



## Marie d'Amonville's Talk

We are very happy to now welcome Marie d'Amonville. With her husband Louis, who has now gone to God, they worked with Father Caffarel first of all as colleagues, before becoming the first Responsible Couple for the Movement. Thank you so much, Marie, for being here today. It is truly a great honour for us. You are here today to talk to us about the Movement that you have just created for the elderly. But before that, could you maybe quickly tell us about your life.

Father Marcovits and Jean Allemand have just spoken in length about Father Caffarel, but one of the things that they did not tell us and that shows a human aspect of Father Caffarel is that, if he were on this stage, he would have stage fright... Because Father Caffarel was fearful and did not like speaking in public. I remember the pilgrimage to Rome in 1970. On the opening day, the three of us were going up together to St Peter's and Father Caffarel said to me, "Marie, aren't you nervous, you seem relaxed and yet, you will be the first woman to speak from the pulpit in St Peter's." Yes, I was nervous just like today, and Father Caffarel was even more so. The real reason was that he was always fearful that he would not speak well enough about God. That is why he always asked for 5 minutes of silent interior prayer before each talk.

Let me now tell you about my life. We were married for 66 years, in Teams for 58 years, and in Intercessors for 51 years. The Lord called Louis home in October 2015.

Louis was a soldier and was badly wounded three times during the war in Indo-China. Since he had had a brush with death very early on in his life, he always remained serene in the face of death, because he considered that all these years of life were in fact a gift, despite the sacrifices that his wounds inflicted.

We wanted to have a big family; Louis had 11 brothers and sisters.

He was 43 years old when the Lord made him understand that if He had only given us one daughter, it was because He wanted our couple to be fruitful in another way. More precisely, it had to do with a calling to help priests, many of them, indeed, were too absorbed in material tasks to be able to dedicate themselves totally to their priestly mission.

We had just returned from a two and a half year stint in Djibouti when Louis talked to me once more about this calling. In the meantime, I had hoped that Louis would have forgotten about it, because although he was in favour of this



change in our life, I was not at all. We decided to do a retreat in order to confirm in prayer and in silence this life choice that was asked of us.

During a week of prayer at Troussures, we met Father Caffarel several times, whom we only knew about through his writings. I was really possessed by the desire to answer this calling because of my love for Louis, more than because of love for the Good Lord. So, on the third day, I went into a small chapel and I entrusted everything to the Lord and said “yes” to Him. It was then that I experienced an exceptional encounter with the Lord and that I found peace at last.

On the last day of the retreat, Father Caffarel called us into his office. And that was when he asked us to come and work at Teams of Our Lady. This did not seem to us to correspond to the calling Louis had heard. So, Father Caffarel answered with this decisive phrase, “You want to help a priest? Why would I not be that priest that you want to help?” He had won and he hired us for 10 years.

We worked with Father Caffarel for five years and then he left the entire responsibility for the Movement to us with a Spiritual Counsellor, called Father Tandonnet to help us. It represented a great change for us and for Teams. Indeed, for the first time, a lay couple took responsibility for the Movement. Since then, there have been six couples, and this Saturday, the seventh one will replace To & Zé.

Marie, your response to Father Caffarel’s call, your commitment and your fidelity to the Movement over all these years are a great example to each one of us. At a time when commitment all too often seems frightening, your momentous choice challenges us.

Today, Father Caffarel’s charism still lives in you. The proof of this is the creation of the Movement called “Life before us.” Can you explain to us how you got the idea to create a sort of new branch of Teams?

Our final Team, that lasted 41 years was disbanded in 2010, because only two couples and a widow were left. This decision, taken by the Team’s Responsible Couple, was very painful for us and for our friend Jacqueline, recently widowed.

Louis often used to say to me, “If Father Caffarel were here, he would find a solution for such situations. He, who wanted to help couples at every age in their lives, surely would not have abandoned them during this final stage of life.” So then, we prayed a lot to the Holy Spirit and to Father Caffarel.



One day, during my hour of interior prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, a small voice told me to go and talk about it to my parish priest. When I came home, I told Louis about it and we decided to go and tell the priest about our desire to create something for the elderly.

He immediately agreed and then began our research on the spirituality of old age with the help of the Bible and numerous contemporary books on the subject.

That is how roughly ten teams began seven years ago.

You say more precisely that you wished to reflect on the means to be implemented in order “to prepare for the great passage (death)”?

Yes, preparing for the great passage seemed to us to be a great challenge to be undertaken.

We, the elderly, we need specific help, adapted to the ultimate stage of our life in faith and hope. We are at an age where, it must be recognised, we endure numerous sufferings, both physical and ethical. We need to try to live joyfully, with a smile and so that suffering becomes our friend. Ordeals, suffering and joy make us richer in humanity; even if sometimes we are a burden, we still remain a source of richness for our communities.

We remain fully-fledged members of parish communities and we are called upon to participate in the life of these through prayer, offering and testimonies of the hope that lives within us. Let us evangelise with the means we possess: prayer, offering and testimony.

Father Bissonnier, who wrote the book, “Life before us,” tells us, “The Elderly’s’ role, in a very specific and irreplaceable way, is to be the light of the world; they are the ones who open up the road and show the path.”

This is the spirit in which around ten teams began seven years ago.

They bring great joy to those who joined them.

We now wish therefore to propose this new Movement more widely.

Can you give us more detail about the characteristics of these Teams?

Firstly, who are they for? What is involved?

It is with joy that we welcome all those who:

Believe in God,



Are 75 years old and older,

Whether they are lay, single, couples, divorced, priests or nuns.

During a monthly meeting, we propose:

Helping each other spiritually to discover how to experience these marvellous years in hope and true joy. (I cannot bear to hear old people complain and say, “You must not get old.”)

We deepen our knowledge of the very beautiful sacrament of the sick and maybe we will encourage a few to be baptised.

Overcoming loneliness, even sometimes occurring within a couple or in retirement homes.

Making new friends, despite and thanks to all our differences.

With these new friends, we can listen, share, talk and discover the hidden wonders and create deep bonds.

*Is the presence of a Spiritual Counsellor envisaged and desirable?*

A regular presence is difficult to envisage, but we would like to be able to benefit from the explanations and support of a priest, knowing that his time should not be wasted.

*How has the specific pedagogy of Teams of Our Lady inspired you in the organisation of this new Movement?*

In everything. We are a spirituality movement founded on prayer, reflection, and exchange between people experiencing the same reality. The methods are similar: a study topic, sharing, mutual material and spiritual help. We are currently looking into the idea of a liaison bulletin or journal as well as the establishment of the equivalent of pilot couples and liaison couples.

*For the moment, the experiment has been launched in Versailles. How can all of us Team members here contribute to the development of this Movement and enable all the elderly, who too often feel neglected, to benefit from it?*

Change the way you consider the elderly! They ramble on sometimes but have much to share with you. As Pope Francis says, “Old age has a grace and a mission too, a true vocation from the Lord. Old age is a vocation.” But it is not easy to manage it alone!

Do whatever is in your power so that the grassroots Teams of Our Lady do not disband and, when it is the case, that the elderly do not feel neglected, because



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they are no longer supported and upheld by a team at the very moment when they most need it, when they find themselves alone facing sickness, suffering, death and widowhood.

Make contact with the elderly that you know, that you meet and suggest “Life before us” to them.

Make the call I launch today come true, by creating “Life before us” Teams in your country, in your town.

Documentation and leaflets will be available. All you need to do is ask for them from the International Secretariat of Teams of Our Lady in Paris.