

TEAMS OF OUR LADY – CANADA

NATIONAL GATHERING 2026

“RETURNING TO THE SOURCE”

PRESENTATION: CONFERENCE #3: CHANTILLY ADDRESS – THE FOUNDATIONAL CHARISM OF TEAMS OF OUR LADY

SPEAKER(S): FATHER AUGUSTO GARCÍA

DATE / SESSION: SATURDAY, AUGUST 22 – 1:45-2:45 PM

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: SPANISH

On May 3, 1987, in Chantilly, France - fourteen years after stepping down as Spiritual Counsellor to the Movement, Father Caffarel addressed the European Regional and Sector Couples. He framed his topic with a question: “What is the founding charism of the Teams of Our Lady?” In this address, Fr. Caffarel explains how the “founding charism” came about, offering historical insights that also reveal his fears, joys, and challenges, but above all, his trust in God’s will.

I would like to begin by sharing with you that when I read this speech, I was immediately struck by the fact that Fr. Caffarel opened his address with the following invitation: “Let us take a few moments to gather our thoughts, for in all these important matters, it is necessary to enter into the mind of the Lord. A few seconds, then, of prayer.” What a wonderful attitude our Founder had. That reverent, sacred respect he shows when speaking of the “charism” of the Teams of Our Lady. The “charism,” as a gift from God, can only be received, loved, and lived within the context of prayer and faith.

Now, I would like to present to you three aspects of the “Foundational Charism” of the Teams of Our Lady as presented in Father Caffarel’s speech at Chantilly. First, the Charism of the Teams of Our Lady is a gift of the Holy Spirit; second, “a gift for the good of the whole Church”; third, “a gift for the Church’s mission.”

1. The Charism of the Teams of Our Lady: A Gift of the Holy Spirit

Father Caffarel begins his address by asking, “What do we mean by ‘foundational charism’?” To which he himself immediately replies, “Certainly, it is not a good idea or an uplifting idea, but rather an inspiration from the Spirit that will serve as a driving force guiding the institution throughout its journey and enabling it to fulfill its mission.”

In this same speech, Fr. Caffarel humbly states:

I dare to believe now, after 40 years, that at the beginning of the Teams of Our Lady, there was a Foundational Charism. But be careful! I do not consider myself a prophet, nor someone inspired, nor a saint. At first, we did not know what the future would hold; we did not say that the Holy Spirit had prompted us to do such a thing. Today, 40 years later, and in light of how the Teams have developed, I think that in 1939, with the first four couples, there was something more than just a good idea, something more than mere enthusiasm; that those meetings were more than just chance encounters, and that Providence and the Holy Spirit were present there.

I would like to highlight, in the words of Fr. Caffarel, his firm conviction that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Movement. For this reason, we can say that the Teams of Our Lady Movement is the “charism”, it is a gift from God. The Movement is a new creation, a new Pentecost, a new grace, a new and particular vocation that the Spirit of God has inspired for the sanctification of couples united in the sacrament of marriage. It was the Holy Spirit who brought about the birth of the Teams, and it is He who presides over their growth under the care of the Church. We must always remember that the Movement was born of a powerful spiritual experience, of the call and challenge to couples who were open to the Spirit and allowed themselves to be transformed into instruments and a concrete response for married couples who desired to grow in their spirituality, deeply attentive to the will and the Word of God.

In this same speech, Fr. Caffarel makes no secret of the novelty that the Teams represent within the Church; he writes: “The emergence of the Teams of Our Lady within the Church is a major event for the Church.”

In light of the new development regarding the Foundational Charism, Fr. Caffarel posed three questions for the Teams in 1987. Fr. Caffarel says:

“What has been understood, what has been fully grasped about this Foundational Charism? What has been understood imperfectly? What could not be understood at that time but is better understood in the current context?”

A year later, Jean and Annick Allemand, following Fr. Caffarel’s questions and answers, re-examined this speech in a reflection titled “From Yesterday to Tomorrow.” Their reflection is structured in three parts: the points of light, the clear and the dark, and what remains in the shadows.

Thus, what has been clearly understood about the founding charism of the Teams is reflected in the following eight points of insight:

1. Marriage is God’s work, God’s masterpiece.
2. Marriage has a soul, which is love.
3. Men and women cannot remain faithful to love without Christ’s help; that is why He instituted the sacrament of marriage.
4. Married Christians are called to holiness.
5. Married life brings great riches but also great demands.
6. It is vital to develop a spirituality specific to the couple.
7. All of this can only be lived out with the help of a movement.
8. The movement is rooted in the Church, its greatest source of nourishment. It serves the Church’s mission, contributing the resources proper to the couple sanctified by Christ.

Jean and Annick go on to describe what Fr. Caffarel sees as a kind of chiaroscuro, that is, what has gradually emerged in the lives of the couples in the Movement:

- After the enthusiasm of the early years of marriage and of teams, there is “a slowdown, a weariness, a routine” for many, and for some, “a breakdown, a failure.” To confront the reality of sin that undermines us, it is helpful to delve deeply into the dynamism of love and grace.

- It’s also good to remind spouses that they must stand on their own two feet, “love and self-sacrifice” to make that shift from “for me” to “for you.”

- One area remains to be explored: the human and Christian meaning of sexual life in relation to the fulfillment and holiness of the couple.

Finally, Jean and Annick discuss the new issues that Fr. Caffarel raises for the Movement:

- Welcoming young couples who are not very Christian and adapting our teaching methods to support them;

- support for long-term committed couples;

- a renewed vision of the transmission and education of the faith; old age; unemployment.

This address by Fr. Caffarel and the guidelines proposed at the Sixth International Gathering in Lourdes (1988) led the Teams into what is considered a new phase in the charism of TOOL, as set forth in the 1988 document known as "The Second Wind." The first part of this document is titled: "The Charism of the Teams of Our Lady Today." This document emphasizes that history changes, but the charism given by the Holy Spirit to TOOL always remains the same, inspiring married couples in Teams to serve with love, while respecting the signs of the times. It reinforces the charism of TOOL as a movement of conjugal spirituality and mutual support among couples, where conjugal spirituality is centered on the couple, without neglecting the family dimension. It affirms that TOOL is a lay movement, directed toward couples united by the sacrament of Marriage, whose specific vocation is the call to holiness.

To better understand what a "charism" is, let us listen to the teaching of the Church's Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council has produced several documents that help us understand what a charism is and its purpose for the Church and for the entire People of God. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG), for example, states that the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Church and in the hearts of her faithful, sustains and governs her with various hierarchical and charismatic gifts which, through the power of the Gospel, rejuvenate her, renew her unceasingly, and lead her to perfect union with Jesus Christ (LG, 4).

These gifts, as *Lumen Gentium* states in paragraph 12, "make them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: "To each one... the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit". (1 Co 12,7).

Regarding charisms, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us:

Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world. (#799)

Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms. (Cf. 1 Cor 13). (#800)

On June 6, 2025, in an address to the leaders of associations of the faithful, ecclesial movements, and new communities, Pope Leo XIV invited all movements to reflect on their charism or charisms in light of grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us listen to his words:

The Letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, (...), states that the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the sacrament of Holy Orders exist precisely so that “the objective offer of grace” made through “the sacraments, the normative proclamation of the word, and pastoral care” may always remain alive and present among the faithful (No. 14). Charisms, on the other hand, “are freely distributed by the Holy Spirit so that sacramental grace may bear fruit in Christian life in different ways and at every level” (n. 15).

He immediately explains what he said:

Consequently, everything in the Church is understood in reference to grace: the institution exists so that grace may always be offered, and charisms are given so that this grace may be received and bear fruit. Without charisms, there is a risk that Christ’s grace, offered in abundance, may not find good soil to receive it. That is the reason why God raises up charisms: to awaken in hearts a desire to encounter Christ and a thirst for the divine life that he offers us. In a word, grace!

2. The Charism of the Teams of Our Lady: A Gift for the Good of the Whole Church

There is no need here to list all the instances in which Father Caffarel emphasizes the ecclesial nature of the Teams of Our Lady Movement and its service to the Church and the world.

In his talk at Chantilly, Fr. Caffarel tells us that very early on, during the first meetings, they discovered something important, an insight sparked by the prayer of one of the women in the group. Fr. Caffarel says: “I think this reflection was very profound, and I think it is part of that dynamic between the foundational principles, the Priestly Covenant represented by the Church, and married couples, who bring their riches, their needs, their questions, and the need for dialogue so that the Church’s teaching does not become disconnected from concrete realities, but rather seeks to respond not only to the needs but also to the aspirations of couples.”

Here, Fr. Caffarel points out that from the very beginning of the Movement, there has been this harmonious relationship between the hierarchical and charismatic gifts, in other words, between the institutional and charismatic dimensions of the Church.

St. John Paul II highlighted three important aspects of the relationship between the institutional and charismatic dimensions of the Church. First, he points out that there is no conflict between them; second, he emphasizes that both are coessential and contribute to making present the mystery of Christ and his saving work in the world. Finally, he noted that the charisms of the movements renew the Church’s awareness that she herself is a movement, “for she is the realization in time and space of the Son’s mission through the work of the Father and with the power of the Holy Spirit” (John Paul II, Message to the participants in the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements. May 27–29, 1998).

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “For this reason, discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism exempts one from reference to and submission to the Church’s pastors. “It is their special responsibility not to quench the Spirit, but to test everything and hold fast to what is good” (LG 12), so that all charisms, in their diversity and complementarity, may contribute to the ‘common good’ (cf. 1 Cor 12:7; cf. LG 30; CL 24). (no. 801)

In TOOL, we are well aware that being recognized as an “ecclesial” movement is not merely a formality, but rather entails a specific commitment. This commitment consists of continually measuring ourselves against the criteria of ecclesiality as set forth in the Church’s magisterium.

Pope Saint John Paul II states that “every charism is bestowed for the common good, that is, for the benefit of the entire Church” (Address of May 30, 1998, no. 5 – Meeting with ecclesial movements). This is the theological truth that serves as the criterion for discerning any charism that claims to be Catholic.

But it is in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, no. 30, dated December 30, 1988, that Saint John Paul II provides a more in-depth exploration of these “criteria of ecclesiality” for lay associations.

In May 2016, with the approval of Pope Francis, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published a letter titled *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* - “The Church is Rejuvenating” - on the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the life and mission of the Church. In no. 18, this letter outlines a series of fundamental criteria intended to help recognize the authentic ecclesial nature of charisms, that is, criteria that allow us to discern that these movements originate from the Holy Spirit. They are as follows:

- 8) *The primacy of every Christian's call to holiness;*
- 8) *A commitment to the missionary spread of the Gospel;*
- 8) *The Confession of the Catholic Faith;*
- 8) *A witness to active communion with the entire Church;*
- 8) *Respect for and recognition of the mutual complementarity of the other components within the charismatic Church. “A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God’s holy and faithful people for the good of all.” (Evangelii Gaudium, 130);*
- 8) *Accepting times of trial in discerning charisms;*
- 8) *The presence of spiritual fruits such as charity, joy, kindness, and peace (cf. Gal 5:22); - “living the life of the Church with even greater intensity,” a more intense zeal for “listening to and meditating on the Word”; “a renewed taste for prayer, contemplation, and liturgical and sacramental life; encouragement for vocations to Christian marriage, the ministerial priesthood, and the consecrated life to flourish”;*
- 8) *The social dimension of evangelization - we must recognize that, driven by charity, (...) at the very heart of the Gospel lies community life and a commitment to others.”*

The Magisterium of the Church has recognized the charism of the Teams of Our Lady as a gift for the good of the entire Church. For this reason, we must ask ourselves how we can ensure that the charism of the Teams of Our Lady continues with even greater strength to be a blessing for the Church in our Canada Region. In a study on “movements in the Church,” Father Ghirlanda proposes three principles that define this integration into the Church: first, fidelity to the charism, as outlined in the statutes; second, respect for the charism, as a gift from God to the entire Church; and third, charity.

Therefore, the Teams of Our Lady Movement will always be a gift for the good of the Church because of its fidelity to its founding charism. The Movement is a gift of the Spirit to the Church; therefore, every couple in the Movement, through their fidelity to the charism, becomes a gift to the Church. The Holy Spirit, who has created this new reality within the Church, as He animates and enlivens it, makes your presence recognizable in the Church and in the world. Today more than ever, it is necessary to know who

we are. Every couple and each one of us is called to keep the charism alive within ourselves, so that it does not become something static, but rather a vital force that flows creatively and freely in every member and couple of TOOL.

In this same vein, Pope Leo XIV, addressing the leaders of ecclesial movements in May of this year (2026), recommends the following:

Here, I would like to emphasize the importance of this dimension of communion with the Church as a whole. At times, we find groups that close themselves up and think that their specific reality is the only one, or that it is the Church, but the Church is all of us; it is much more! And so, our movements must truly endeavour to live in communion with the entire Church, at diocesan level. The bishop is therefore a very important figure of reference, and if a group says, “No, we are not in communion with this bishop, we want another one”, this will not do. We must try to live in communion with all the Church, at diocesan level as well as at universal level.

In this light, we can better understand the meaning of fidelity to the founding charism, which constitutes an indispensable point of reference for the governance of an ecclesial community. Every authentic charism already contains within itself fidelity and openness to the Church. To govern in a manner faithful to the founding charism, therefore, means finding in it the inspiration to open oneself to the journey the Church is undertaking in the present, without becoming entrenched in the models—however positive—of the past, but allowing oneself to be challenged by new realities and challenges, in dialogue with all the other members of the ecclesial body.

3. The Charism of the Teams of Our Lady: A Gift for the Church's Mission

In his speech at Chantilly, Fr. Caffarel reminds the Teams of Our Lady that mission in the Church is part of the “Foundational Charism.” Let’s listen to Fr. Caffarel:

The third aspect of the Foundational Charism that I believe has not been sufficiently understood. To tell the truth, it could only be understood as the years went by. It concerns the mission of the Teams of Our Lady. For the Teams have a vocation: their vocation is to help couples become holy. But the Teams of Our Lady also have a mission within the Church. We must never forget these two aspects: Vocation and Mission.

This statement inspired the International Leadership Team (ERI) to present the 2018 document “Vocation and Mission” to the Movement.

Forty years ago, in this speech, Fr. Caffarel opened up new avenues for the Movement’s mission in the face of current challenges that had not been clearly visible before. For example, he set the following tasks for the Teams:

- Welcoming young couples who are not very Christian and adapting our teaching methods to accompany them;
- Supporting couples who have been together for a long time;
- Formation in marital sexuality as a factor in sanctification;

- A renewed vision of the transmission and education of the faith;
- Helping team married couples to age well, die well, and live out their widowhood.

How important it is today that, from the base teams to the leaders at every level of the Movement in Canada, we ask ourselves about the new realities that challenge Christian life, the family, and marriage. Belonging to the Movement cannot be a sedative for our Christian conscience or a false spiritualism in married life. The Movement's charism does not confine or isolate couples, because holiness is not self-referential. The Charism is a vocation to marital holiness, but it is also a gift for mission. The Charism carries within it the "grace" to step outside ourselves and go out to meet so many couples who are seeking happiness, who are working for love, but who have no one to speak to them about true human conjugal love, which has its source in the love of God.

Pope Leo XIV, just a few months after his election, encouraged ecclesial movements with these words:

Always keep this missionary zeal alive in your midst: today as always, movements have a fundamental role in the work of evangelization. Among you, there are many generous, well-trained people, with "hands-on" experience. This is a treasure that needs to be put to good use, with a constant eye to new situations and challenges. Place your talents at the service of the Church's mission, whether in places of first evangelization or in your parishes and local ecclesial communities, in order to reach those who, albeit distant, are often waiting, without being aware of it, to hear God's word of life.

At the end of his speech, Fr. Caffarel entrusts the Movement to the intercession of Our Lady, who has been present in it from the very beginning. For this reason, Fr. Caffarel says: "I invite you to renew, more than ever, your trust in the Virgin Mary, who will guide the destiny of the Teams."