

**The importance of Christian formation for Teams of Our Lady couples**

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Father Henri Caffarel was very concerned that Team couples should seek ongoing and lasting formation. He used to say: "I beg you, never stop training. If the activity does not allow you to continue your formation, that activity will cause you to become lost".[[1]](#footnote-1)

His reflections focus on the lack of formation of couples in a true Christian life - whether or not they are team members. Many marry without adequate preparation for married and family life, and often without knowing about the profound meaning of the sacrament of marriage and the spirituality that married Christians can experience.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Teams of Our Lady formation programme is a response to couples who wish to deepen their faith and respond to the movement's raison d'être: their sanctification in and through marriage ("no more, no less").

This is why the different levels of formation offered by the Teams of Our Lady enable couples to deepen their conjugal spirituality in a coherent, ongoing and progressive way along their path to holiness.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is important to emphasise that Christian formation is not simply the integration of what others pass on to us in terms of knowledge. It is also something that is born in the depths of each of us, to live the gift of faith more fully in a free and mature way. We discover new human values, and we assume the apostolic purpose of the Church more responsibly, following Jesus Christ in his way of being and acting.

According to the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, Christian formation is: "a continuous personal process of maturing in faith and of being conformed to Christ, according to the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit".[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Exhortation of Pope John Paul II affirms that the formation of lay Christians must be fundamental and ongoing, in order for us to live out and fulfil both our vocation, and our human and Christian mission, in various spheres of activity in the Church and in the world.

Father Henri Caffarel's apostolic exhortation reminds us that Christian formation is not a privilege for the few but a right and a duty for all. The basis of this formation is its continuity, so that: “The more we are formed, the more we feel the need to continue to improve our formation. In the same way, the more we are formed, the more capable we become of forming others”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

And what is the foundation or raison d’être of this formation of the lay faithful, and consequently, of couples in Teams of Our Lady? This is the answer to the apostolic exhortation: “That you may bear more fruit”.

Based on the Gospel image of the vine and the branches, the exhortation shows us a fundamental aspect of the life and mission of the lay faithful: It is a call to grow, to continually mature, and to bear ever more fruit.

It is about formation and action to grow and mature continually, and to bear more fruit for the Lord’s vine, so that we are not cut off and thrown away. That is the great challenge!

It is important to remember that we are not Christians because we are born into a Christian family. We become Christians to the extent that a “believing subject” or “ecclesial subject” is established within us. That is to say, we become a being who is mature in faith, we are someone who bears witness to his or her love for the Church, who serves his or her brothers and sisters in their needs, who remains a follower of Jesus, who is obediently listening to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and who has the courage, creativity and boldness to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

This obliges us, as couples of Teams of Our Lady, to break with the orthodoxy of a faith, a Christianity or a religion, that is a given, or something that of itself guarantees our salvation.

This is why we need initial and ongoing formation. It needs to be a human formation that develops mature qualities in us, for our contact with this pluralistic world.   
It is:

* a spiritual formation that allows us to grow constantly in intimacy with Jesus Christ
* a doctrinal formation
* a systematic catechetical activity that develops biblical and theological knowledge
* a pastoral and missionary formation which makes possible and encourages responsibility in the world for the building up of the Kingdom of God.

Formation in the spirituality of missionary action is one of the strengths of the Teams of Our Lady Movement, and it is something that Father Henri Caffarel continually emphasised. It is based on being open to the Spirit and must be expressed in the family and in the community, in our professional work, in our dialogue and in our listening to others, in our service to the most disadvantaged, and in every other aspect of our daily mission.

We can never say we are formed enough if we understand that the primary mission of formation is to help the members of the Church to always encounter Christ. It is through formation that we can recognise, welcome, internalise and develop the experience and values that make up our own Christian identity and mission in the world.[[6]](#footnote-6)

As Fr Henri Caffarel used to say: never stop being formed. If action, mission, apostolic life, and the day-to-day aspects of your lives don't allow you to continue your formation, it will lose you, and you won't be able to bear the fruit that the Lord expects. So, what's left to do?

Being a disciple of Jesus is a gift destined to grow in love, mercy, forgiveness, listening to others, service to those most in need, missionary character, human and Christian maturity.

May our Mother Mary, Jesus' most perfect disciple, help and accompany us in our Christian growth, in our integral development. May it be so!

1. Friends of Father Caffarel Newsletter, 11, july 2012, p. 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anneau d’Or 1958, For an spirituality of married life [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ERI Formation, October, 2011, Part 2, Objectives and models of formation [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John Paul II, Christifideles Laici, 30 december 1988, nº57 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Idem nº63 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. CELAM, Aparecida Document, 13-31 may 2007, nº279 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)