



Equipes Notre-Dame

Trans Atlantic

## ***How do we attract young married couples to Teams?***

*This is not an official Teams Document, but is developed by the Transatlantic Super-Region from a Belgian-French reflection on the situation in two countries in 2011, presented at the International College in 2011.*

### **Is the Equipes Notre-Dame Movement still relevant to young couples ?**

Some practising couples today do no more than go to Sunday Mass. Most seek to meet other Christians in small Church groups: prayer groups, bible study groups, teams, where they can deepen their faith by studying the Good News and true sharing.

The Teams Movement truly responds to a fundamental need experienced by today's couples.

Father Caffarel, our founder, was a visionary, in creating Equipes Notre-Dame.

Yes, with an up to date vocabulary, numerous couples can find their happiness in Teams.

### **All team members and every Spiritual Counsellor should feel « responsible » :**

Aware that Teams is a **treasure** for couples, they want to make the movement known to those around them.

### **How to make young people want to join?**

By sharing their **enthusiasm** for a Christian life, by sharing the **benefits** of teams within their couple, by a true dialogue, by edifying reading, with the help of a Team which accompanies us on our journey.

### **Who do we propose can join the Teams Movement?**

Any Christian couple united by the sacrament of marriage and wanting to follow Christ.

### **Opportune places to make young people aware of the Teams Movement**

- **Marriage Preparation Centres**, because all couples when they get married really want their marriage to succeed
- **retreats or sessions for future married couples** : couples often hope to go further and are aware that marriage is an on-going vocation.
- **in parishes** :
  - o **Parish priests** or couples responsible **for marriage** in the parish can suggest to future married couples that they continue their *journey after they are married*
  - o When preparing for the **baptism of a child**, parents often ask how they can talk about God to their little one
  - o Parents, whose children are preparing for **communion or confirmation**, often feel « called » by the step their children are taking, but many feel ill equipped
  - o Couples who are **already active in the parish**: as readers, in the choir, in catechesis, children's liturgy, Youth Masses, etc. They often experience a need for spiritual deepening to better communicate with children, youth and adults.
  - o An annual Mass with renewal of Marriage vows can be arranged for all couples recently married in the Parish and/or those with significant anniversaries, and with a testimony from a Teams couple, and a chance to meet after the Mass.

- **in deanery assemblies:** a couple witness to their experience in Teams and the contribution teams can make to the priests there: delineating precisely what is specific to Teams as compared to other pastoral movements for Couples and families
- **to parents' associations:** parents who participate in these are usually parents who are keen to pass their values on to their children, including Christian values.
- other special locations: **chaplains, seminaries, retreat centres, monasteries**
- to any **couple that expresses** (to the parish priest) a desire to deepen their faith or participate in a spiritual group.

### **Charism specific to Equipes Notre-Dame :**

Teams is a unique movement: it is important to bear witness to our charism **in front decision makers in the Church** (bishops, parish priests and lay people who hold responsible positions):

- working as a couple throughout the month: conjugal dialogue called 'sit down', personal/couple prayer and as a family, preparation of a discussion topic singly and as a couple
- journeying a whole life as a team: respect, confidence, solidarity, prayer, mutual support
- complementarity to the sacraments of ordination and of marriage through spiritual companionship of a priest to discover or deepen understanding of the Good News
- annual retreats (personal or as a couple)
- statistically:
  - o historically one of the first movements for couples (1937)
  - o geographically one of the most widespread: 76 countries
  - o numerically one of the most numerous: 122,000 members and 12,000 spiritual counsellors, usually priests
  - o evolution and growth in the number of team members throughout the world

So we should make clear the ADVANTAGES of our Movement, in respect of others, which may have other advantages, according to individual needs.

These advantages should encourage decision makers to support and promote the Teams Movement.

### **Negative images we need to erase :**

**1. Unfortunately the long existence of the Teams Movement** is also a hindrance, a disadvantage as seen by others.

It is important to erase a middle-class, hierarchical, rigid image, of a movement of aged team members.

*Solution :* rely principally on young members in our publications and in media. Give priority to organising activities for young people without forgetting older members who can bear witness to their treasure. Empower and train younger couples in the Movement.

**2. The name 'Teams of Our Lady' :** The Belgian Super-Region noted that the headline on our documents can convey an image of a Marian group, where we say the rosary. Their solution is that the new Belgian leaflet headlines "Christian couple teams" with the logo only shown at the bottom of the page. However, some parts of the Transatlantic Super-Region consider Our Lady to be an important factor in attracting people.

**3 . The need for the 'sacrament of marriage'** to join a team.

*Solutions :* in France there are Tandem Teams (22 meetings), which in some cases could be used as a more accessible preparation, based on couple dialogue, before requiring the sacrament of

marriage and membership of a Team; and also the “Reliance” Movement which welcomes divorced and remarried couples. The Hispano-American Super-Region has developed a programme of 14 meetings, called “Pareja” or “MoreCouple”, for engaged couples, divorced and remarried couples, and married couples who just want to try a fixed term course without commitment (This will need translating from the Spanish for us in English-speaking countries).

4. **Competition** between parishes and Teams: parish priests have difficulty in finding volunteers to serve in parishes and fear that teams may compete with them.

*Solution* : remind parish priests that almost all team members are active in their parishes or in other works that serve the Church, thanks to the ongoing catechesis offered by Teams, thanks to the deepening of faith and sharing practices which help us pass on the faith.

### **Communication options to reach out to young couples**

1. **A communication** campaign that is particularly young and up to date. The French Super-Region have developed new material, and have run a campaign aimed at attracting couples to a series of picnics across the country on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2011.

### **2. An internet site**

- Young people who are looking for a couple spiritual movement should find us with a single click.
- On the first page of the site one should find:
  - o a simple presentation of Teams and its advantages (specific to Teams)
  - o the address of an enthusiastic contact couple (not just the national secretariat, unless there is a person readily available to listen)
- next the site should have information for teams members

In spring this year, a new, modern site that is more open to a varied public was launched in France.

### **3. News**

- a. we propose short articles (2 pages) with a photo and a 2 line summary for rapid reading
- b. we prefer stories based on personal testimonials
- c. the letter from the International Team could similarly include testimonies from young team members from other countries (young people are more ‘international’ than the old)
- d. we value the stories from Brazil and their insistence that we should participate in the gathering in Brasilia: even if few young people can go to Brasilia, they can have the impression of having met the young Brazilians by reading and watching the videos.

### **Teams Activities to publicise the Movement**

- a teams sector elects once a year **to take responsibility for organising a parish Mass** where a parish priest is also a Spiritual Counsellor: all the organising is done as a couple, with the couple telling their story and giving a presentation about the Movement. After Mass, team members host drinks to get to know the parishioners
- organisation of **conferences**, to which the Teams invite all the Christians in the region, setting aside time to speak about Teams
- **Teams retreats**: talk to non-Teams couples who participate. The organisers take care to speak of our Movement. They anticipate the pleasure of sitting down with a mixed group, to make others want to join.

- **Organise a Mass with Renewal of Marriage Vows** in the parish.
- During a **National Gathering**, team members are encouraged to invite a couple of friends who could be interested in the Movement and keep them company throughout the day.
- participate actively in the big **events of the local Church**, such as missions, youth meetings, renewals of the sacrament of marriage
- contribute to **Catholic media** wherever possible : Catholic radio, television, parish weeklies and monthly magazines.
- **each sector** should make someone **responsible for 'communication'** to make teams known within the diocese and in all Church movements
- a national day of discovery for Equipes Notre-Dame will be organised on 25 September in France in the form of picnics organised in every sector of the super-region.

### **Approaches by Teams members to make the Movement known**

- every Team member should 'feel responsible'.
- **For Teams:** when the annual Team form is sent in, all team members could sign up in a field where they undertake to make teams known: listing their talents, so that they can be contacted when some skill is needed (writing articles, internet, secretariat services, voluntary work, introduction to the diocese, or some specific Church activity)
- **in his or her parish**, s/he should suggest including his/her **contact details in the parish booklet**, listing the various services offered by the Church
- **in his/her Church or social activities:** each team member should **talk about the benefits s/he experiences through membership of a team**
  - o daring to talk about the happiness of being a team member
  - o in articles when reporting their activities
  - o through personal meetings with another couple
  - o by distributing Teams leaflets.

This would enable Teams

- to manage multiple small tasks that are not too heavy to take on
- to lighten heavy responsibilities
- to take over from each other more easily where heavy responsibilities are concerned
- to motivate more Team members in favour of the Movement

This in turn would enable those with the heaviest responsibilities to give priority to human contact in the interests of the spiritual well-being of team members.

### **First contact with the young couple**

Suggest to them that a Teams couple (= information couple) visit them one evening to let them know what Teams will bring to them.

Of course the **information couple's contact details should be known** to all team members and be highlighted on the internet site and in the Regional or Sector newsletters.

### **First meeting with the young couple**

The information couple will be very motivated and enthusiastic, and preferably young.

It is better to go to the young couple's home so that they can feel more relaxed, in their family setting, with their children.

They speak of how they really live and not directly about the Movement and its structure. They speak about the advantages Teams bring to them. It is also appropriate to speak about the demands teams make, without exaggeration, but referring to a gradual introduction...

They listen and reply to questions from the young couple. They pay attention to the hopes and concerns of the couple the better to guide them.

This meeting should be joyous to create a desire to join the Movement. We are not saints, still less sad saints.

After this meeting, the young couple are left for some time to think over their decision.

The young couple's contact details are kept in case they want to be contacted later on...

### **2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with the young couple**

Once the information couple has 4 to 6 couples lined up, they invite them all to a meeting.

If these couples seem able to form a Team, the Sector Couple looks for a Pilot Couple who will accompany the Team for 12 months; then provide follow-up for a slightly longer period ...

Otherwise, each couple can be asked to find in their area or network other couples suitable for forming a Team with them, preferably not really close friends.

### **First team meeting**

Couples prepare the meeting using the introductory booklet.

The host couple prepares the meeting with the Pilot Couple.

### **How can we introduce a couple into an 'existing' Team?**

When several couples join an existing Team the whole life of the team focuses on the introduction of the new couple by accepting each where they are, by choosing an appropriate topic and by progressively introducing the endeavours.

It is good for an established couple to 'sponsor' the new couple, by meeting them more frequently. It is also good for each couple in the team to personally welcome the new couple taking a more individual approach.

We especially invite team members in renewed teams to participate together in a Second Wind weekend, so that the new members can be made aware of belonging to teams and of the benefits of the method proposed.

Introducing a new couple often in effect breathes 'a second wind' into the team, and becomes a wake up call, a stimulant and an opening.