It is important to remember this last meeting is not an end, but a new starting point, the beginning of a new beginning.

Following in Mary's footsteps: do whatever He tells you

Mary is a much-loved figure in the Church, recognized with many titles. Throughout each of the meetings for this Study Topic we have focused more on Mary's humanity. We have realized that we have much to learn from her many virtues and attitudes: solidarity, humility, resilience, educator, availability, gentleness, empathy, human sensitivity, serenity, perseverance, defender of life.

She was the wife of Joseph, the mother of Jesus, a supportive friend of Elizabeth, a grieving mother at the foot of the cross, and the first disciple. She was human, and like us, had to step forward in faith, an unconditional "fiat", even when God's plan was not clear to her.

At the wedding of Cana, at a human feast par excellence, where the most expressive symbol of married love is demonstrated two thousand years ago, a phrase and a piece of advice from Mary resounded loudly in the midst of her Son's disciples and among many guests: "Do whatever He tells you!"

It is a seemingly simple command, but enough to transform the lives of the young couple at that wedding, and even to transform the world from that moment on.

When Mary realized there was no more wine, she was not just referring to the material lack of the drink at that moment. Mary was interceding for all her children. She was referring to all God's people, oppressed by the power and greed of the few, who were living in expectation of receiving the wine of Life and Salvation. Mary points us to the way forward, the true Way, Truth and Life, which is Jesus.

⁶² See: Guide to the Teams of Our Lady, edition 2018, n° 5.3.2 (The Annual Review).

We need to associate this story of the wedding at Cana with our own story - personal, marital, family, ecclesial, professional, social, etc., if we want to make good use of this passage from the Word of God, or to put on the Word of God.

What do we notice? The wine was missing before expected, before the end of that party.

In our lives, and in the lives of millions of our brothers, it is no different.

How many things end before they are expected? How many people have no more wine? The wine of the family, of the children, of housing, of health, of education, of a country, of dialogue, of living with other people?

How many situations that should be "human feasts" or moments of full joy, end up empty, without wine and without the capacity to fill people's desire for happiness!

From the biblical text, Jesus commanded two important things to restore the feast: (Jn 2:7)

- Fill the jars with water.
- Now take them out and bring them to the master of ceremonies.

The first step recommended by Jesus is to fill the jars with water. In fact, they were standing empty, a sign that they were not fulfilling their role.

The second measure is to take these jars to the master of ceremonies, so that he could see what had happened, after Jesus' intervention: the best wine, which has been kept until now, until the end of the feast.

Therefore, at the end of this team year, the "transformation of water into wine" is proposed to us as a key to reading and understanding the Word of God. It is a way to grasp the kind of transformation that Jesus carries out and that, in his name, his followers must offer where wine is lacking, where life is lacking, where bread is lacking. It needs to be shared with everyone, starting with the poorest and most excluded, who are the center of the Gospel, as Pope Francis tells us.

In his editorial for the May 1949 issue of French Monthly Letter, Fr. Caffarel wrote:⁶³

"You come together to seek Christ, to imitate him, to serve him. You will not succeed without a guide, and there is no better guide than Mary. I would like us, in our Teams, to nurture faith in the all-powerful tenderness of Our Lady and for each couple to experience the trust and security that small children feel in their mother's presence. I would like this to be one of our characteristics - I would then have great confidence in the future."

⁶³ Translation by the writing team.

The Word of God (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4)

So, from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, they went back to Jerusalem, a short distance away. It was no more than a sabbath walk; and when they reached the city they went to the upper room where they were staying. There were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Jude, son of James. All of them were joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting. Something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire. These separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

Here is Mary, the woman who, filled with the gift of God's Holy Spirit, brought into the world, the Word who became flesh. Now she contemplates the living Church in the midst of the Apostles also being empowered with this same gift. Annunciation and Pentecost show us a woman who always walked in the power of the Spirit.

It is not strange that Mary is with the disciples in the cenacle, praying with them. Jesus himself made the mission of Mary's spiritual motherhood explicit by telling John, "Behold your mother!" (Jn 19:27). So, it is not difficult to imagine her even supporting the faith of the disciples, which was shaky.

The Annunciation marked Mary as the one who would bring Jesus into the world; Pentecost instills in the Church the mission of announcing Him.

We are Church; the Movement of the Teams of Our Lady is Church. Therefore, we have received this same Spirit of Pentecost and, as the servants at that wedding in Cana of Galilee heard from Our Lady more than two thousand years ago. We are also hearing: "*Do whatever He tells you*".

The Holy Spirit illuminates the stages of the mission to which we are called and challenged as couples who have received the Sacrament of Marriage. As Christians, yesterday and today, driven by the Holy Spirit, we are called to create a world of the resurrected, where the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of those who encounter Jesus.

Let us let this Marian imperative interpose our meditation and prayer in this last meeting of the year. Did we really do all that Jesus asked of us? Do we make an effort to listen to Mary's voice, showing us the way? Are we aware that only by listening and putting into practice this command will we have New Wine in our lives and in society?

Mary, Lady of the New Wine, intercede for us so that, listening to your Son, we may reach the full joy promised by Him.

Texts for reflection

At the Review Meeting, besides undertaking an evaluation of our journey this year, there is also a sense of sending us on a mission. We are all being sent to different realities where the wine is lacking: decent housing; quality education; work; dialogue; a country; a healthy environment; human rights that are not guaranteed and respected...

This is our responsibility as members of the Church community, where we must imitate Mary's example.

Pope Francis

"Indeed, I would like to insist on this missionary role of the Teams of Our Lady. Every committed couple certainly receives a great deal from its Team experience, and its conjugal life is deepened by refining itself through the spirituality of the Movement. However, after receiving from Christ and from the Church, a Christian is irresistibly sent out to witness to and pass on what he has received. (...) Christian couples and families are often the best placed to proclaim Jesus Christ to other families, to support, fortify and encourage them. What you live as couples and as families — accompanied by the very charism of your Movement — the profound and irreplaceable joy that the Lord enables you to feel in domestic intimacy in joy and sorrow, in the happiness of your spouse's presence, in the growth of your children, in the human and spiritual fruitfulness that He grants you, all this is to be witnessed to, proclaimed and communicated outside so that others, in turn, may set out on this path."⁶⁴

[...] "we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love. We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity". (FT, 68)

[...] "Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveler in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen. We may often find ourselves succumbing to the mentality of the violent, the blindly ambitious, those who spread mistrust and lies. (...) For our part, let us foster what is good and place ourselves at its service". (FT, 77)

⁶⁴ Pope Francis. Address to Participants in the Meeting Sponsored by the Teams of Our Lady (Équipes Notre-Dame), Clementine Hall, 10 September 2015.

Father Henri Caffarel

In the writings of Father Caffarel, we find many references to the mission of couples and of the Teams of Our Lady Movement. Here is one of them, eloquent enough about the missionary requirement:

"The Teams of Our Lady, an ecclesial community, are missionary communities. And if one day they were no longer missionary, they would no longer be an ecclesial community".⁶⁵

However, it is also worth reflecting on the meaning of the Review Meeting in the journey of the Teams:

"In the team, it is the end of the year meeting, which we often call a Review Meeting, in which, with frankness and goodwill, we ask ourselves what reforms should be adopted, what steps forward should be taken so that the life of the team can progress in terms of prayer, study and fraternal friendship."⁶⁶

"At the end of the year, at the team's review, all couples should answer 'no' to the question: "Do we feel good in the Movement?" - which is not a nursery school for adults! Instead, answer this one: "Are we really determined to engage ourselves deeply in Teams and, with the help of Teams, in the mission of being God's witnesses in the midst of this world that the rising tide of atheism threatens to overwhelm?"⁶⁷

Question for the Sit-down

For this month's Sit-down, in addition to the questions that are specific to this particular Endeavour, the couple can reflect for a moment, in the light of Mary's virtues, on how they have made their way through the last meeting of the team year.

At the end of the sit down, the couple should take a moment to pray a prayer of thanksgiving and praise.

3. THE MONTHLY TEAM MEETING

Welcome

Welcoming couple: Dear brothers, sisters and friends, welcome to this review meeting. Let us begin by praying the prayer to the Holy Spirit, so that our meeting can be lived with great sincerity and so that we can make it a moment to reinvigorate our faith and witness.

⁶⁵ Équipe Notre-Dame, Expansion and mission of Christian couples). (Translation by the writing team).

⁶⁶ Vocation and Itinerary of the Teams of Our Lady, 1959. (Translation by the writing team).

⁶⁷ Henri Caffarel. In the Face of Atheism, 1970. (Translation by the writing team).

Prayer to the Holy Spirit taught by Pope Francis:⁶⁸

Holy Spirit, memory of God, revive in us the memory of the gift received.

Free us from the paralysis of selfishness and kindle in us the desire to serve, to do good.

Because worse than this crisis we are living,

only the drama of wasting it, closing ourselves within ourselves.

Come, Holy Spirit! You who are harmony, make us builders of unity;

You who always give Yourself, give us the courage to come out of ourselves,

to love and help each other, to become a single family. Amen.

Meal

The meal, as part of the meeting, should be done according to what is stipulated by each team. It is a time of grace, of joy for the meeting, of celebration, of feasting, and of prayer.

Sharing/pooling

- Share the experiences lived during the month, those that were significant in the life of the individual, or of the couple, or of the family, and those that help confront the reality lived with the Gospel should prevail.
- Share how you have been a sign of God's presence for the members of your team and your community throughout this team year.
- Share how you - individually or as a couple - have been encouraged to live out this mandate of Mary: "Do whatever He tells you" throughout the team year (What were these ways? In whose favor were they carried out?).

Reading of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

Reading and Meditation

Reading and meditation on the Word of God suggested for this meeting (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4).

Reflecting on Mary's presence in the Upper Room, Pope Francis tells us that the "Mother of Jesus is with the community of disciples gathered in prayer: she is the living remembrance of the Son and the living invocation of the Holy Spirit. She is the Mother of the Church".

Liturgical Prayer

Responsorial Psalm from the Mass of the day of the meeting.

⁶⁸ Translation by the writing team.

Sharing on the Endeavours

The sharing of the Endeavours is a very significant moment in the team meeting. It is a moment of encounter with oneself and with others. It is a moment of mutual help, of staying close to each other, to strengthen the spiritual journey of each and everyone. For this:

- Share about living the Endeavours during this year.
- What is the "wine" that we are still missing individually and as a couple in living the Endeavours?
- How have I helped my spouse in practicing the Endeavours throughout this year?
- What were the Endeavours that required "more effort" on our part this year?

Questions for the Review: exchange of ideas

At the review meeting, we are invited to reflect on various dimensions of our life as team members: as individuals and as couples, in relation to the team community, on our belonging to the movement and on our mission.

Some questions are proposed below. However, Sectors, Regions and even Super Regions usually propose some questions, whose answers represent important feedback for the planning of new actions, or the evaluation of activities carried out.

The Responsible Couple of the Team, together with the Priest Counselor or the Spiritual Advisor, will know what is most important for the team in this moment of exchange of ideas.

About the life of the couple:

- a) Do you think that the experience of this year's theme has brought you any changes? Which ones?

About the life of the Team and the Movement:

- b) Like Mary, have you been sensitive to the "wine" that perhaps one of the couples in your team has lacked? To your Spiritual Counsellor? Did you have the availability to go and meet with him/her?

About life in the World:

- c) Starting with what Jesus told us in each chapter, to what concrete gestures have you been called? Has anything changed in your way of acting in the world?

Final Prayers

- Prayer for the Canonization of Father Henri Caffarel
- Magnificat