



A Christian Movement for Married Couples

Equipes Notre – Dame (Teams of Our Lady)

Role of Responsible Couple





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A MANUAL FOR THE RESPONSIBLE COUPLE

Once the initial shock of being elected Responsible Couple (RC) passes, a newly elected couple will begin planning for the coming year. This manual is written as one of many helps available to the RC to make their year successful for themselves and for their Team. The ideas contained here have been tried by others and found effective.

Some invaluable helps that new RC's can draw upon are the many prayers offered by the entire Team movement and the spiritual support which Teams provide. The participation at an extra Mass weekly will also be an added channel of grace for them.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RC COUPLE

The purpose, goals and practices of a Team of Our Lady are contained in the first addendum to this manual entitled "What is a Team of Our Lady". This addendum should be read a few times with emphasis on the sections "Concrete suggestions for particular practices" and the section on the "Duties of the couple in charge". The RC responds to the challenge of having their Team follow the guidelines proposed in this document, with emphasis on the spiritual growth of the Team members and the mutual support offered in their Team.

ATTITUDE

The attitude displayed by the RC is crucial to their effectiveness. A couple chosen by their own Team is given a mandate to lead and guide. Therefore, start your year with enthusiasm, energy and a positive, assertive attitude which will encourage the members of your Team to respond in a similar manner. Believe you are leaders and you will be leaders.

Your attitude, bolstered by prayer and planning, is the key to a year of growth. Be optimistic that the goals and plans you make will work. Your Team members will welcome positive leadership and will join you in reaching goals mutually set.



SETTING GOALS FOR THE YEAR

If your Team is one or more years old, the Team has had an evaluation meeting and has agreed to concentrate on certain areas of growth for the coming year. If this has not been done, this may be your first order of business. These goals may be specific as to the conduct of the meeting, e.g. start promptly at an agreed upon time or more general, e.g. more contact between meetings. Make a list of these goals, refine them so they are clear and as specific as possible, put them in priority order according to the wish of the Team and then choose the first 2 - 4 goals. Some examples of goals are:

- to concentrate on the obligation of the sit-down and to share successes/failures each month.
- to plan for a Team retreat
- to start and end the meeting at specific times

These goals should be copied and given to each couple. Some goals will require the help of other couples, such as a committee to arrange a retreat. Other goals require monthly implementation, such as sharing on the sitdown. The goal setting technique will work if the goals are specific, few in number, agreed to by the couples in the Team and monitored by the RC. Some goals are achieved, others just show improvement. No matter - the aim is progress.

SOURCES OF HELP

In goal setting and planning, take advantage of the help offered by the Sector Couple, the Liaison Couple (LC), sharing within the Cluster meetings where the cluster system is used, the chaplain and the previous RC. Attend any training session offered to RC's, meet with the LC and the Chaplain to plan for the New Year, obtain notes and responses from the previous RC concerning the evaluation meeting. Obtain copies of Team documents related to the obligations which are part of the goals.

DISCUSSION MATERIAL

This should set in motion by the outgoing RC but if nothing has been done about selecting the study material, you must start. Ask one or two couples to investigate suitable books, see if the last evaluation meeting offers suggestions and contact the Sector Couple for recommendations made by other Teams and order study materials for all couples so it is available prior to the first meeting. Ask one couple to be discussion leader, write questions and get materials and questions to the couples.



New Teams will be using the study materials provided by the movement. This material provides an orientation in the movement and an introduction to the practices and obligations to Teams. This material is excellent for an older Team to read for purposes of renewal and should be covered with couples entering an existing Team who are new to the movement.

TEAM CALENDAR

Set as many dates for the monthly meetings as far as possible in advance. Some Teams can establish a continuing date such as the last Friday of the month others must plan around the available dates of couples. In either case set as many dates as early as possible. Assign the host couple for the meeting, the discussion couple and the couples helping with the meal.

Additionally, place on the calendar dates of Team events such as Sector Evening, special liturgies, sector retreats, and special social events. Share these dates with the Team and encourage attendance by phone calls and car pools. The RC can greatly increase attendance at these Sector events by encouraging all to attend and by going themselves.

Establish dates for your Team's special events such as special liturgies, retreat, or social events such as a picnic. Obtain volunteer couples to plan these events and follow-up on progress. Do not take responsibility for these events but instead delegate to others and offer assistance.

RC ROLE AT THE TEAM MEETING

The monthly meeting is the central activity of the Team and the RC role is crucial as planner, facilitator and director. Prior to the meeting, the RC can help the discussion couple get written responses to the discussion material. If a couple new to Teams is host for the meeting, the RC should offer help.

THE MEAL

As the Charter says, "Mankind has yet to invent anything better than a meal together to help renew friendships and strengthen old ties". Keep the meal simple so that the financial burden and the preparation chores are limited. Disposable plates and casseroles should be more in evidence than fine china and haute cuisine. Let other couples help with the meal by providing salad and dessert. The meeting should start on time with any late-comers quietly taking their places. During the meal,



pooling takes place, which is a sharing by each couple. Pooling can be quite specific, such as how I encountered Christ during the past month or more general to include events in our lives during the past month. The pooling should move from couple to couple so that all have a chance to share and the other couple listen. Crosstalk is discouraged. The meal should not take too long and can be followed by a few minutes silence before the rest of the meeting takes place.

SHARING OF INTENTIONS

Couples at this time ask for the prayers of members of their Team for intentions special to them. If the RC notes major concerns of the couples, this can be the basis for calls during the month to the couples to see how things are going. It is another indication of your concern.

THE MEDITATION

The Chaplain can assume the responsibility for the preparation, assignment of reading and the sharing on the meditation. The response to the meditation should be a prayer and not an intellectual discussion of the passage. The meditations may be chosen from the monthly newsletter, reflections on a yearly theme such as God's love for us, a selection which mirrors the liturgical cycle such as those found in the readings at Mass on Sunday or reflections which arise from the discussion material.

Some Teams facilitate the response to the meditation by the passing of a remembrance card from one to another which indicates that a person has finished sharing on the meditation. At the conclusion of the sharing by the couples, the Chaplain is invited to offer a prayer which summarizes the meditation.

SHARING ON OBLIGATIONS

The spiritual health of the Team is reflected in the performance of the obligations. The six current obligations are found in the addendum. The Team should have decided on a way to help each other with the obligations. A team could concentrate on one obligation for a period of time or each couple concentrate and share on a particular obligation of their choice. Many Teams share on the progress of all the obligations monthly, taking note of those obligations not performed over a period of time. These concerns that need further attention could then be the focus for a rule of life. One goal for the Team should involve the obligations. The RC can help by offering encouragement and suggestions to couples on specific obligations. Information on the obligations is found in booklets available from Teams.



THE DISCUSSION

Although the discussion is the responsibility of the discussion couple, the RC can help to make the discussion lively and interesting. Some techniques to be encouraged:

- the questions elicit personal response rather than a repeat of the study material.
- encourage all couples to respond in writing to the questions.
- the discussion leader incorporates these responses into the preparation for the discussion.
- divergent views are stated and couples are encouraged to express their thoughts.
- all individuals are encouraged to participate.
- the discussion couple refrains from judgement on ideas offered. Instead, the discussion couple reflects these views back to other couples to obtain their response.
- no consensus is looked for. The purpose of the discussion is to create thought not to persuade others towards a single opinion.

The discussion is summarized and ended by the discussion couple at a time agreed upon.

NEW BUSINESS

Dates and place of the next meeting are announced, discussion couple assigned and also those couples helping with the meal. Special events are discussed and couples with responsibility for planning report. The meeting should end at a time agreed upon by the Team. Some Teams end with a prayer (the Magnificat, the Hail Mary) or with a song.

SUPPORT FOR THE RC

In the case of a new Team, the RC should maintain close contact with the LC who may have been the Pilot Couple. This contact will help establish solid foundations on which the Team will grow. The RC should accept any offer to attend a meeting of another Team to see how things are done elsewhere. This visitation can be arranged through the Le. Initiate contact with the LC after each meeting, sharing highs and lows and looking for suggestions. Discuss with the LC problems you have, decisions to be made and events in the planning stage.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Teams with five or less couples should consider adding new couples. It is helpful to all if two couples are added at the same time. The Sector Couple may have names of couples who have shown an interest in joining Teams. The couples already in the Team should join in the orientation of new



couples. This orientation may be an excellent time for the Team to review some basics such as the study of the Charter or the study material found in the "blue books".

Chaplains are subject to reassignment. Be willing to speak to prospective chaplains about the Team movement. If any interest is shown, invite them to a Team meeting. Recruit the Chaplain for your own Team if needed or forward the name to your Sector Couple.

One of the obligations assumed in the Team movement is financial support which consists of a fair appraisal of a day's earnings contributed once a year. This annual contribution can be expedited if the RC simply asks couples in advance to bring their cheques in a sealed envelope to a particular meeting, for example April or May. These envelopes are then inserted into another, addressed to the Secretariat and sent off. These contributions are essential to the maintenance and growth of the Team movement. If a couple cannot contribute the amount suggested, they are asked to contribute whatever they can, however small. If a couple wishes to postpone the contribution, a short note to that effect is appreciated.

ELECTION OF A NEW RC

A new RC is elected annually. Each member votes secretly by ballot and the counting is left to the Chaplain who does not vote. The couple obtaining a relative majority is elected. After each round of votes, the Chaplain announced if a couple is elected or if another round is indicated, without any commentary. No information is provided as to the number of votes nor the couples involved in a tie nor the names of couples receiving any votes. The RC should try to create the appropriate climate for this choice to be done under the best conditions. As soon as the choice of a new RC has been made, the former RC informs the LC and the Sector Couple.

THE EVALUATION MEETING

The last meeting of the year is the usual time for evaluation. The purpose of this meeting is to set goals for the coming year. This has been described earlier in this booklet. The RC, Chaplain and the members of the Team are invited to construct the evaluation questions to which all respond in writing. Questions relating to the spiritual growth of the Team, the sharing on obligations, the discussion material, the Team retreat, contact between meetings are all appropriate. The importance of everyone responding to these questions is stressed by the RC and the responses and subsequent discussion are the basis for the goals for the coming year. Share these goals with the Le.



It is suggested that a special meeting of commitment, with liturgy and social, be held after the annual evaluation meeting and before the first Team meeting of the New Year.

CONCLUSION

Look forward to your term as RC. Take advantage of the opportunity to meet other RC's, to experience the larger Team movement, to work closely with the Chaplain, to visit with other Teams, and to lead and guide those who have selected you. Attendance at the extra Mass requested of leaders is an excellent occasion to pray for the graces available to you for the asking.

Be a responsible Couple - thinking, planning, praying and acting together. Resist the temptation to have one or the other do the job. Share the responsibilities of making the phone calls, announcements and giving direction.

Great enthusiasm is generated by couples who participate in spreading the Team movement. Couples involved in recruitment and piloting are themselves renewed. If you have been shown the gift of a Christian community, share this gift with others. Give other couples the opportunity to examine this movement. Invite couples occasionally to your meeting, with the consent of the Team couples. These couples, witnessing a Team meeting, will know other interested couples and this will be the start of another Team. Don't keep your light under a bushel, but let it shine for others to see.

Much will happen to you as a couple if you let it. You will have new experiences and make new friends. The growth of your Team will be a great reward. This is worth your efforts.

ADDENDUM - WHAT IS A TEAM OF OUR LADY?

I. A PROPOSAL

"Come, follow me!" Christ is calling each of us, and each married couple. He invites us to a constant broadening of his love, so that witness may be given to that love wherever it may be.

There are families who wish to answer to that call, although well aware of their weakness; married couples who have confidence in the sacramental grace given them by marriage, and who believe in the efficacy of fraternal mutual help and in Christ's promise - "Where two or three have met together in my name, I am there among them" (Mt. 18,20): some such couples decide to form a team, and ask the Movement to help them. This is the basic proposal underlying the Teams of Our Lady.



2. AN IMAGE

A Team of Our Lady is a married couples Christian community.

2.1 A Community

A "Team" consists of 5 to 7 couples, assisted by a priest, who have freely decided to join together. No one is forced to come, or forced to stay. They continue as active members because of fidelity to the Spirit. In order to attain the common end they have chosen, each of the participants agrees to "play the game" faithfully, in accordance with the rules of their community. Such a community has its rules, and its needs, that find expression in the choice of a certain number of common goals and of concrete means necessary to achieve those ends; each member accepts as his or her own the decisions made by the community, as long as he participates in its activity.

Each "Team" forms part of a larger community, the supranational Movement of the Teams of Our Lady, and accepts to share fully in its life.

2.2 A Christian community

A "Team" is not simply a human community; it comes together "in Christ's name", and attempts to help its members to make progress in the love of God and in the love of one's neighbour, so as to answer more fully to the invitation of Christ. It was Christ's wish that a visible community should be the meeting-place, where the love he has brought us could find expression and actuality. He himself assembled such a community, he promised it his presence and granted it his Spirit. He entrusted it with his Gospel of good news, which was to be announced to the world. That community is the Church the "body of Christ" which is at the service of the community of men.

The Church herself is made up of small communities, each distinct in appearance. The structure of these communities may be very different from that of the Church, but the same life is present in each, just as each part of the human body shares the life of the whole body; the principle of life for the Church is Christ's own love for his Father and for all men.

A Team of Our Lady is one of those small communities; as such it links up with the Father (by its close communion with the Church) and yet remains in full contact with the world.

Its life is organized accordingly: the priest, who "ensures that Christ be present as head of the community" (Bishops' Synod, 1971), helps the community as a constant reminder of its true goal.

2.3 A community of married couples

A Christian home is already a Christian community, but of a distinctive sort.

On the one hand, such a community is founded on a human reality, the free, complete, definitive and fruitful gift of one's self in love, which is what a man and a woman undertake in marriage. On the other, this human reality becomes in Christ a sacrament, i.e. a sign that displays God's love for man, and Christ's love for his Church, and which allows the husband and wife to share in those loves.

Christ's presence in a conjugal community is very special: his love for God and for men transforms human love from within. In consequence, human love that is lived in a Christian fashion is already, of itself, a witness to God: from the fullness of that love there flows the apostolic action of a Christian home.

The mutual aid that burgeons within a Team will have a distinctive character: each couple will help the others to grow in Christ (a married couple is constantly "under construction") and to collaborate by their love for the furtherance of the Kingdom.

A Team of Our Lady asks for the special protection of Our Lady. The members of the group underline in this way their conviction that on the way to God there is no better guide than "she who holds first place among the humble and poor of the Lord, those who confidently await and attain his salvation" (Lumen Gentium - 55).

3. AWAY

Only one "way" exists for all Christians through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God: "Happy are those who hear the word of God and Keep it" (Luke 11, 28). The Teams of Our Lady do not impose a particular type of spirituality on their members; they simply want to help them advance as a couple along the path signposted by Christ. For this purpose stress is laid on three points:

- a direction to life;
- concrete suggestions for particular practices;
- and team spirit.

3.1 A Direction to Life

The general trend is that of the love that Christ came to bring us: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength ... Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12, 30-31). To grow in such a love is the work of a whole lifetime; the Teams of



Our Lady would like to help their members in this effort, and they require the following points of collaboration:

- for mutual aid in their growth in God's love:
- to leave an important place in their lives for prayer
- to become familiar with God's word, and to make a regular effort to live it more fully
- to frequent the sacraments, especially the Eucharist
- to strive with energy in the knowledge and practice of Christian asceticism.
- for mutual aid in their growth in love for others:
- to put into practice a true mutual help as a married couple - by listening, speaking and sharing - in all matters, especially as regards spiritual matters
- to preoccupy themselves for the full human and Christian education of their children
- to open their home in a spirit of friendship and hospitality
- to bear effective witness to Christ's love, especially by their acceptance of ecclesiastical and civic duties.

3.2 Concrete Suggestions for Particular Practices

Experience has proven that the bottom line between the success or failure of a particular Team is its willing acceptance of the obligations and The Charter. Experience shows also that unless one has a certain number of particular practices, general directives for one's life remain a dead issue.

As Fr. Tandonnet explains it so simply, "The only requirement necessary to be members of the Teams of Our Lady is a sincere desire to improve our spiritual lives as individuals, as a couple and to agree with other couples to try to follow the formula that the Teams offers to help us reach that goal".

This formula, first set forth in The Charter, and more recently expanded and enriched in this document, "What is a Team of Our Lady?" outlines the following six obligations:

1. A regular reading (or listening) to the Word of God. (Scripture)
2. A daily period set aside for a "true conversation with the Lord". (Personal Prayer)
3. A daily meeting of husband and wife for conjugal (and whenever possible), family prayer.
4. A monthly in depth talk between husband and wife in the presence of the Lord (Sit Down).
5. A choice (and periodic revision) of one's Rule of Life.
6. A yearly Retreat (at least two days) made, if possible, together, husband and wife, in order to withdraw before the Lord and reflect on their spiritual progress.



These, then, are the "OBLIGATIONS" we undertake as members of the Teams of Our Lady on which we share and for which we ask the prayer and assistance of our Team at the monthly meeting.

3.3 Team Spirit

The Team is not an end in itself: it is a means for the benefit of its members. It allows them

- to live together key moments of prayer in common and of mutual sharing.
- to help one another to really make progress in the Lord and to bear witness to him.

There are generally three aspects, or turning-points, in the life of a Team just as there are in the life of any Christian community:

- with Christ, the Team turns towards the Father and welcomes his love.
- in Christ, the Team shares that love: "they were united in heart and soul" (Acts 4, 32).
- urged by the Spirit, the Team sends its members into the world to renew that love.

These three aspects are to be found primarily in the course of the monthly meetings.

Those normally include:

- a meal, which is more especially the occasion for a spirit of friendship.
- a prayer in common, which is the centre and summit of the meeting, and which can sometimes take the form of a Eucharistic celebration.
- a "sharing" and a "pooling", where mutual aid is at its strongest especially regarding spiritual and apostolic help of one another.
- a discussion on the theme for consideration of the month, when, more especially the members deepen their grasp of the faith.

However, the life of the Teams is not limited to the monthly meeting: prayer in the company of other members, and for their intentions, mutual sharing and assistance prolong the group's activities during the month, in accordance with the initiative of each group.

4. DUTIES OF THE COUPLE IN CHARGE - THE RC

There is one couple "in charge", elected each year by the members of the Team, that undertakes to ensure that all participate effectively in the life of the community, so that mutual help will really be shared, and each member will feel truly recognized, loved and accepted by the whole group. The couple in charge has the duty of inviting each member to participate actively in the Teams of Our Lady. In addition to the "OBLIGATIONS", we agree to abide by the Rules of the Game",



At the Team level

By attending the monthly meeting

By preparing the meeting with prayer and reflection, by offering a written response to the monthly discussion material.

At the level of the Movement ...

By keeping informed about the life of the Movement

By reading the newsletter, and especially the editorial

By making an effort to live according to the rules common to the Movement

By attending the meetings organized at the different levels

By sharing in the movement's life and apostolic mission ...

Accepting responsibility (leadership)

Contributing to the financial needs of the Movement

By praying the Team prayer, the "Magnificat" each day

By including all Team members around the world in our prayer

By extending hospitality to other Team members whenever the opportunity occurs.

Pilot couples have the all important initial responsibility of presenting the obligations to the newly formed Teams in the right context. This is particularly true when using the new study material in which the obligations are not so clearly set forth. Therefore, the Responsible Couple assumes the duty of providing for a sharing of obligations at each meeting.

Time was when we presented an almost apologetic version of the obligations, and called them opportunities or some other less innocuous word, but no more! We are firmly convinced in talking to members of thriving Teams, and persons inquiring about the Movement, that this discipline is one of the things that make us unique, and it is what more and more Christians are seeking.

CONCLUSION

The Teams of Our Lady is a Movement of Spirituality for married people. They offer to their members a team-life and some concrete means in order to help them to progress as a couple in God's love and love of the neighbour. They thus prepare them to witness, the form of which is freely chosen by each couple. In that way, the Teams of Our lady, even though they are not a movement for action, are nevertheless a movement of active people.



A Christian Movement for Married Couples

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