

TEAMS OF OUR LADY – CANADA

NATIONAL GATHERING 2026

“RETURNING TO THE SOURCE”

PRESENTATION: CONFERENCE #4: TEAMS OF OUR LADY IN 2026 – AN INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW

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ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: SPANISH

In this address, Fabiana and Marcelo have asked us to offer an overview of the ERI's plans, an international perspective, and an update on what was experienced at the most recent International College in Villa de Leyva (Colombia), just a few days ago.

ERI Mission

As you know, the International Responsible Team has several missions, which include spiritual animation, liaison, formation, outreach, and the administration of human and financial resources. In each of these areas, we are called to animate the Movement, keep it connected to the universal Church, ensure fidelity to the founding intuition, exercise long-term discernment, safeguard unity and internationality while respecting diverse cultures, support its development in countries or areas where it is not yet present, collaborate with the SRs and RRs, develop pedagogical and foundational organisational documents and study themes, organise international gatherings every six years, establish and manage appropriate budgets, and assist in the formation needed for this mission. To this end, we work as a team with different roles and functions: ourselves as responsible couple, Father Augusto as ERI spiritual counsellor, Catherine and Christophe as treasurers and secretaries, Carmen and Ricardo in charge of communications and satellite teams, working groups currently devoted to reviewing the formation plan, to collecting and cataloguing many materials to make them available to everyone, and to work on the texts and materials of Father Caffarel. Then there are the four zone coordinators: TJ and Ellen, who coordinate the Transoceanic zone in which you are; Youssef and Georgina, for the Middle East and Central Europe; Cris and Brito for the Americas zone, from Mexico southwards; and Edith and Jérôme for the Eurafrica zone. All of us are at your service — we are not the ERI as some abstract entity; we are married couples and a priest, with our own lived reality, our base team, and a mission for a specific number of years at the helm of the Movement.

Orientations

In this regard, the entire mission of the International Responsible Team in these years since Turin is animated by the general orientation we chose then, which continues to accompany us: **Called to Live in Communion**. Something we want to bring close to every team member, so that they understand its meaning.

If we look at some of the founding documents, the first mention of orientations appeared in the supplement to the 1977 Letter, recalling that the great Orientation was the love Christ offers us: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... and your neighbour as yourself” (Mk 12:30–31). And to grow in this love, orientations were proposed with a twofold purpose: **to grow in love for God and in love for one’s neighbour**. This, then, is what we must explain in order to understand the purpose of the orientations: they are a tool that helps us grow in LOVE.

As they developed, several elements recurred that were later embodied in the points of effort, such as:

- giving an important place to prayer,
- to listening to the Word,
- to the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist,
- to deepening in faith, in order to love God more.

While for love of neighbour they emphasised:

- mutual support between spouses — listening, dialogue, sharing, and especially help for spiritual growth,
- care in the education of children,
- the practice of hospitality in the home,
- and being a concrete witness of Christ’s love, committed within the Church and in public life.

From this idea, the various international gatherings have offered orientations that have gradually shaped the life of the Movement, responding to the changes and challenges that surround us. A general orientation for the six-year period between gatherings, and specific orientations for each year.

All of them have kept in view that twofold dimension:

- love for God, and
- love for one’s brothers and sisters.

With this dual perspective, we understand that underlying them is a spiritual and missionary impulse. That is, if we direct our spiritual life and ground it in the depth of prayer, in listening to the Word and in formation in faith, we will be able to go forth with strength, on mission, to make love for others a reality — concrete love for our own spouse, for our families, in our teams, in the Movement, in whatever the Church calls us to, and in the concrete world that surrounds us.

We are called to an encounter, called by God, to receive a gift — communion. It is not something we create; it is something we receive freely from God, as is everything in our lives. And after that encounter with Christ, which strengthens our life of faith and animates the spiritual dimension, we respond from within our own reality, in order to become missionaries of his Kingdom. Our understanding of communion in the Church and in the world in which we live — that union of believers with Christ — is strengthened within our community, which is that of the Teams of Our Lady.

As you have been living since then: in the first year, we were **called to live in communion with Christ**, and we followed the study theme On the Road to Emmaus, recognising Christ walking by our side. In this second year, in the theme Love Is So Much More Than Love, we have worked fundamentally on **communion with our spouse**, drawing from the foundational texts of Father Henri Caffarel, and thus also honouring the principle of remaining faithful to the founding intuitions of the Movement.

Orientation for 2026/27

For the coming year, we will follow the orientation: **Called to Live in Communion as a Family**. We will journey through the great history of salvation as it is presented to us in Sacred Scripture, discovering that it is not a distant or foreign narrative, but a mirror in which our own experience as spouses, parents, children, and team members is reflected. The history of salvation is, from the very beginning, the history of a people and of a family. And so our own history — with its lights and shadows — can also become a place of encounter with God. Every history, when viewed with faith, can become a history of salvation. We are not speaking of an ideal or perfect history, but of a real one — woven from encounters and ruptures, fidelities and fragilities, sincere searchings and hurtful errors. It is precisely there, in the concrete and the everyday, that God chooses to enter in order to reveal himself and to save. The Bible shows us that God does not act apart from human history but within it, choosing real families — marked by limitations and sins — to carry forward his project of communion. This study theme does not aim to offer us ready-made answers or ideal family models. Rather, it seeks to help us look at our own lives with the eyes of God, to be reconciled with our history, and to discover that even where we perceive limitations or wounds, God continues to act with faithfulness and hope. As married

couples in the Teams of Our Lady, we walk together convinced that we are not alone, that the grace of the sacrament sustains us, and that the Lord continues to make all things new.

The Colombia College

And this is what we have continued to pursue and have been working on at the International College of Colombia, held this past July. There, we gathered with all the responsables and spiritual counsellours of the 14 SRs and 7 RRs directly linked to the ERI. We formed a plural reality that helps us understand how teams are living around the world. It constitutes one of the key moments of communion — alongside the visits that, as ERI, we make at other times of the year to a specific SR or RR, the most recent being to Lithuania last March, and those that the zone coordinators or we ourselves as international responsables may make on the occasion of important events such as this one. Our mission only makes sense if it is kept close to the reality of the specific married couples, counsellours, and spiritual companions who make up the Teams. If our work becomes merely administrative and removed from this reality, we will lose perspective entirely.

The College is animated by a biblical text that seeks to follow the orientation of communion, and for Colombia we chose: “We are one body in Christ”, drawn from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12:12-27). Each day emphasised a different accent from this text — seeking to keep in view how we are baptised in one Spirit, how we live unity in diversity, how we share a single mission, how we care for and support one another, with Christ as the source of our unity. Among all the themes, we can highlight the presentations that spoke of diverse experiences of unity in diversity — from countries such as Brazil, with very different social, cultural and economic realities that have enabled the expansion of the Teams across its vast geography; the reality of integrating migrants in Europe, with examples of new teams in Spain; and the warmly welcomed and greatly valued experience lived here in Canada, which we can say is one of the most valuable examples of effort to integrate and welcome great linguistic and cultural variety. We also heard valuable testimonies from spiritual counsellours, who are essential in helping us with the theological deepening needed to properly understand the sacrament of marriage — including an important reflection from the international spiritual counsellour Father Augusto, which was also greatly appreciated and which then enabled reflection in mixed teams. In our own presentation, we reflected on responsibility and service in the light of Father Henri Caffarel, because we are working on various matters that require us to return to the sources in order to understand the aspects of responsibility.

Another major area of work has been the official Statutes of the Teams of Our Lady, which must be adapted to a new decree promulgated by Pope Francis in 2021. This entails a series of modifications relating to the International Association, specifically regarding the duration of mandates and the systems for electing responsables. This was the reason for our reflection on responsibility and service — bearing in mind that Father Caffarel always promoted collegiality and co-responsibility, stepping back from the Movement in 1973 (a founder who withdraws to pray is an exceptional fact) and entrusting its direction to a team of married couples accompanied by a priest. If there is one thing to be highlighted about that sense of responsibility — and it already appears in the founding letter — it is that Father Caffarel held that above any administrative or organisational mission, the role of the responsables is to ensure fraternal love, to be an example of evangelical charity, and to ensure that each couple finds the help they need, from team level right up to the international level. And for him, the three foundations of service are: encounter with Christ, prayer, and love.

This is why we insist that in our meetings, Christ is present among us — without this conviction, the team meeting loses its meaning. We need prayer to be able to carry out our mission, and we can tell you that we count on praying for one another. Do not forget to pray for the people who make up this responsible team. And love — which gives meaning to what we do and how we live.

With this spirit, we are also organising other important gatherings, for which we ask for your prayers. The International Meeting of Regionals responsible couples — an intermediate gathering between the international meetings that brings together the regional responsables from around the world — will take place next February in Rome, for which we are still awaiting confirmation from the Pope as to whether he may receive us in Audience. And there are the countless other gatherings we have planned in order to continue living out international life. The next one: the Days to be held in Brazil to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of Father Henri Caffarel, in the context of the recent recognition of his Venerability. A milestone that is marking our history and that is gradually bringing us closer to and helping us know our founder better.

We also ask you to continue praying for the difficult situations that are affecting the world and, in particular, some of the Teams. For the Teams in Ukraine, who continue to meet in the midst of war under enormous difficulties; the Teams in Lebanon and the Gulf countries, where growth had been experienced and which have had to suspend some activities due to the war; the difficult situation of the Teams in Syria, where there is a creeping persecution of Christians who are increasingly isolated and deprived of employment; the Teams in Congo in the Great Lakes region, who have had to flee their homes; those in Mozambique, also in a precarious situation in a country divided by civil war; those in Malawi, in a situation of poverty and hardship. But also for the joy represented by the growth in many

African countries experiencing significant expansion — in places where they already existed and in new countries. For the expansion in the Philippines and New Zealand, with new teams. For every new couple joining, every new team, every chaplain and spiritual companion, wherever in the world they may be. As mentioned, we have visited Lithuania and have witnessed in that region a desire to deepen in married spirituality, with the significant support of their archbishops, who are even serving as chaplains.

The task is to discover how to accompany, nourish and animate that path of holiness as a couple. And here too, the priests and spiritual companions have much to offer us — we need you enormously. We have been called freely by Christ to this — to give “a greater love to others”. Inexplicably, he has called us, and as Father Caffarel reminds us, we have a mission in the Church: “it is important that married couples bring their riches so that the Church’s thinking does not become disconnected from concrete realities, but seeks to respond not only to needs, but also to the aspirations of couples”.¹

As married couples we remain open to the Breath of the Spirit, asking the Lord to grant it to us and to give us strength until the end of our mission. Has not being called been the greatest grace of our lives?

¹ Father Caffarel, conference at Chantilly, 1987