

**TEAMS OF OUR LADY – CANADA
NATIONAL GATHERING 2026
“RETURNING TO THE SOURCE”**

PRESENTATION: OPENING ADDRESS

SPEAKER(S): MERCEDES GÓMEZ-FERRER & ALBERTO PÉREZ

DATE / SESSION: FRIDAY, AUGUST 21 – 5:00–5:30 PM

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: SPANISH

Dear everyone, it is a great joy for us to be here today and to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of Teams of Our Lady in Canada. We are enormously grateful for this invitation and for the opportunity to share these days with all of you.

As we always do, we will begin by introducing ourselves — although some of you already know us. We are Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer and Alberto Pérez, and we have been married for 35 years. We have three sons and four grandchildren. We live in the city of Valencia, Spain, where we work. Alberto has been a music teacher in a public secondary school and has recently retired from teaching, though he remains very active in music. Mercedes is a Professor of Art History at the University. We are grateful to our sons for the understanding they have always shown us in everything we undertake — and now, during the school holidays in Spain when we usually help them with the grandchildren, they know we are here and have supported us. Equally, we are grateful to Mercedes's parents, who were the ones who showed us what it meant to live in a Team of Our Lady and have been a constant example of dedication and faithfulness to the movement. Our base team is Valencia 101, with which we began 35 years ago, as we started the piloting the same year we were married. At the same time, we have had the great fortune of contributing to many activities in the Teams as formators, as pilots, and as responsables at various levels — team, sector, our region of Levante and Murcia, the Spain Super-Region, in communications within the ERI, and now as International Responsible Couple, since July 2024.

If we were to sum up in a few words what we feel, we can tell you that we love the Teams, and we believe they are a grace from God. This call to service is, for us, a call to live truly and deeply the charism that Father Caffarel once intuited and which remains more alive than ever.

That fidelity to Father Caffarel leads us to greatly appreciate the theme of this gathering — *"Return to the Sources"* — and the text chosen as inspiration for these days: *"Remain in me, as I remain in you."* Indeed, all the work we have undertaken during this year with the study topic *Love Is Much More Than Love* is inspired by a fundamental idea: the need to form ourselves

and come to know well our charism and the vision for marriage that Father Caffarel put forward. We cannot be content with reading a few isolated phrases — sometimes taken out of context, sometimes even with quotations that do not correspond exactly to his words. That is why we invite you to re-read some of his texts: the foundational ones, those he published in the journal *Anneau d'Or*, the key conferences. We need to nourish ourselves and, in a certain sense, to live in their full depth the entire proposal that the Teams offer us. It is not enough simply to know their pedagogy and practice it — understanding by "pedagogy" the team life, the endeavours, or the mutual support

A charism is a gift from God that the Spirit inspires in a person or a group of people, in order to respond to a need that makes God's Love present in a given historical moment. A gift from God is something that cannot be manipulated. A gift, a present, must be received with gratitude, respected, deepened and shared. Our Movement received a charism from the Spirit: to proclaim that conjugal love is a path toward God as a couple, and that this path, with God's grace and walked alongside other couples priests or spiritual companions, will be made easier through mutual support.

It is a great project, a great mission, and it is neither outdated nor finished. On the contrary, given the evolution of marriage today, its relevance is more urgent and necessary than ever. Only by being what we are, with creativity and fidelity, will we be able to bear fruit in the Church and contribute our part in the building of the Kingdom.

It is therefore essential that we are fully aware of our charism, because by recognising the specifics of our movement we remain united. The charism is a reality that stands above cultural differences, adaptations, and inculturations. We must clearly recognise who we are - couples called to live the holiness of our sacrament, together with priests and spiritual companions who accompany us on our journey. Our way of doing this is through the small communities that are the teams. We do so, conscious of this identity, but not in the sense of believing ourselves to be in possession of moral perfection, which would make us proud. Instead, we are called to live in the perfection of love, as Fr Caffarel reminded us. Strengthened by this way of being Christians and recognising from our reality other situations, we commit ourselves to collaborate, to help, and to serve... without blurring or diluting ourselves, because we cannot betray our charism, which is a gift of the Spirit. Faithful to the gift we have received, while at the same time updating it without distortion during this historic time in the Church, we propose to live deeply the proposition that Teams offer us. We humbly recognise that Teams of Our Lady is the work of God and that it is He who guides us.

We continue our journey as a couple, we continue in the Teams and in our own team. We have had unforgettable meetings where the work of the Spirit could be felt — healing, consoling, giving strength... We are friends, brothers and sisters, we love one another. But above all, each one of us, each couple, is discovering that the deep and intimate communion being formed among us is not only an alliance of the two with Christ, but one that pushes us toward all those around us who are waiting for a visible sign from us — the sacrament of another Love which, without our lives, without our witness, without our words, without our mercy, however poor, simple or incomplete it may be, they would have no chance of finding.

Father Caffarel said in words addressed to the members of the International Leadership Team in 1981: "There is no true renewal if one is not faithful to the original charism. Renewal of the Movement can only be achieved by deepening the charism which is a gift of the Spirit. As such, it cannot be manipulated. To renew the Movement, one must join in the internal growth of that charism. It is not necessary to look elsewhere. It is as if, after having found a fountain with abundant water, when it seems to us that it is beginning to run dry, we go to look for water elsewhere. What we have to do is to go deep where the vein of water is sure to be found".

The Church and the world need couples united by the sacrament of marriage to witness that love sustains us and gives meaning to our lives when Christ walks with us. And that love which gives strength to our marriage helps us to encounter others and to give of ourselves wherever we are needed, each one responding to his or her own vocation. The Church and the society needs us all.