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REALITY

MARCH 2012

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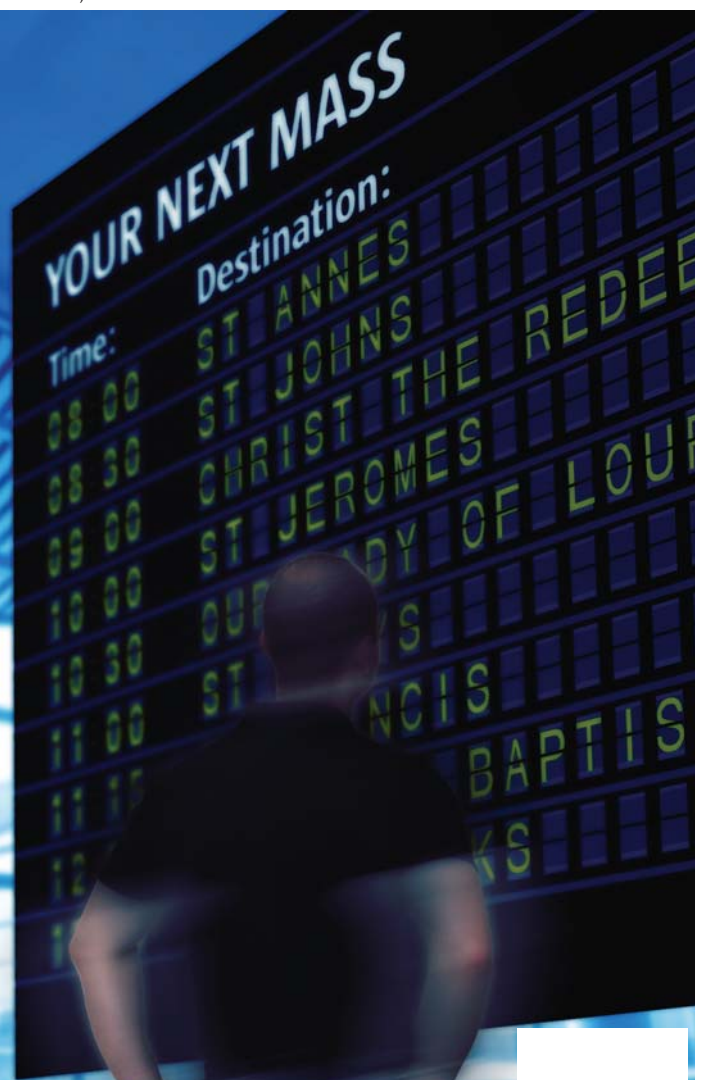
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THE NEW ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Before he became pope, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger declared that the new ecclesial movements and communities in the Catholic Church were 'a promising springtime.' Hundreds of them were born in the 20th century, at a time when some said, "God is dead." They were the "surprise of the Holy Spirit," said Cardinal Ratzinger. In this series we look at some of these movements, each of which constitutes a gift from the Holy Spirit for the world of today.

WITNESSING CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: TEAMS OF OUR LADY

THE MOVEMENT HELPS COUPLES GROW IN LOVE OF GOD AND OF EACH OTHER

BY SUSAN GATELY



Fr Henri Caffarel

When four recently married couples approached a priest in Paris in 1938, asking him to help them live their newfound love in the light of faith, his reply was, "Let us journey together." This was the start of the Teams of Our Lady, which is now spread to 75 countries, involving over 100,000 people, and bringing out the powerful vocation of Christian marriage.

One night recently I went to visit one of these teams in Co Kildare.

It had been a hard day. I'd spent seven hours in casualty with a sick relative, while ambulances delivered crash victims, a raffish drunk lectured us on the economy, and the walking wounded patiently marked time in the waiting room.

Now it was evening and I was at the door of Mary and Hugo Gallagher's house in Leixlip. I was frazzled and late. Mary welcomed me into a cosy sitting room where four couples and a priest were saying a few prayers around a candle.

They greeted me, and we settled down to pray. Immediately I felt enveloped by the peace. Fr John, a Jesuit priest, led the prayer and spoke about appreciating the treasure of faith in others. In moments of silence, you could hear the ticking clock in the hall and the hissing of the gas fire. After the silence, each person prayed a petition.

Then we adjourned to the dining room to quell our rumbling tummies. Each couple had brought a meal, which made it very easy for

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Mary & Hugo Gallagher



Joe & Aine Clayton

everyone. In turn, each person spoke, sharing their experiences of the previous month - their encounters with God. They pooled stories of bereavement, business problems,

proposed six 'endeavours' to help them do this: conjugal and family prayer; regular dialogue in the sight of God as a couple (the Sit Down); daily scripture reading; a personal

internationally. This led to the drawing up of a charter in 1947 which presented its essential objectives as a worldwide Christian movement for married couples, seeking to develop their relationship with God personally and as a couple.

times we're together."

Tony, who works in tourism, describes the process. "A couple sits quietly together. If a thing is on your mind, you discuss it frankly and openly. There's a great sense of peace. It is like you had a meeting with God."

His wife Breda, a nurse, says it reminds her of confession. "You get a feeling of relief and inner peace." Some couples find the 'Sit down' more difficult than others, but at this meeting they all agree it is a precious moment.

During the final part of the meeting, the team discusses the chapter of a spiritual book they are studying in between meetings. Currently the group is reading *The Naked Now*, by Richard Rohr. There is no attempt to reach consensus or a conclusion, merely to exchange insights. At the end, all stand to recite the Magnificat.



Equipes Notre-Dame

You realise the Holy Spirit is so present in your life

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emigration, illness, exam pressures, financial worries and family joys.

This year Joe and Aine are leading the Leixlip group. (Leadership rotates, as does the location for their monthly meeting). "We help one another. There's a friendship, but also a code of confidentiality. People are free to say anything and be sure it won't go outside the room," Aine tells me.

Tonight a new couple is sitting in (like me) to get a feel for the movement and discern if it is for them. Fr John, who works as a chaplain in St Vincent's Hospital, speaks too, and it is a strong moment of sharing, showing the beauty of both vocations - marriage and the celibate life.

He moved to Dublin in 2005 and joined this team. "It is a faith support for me," he tells me between courses. "I receive much more than I give."

ORIGINS

The Equipes Notre-Dame, or Teams of Our Lady, was started by Fr Henri Caffarel in Paris in 1939, just before the Second World War. The "Caffarel" groups, as they were known, multiplied after the war, nationally and



rule of life; and an annual spiritual retreat.

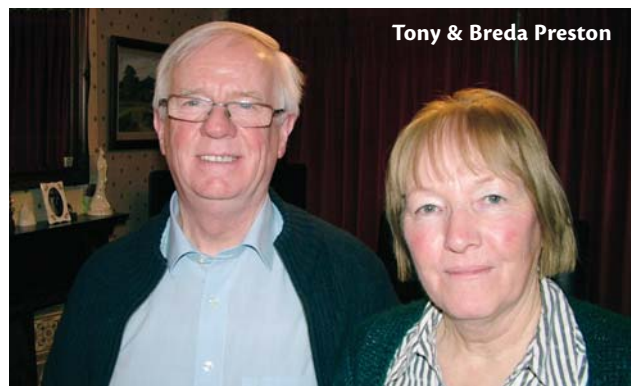
At every gathering, the team considers one of these 'endeavours' in more depth. Tonight, the focus is on the 'Sit Down.' This is a period of time where each couple, in the presence of God, tries to look at their lives together.

Joe, originally from Manchester, talks about how the 'Sit Down' has taught him to "shut up and listen!" Everyone laughs. Aine, his wife of 37 years, nods, adding, "It is very valuable. It is different to other

NATIONWIDE

The Equipes Notre Dame reached Ireland in 1964. Today there are 32 teams, each involving four to six couples, spread across the country, in Galway, Mullingar, Limerick, Belfast, Sligo, Meath and Dublin. Worldwide it is a single international movement with 122,000 members, all striving to be renewed in their marriages, and to help each other. Teams are grouped into Sectors, Regions and Super Regions.

While for years the movement's growth was slow, in the last two years it has experienced new life with the birth of five new teams. Many are young couples, thirsty for spirituality for their marriages. They have



Tony & Breda Preston



The opening period of prayer

to watch a Manchester United match. "I couldn't describe it. The sense of peace," he says, adding with a laugh, "Of course, we won, though I don't think that had much to do with it!"

When children leave home and parents retire, it can be a challenging time. But the teams' spirituality makes it a time of enrichment.

"We pray together as a couple. We study scripture together, we go through the team's rule of life together and separately. It has brought us many steps down the road and we've grown spiritually," says Joe.

come to the movement from parish retreats through the witness of other couples.


The couples that make up the Leixlip team joined through the invitation of a friend. Breda, for example, was nursing with Mary.

"I thought it was a lovely way to meet people," says Breda, but her husband Tony found it harder at the start. "I was reticent

understanding of the scriptures. I feel I've gained great riches from reading scripture and a new closeness to God."

PROFOUND UNITY

Moments of profound unity with each other stand out as the gems in their marriage. Tony recalls a 'Sit Down' Breda and he had while they were in Old Trafford

The prayer and friendship among the couples is a bedrock support to each one, especially in times of trial. "When we're all together, there is not one issue or worry affecting families that is not covered, and yet we are still praising God. You are a team. It is a family," says Mary. 

For further information, see: www.equipes-notre-dame.ie



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Praying the Magnificat

about sharing. It took time to build up trust."

The couples tell me the movement brings them closer to God and each other. "You realise the Holy Spirit is so present in your life," says Breda. For Tony it has brought a new love of scripture. "I was always a devout Catholic, but I didn't have a strong



The Leixlip Team after the meal