

Letter from the International Leading Team March 2026

Fr Augusto Garcia, Spiritual Counsellor

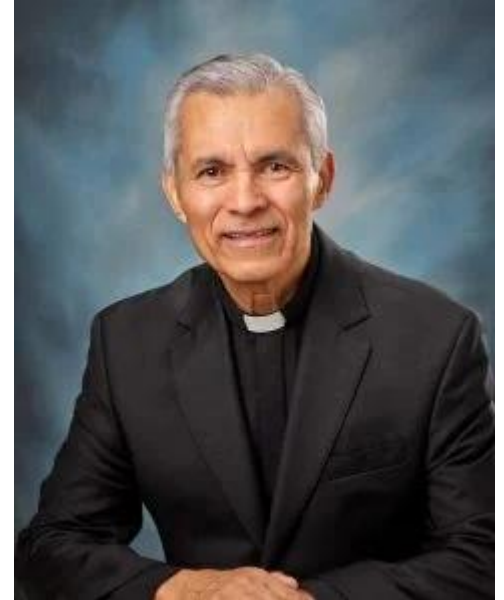
In the December 2025 letter, I suggested that we begin reading the words of recent Popes addressed to the Spiritual Counsellors in their messages to the Teams of Our Lady.

In this letter, we continue with Pope Paul VI, reading his message addressed to the Teams of Our Lady on September 22, 1976, during the audience with the participants in the Fifth International Gathering held in Rome. Let us recall the theme of this meeting: “The Teams of Our Lady in the service of Evangelization.”

Immediately after emphasizing the importance of the Movement’s charism and encouraging it to “continue to be” faithful to its vocation as “schools of conjugal spirituality” faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, the Holy Father Paul VI addressed the Spiritual Counsellors:

To the priests who are chaplains of the Teams, “I exhort them, as a priest like them, a witness to the sufferings of Christ and as one who must share in the glory that is about to be revealed”

(1 Pet 5:1). Do not hesitate to give the best of your skills, your strength and your pastoral zeal to this privileged apostolic field. You will find there a portion of the Church of which you are pastors. Do not give in to the temptation to believe that your pastoral work is limited to a small group of Christians. Your work will be multiplied by the influence of so many couples. You help them to deepen their Christian life; may yours deepen in equal measure.



1. “To the priests who are chaplains of the Teams, “I exhort them, as a priest like them, a witness to the sufferings of Christ and as one who must share in the glory that is about to be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1).”

This biblical text could be considered simply a kind gesture from the Holy Father. But it is also possible to see in it a message he wishes to convey to the Spiritual Counsellors.

Let us see what Peter says to the elders. At the end of this letter, including himself among the elders, Peter exhorts them to shepherd the local churches as good shepherds. He reminds them that their pastoral authority to guide, instruct, and protect the flock in their care derives from the supreme authority of Christ, “the chief shepherd” (5:4). Furthermore, as those responsible for the welfare of the Lord’s flock, he warns the elders not to abuse their authority with malice, greed, or oppression (5:2-3). They must exercise this service “willingly” and not as a burdensome duty. Likewise, they should not be motivated by “greed,” but by a desire to serve the community (5:2b).

Finally, and most fundamentally, elders should not “rule over” those entrusted to them but rather serve as models or examples for the community. Through the way elders exercise their leadership, they can bear witness to Christ’s redemptive sufferings (5:1). The reward offered to them is the same vision that draws the whole community toward the future: “the unfading crown of glory” (5:4). This sharing in glory will take place “when the chief shepherd appears” (5:4).

2. “Do not hesitate to give the best of your skills, your strength and your pastoral zeal to this privileged apostolic field. You will find there a portion of the Church of which you are pastors.”

The Holy Father recognizes the Teams of Our Lady movement as a “privileged apostolic field,” undoubtedly considering married life and families, and further confirms it as “a portion of the Church,” with the clear intention of assuring the Spiritual Counsellors that in their service to the TOL they are also serving the Church



Equipes Notre Dame

as pastors, just as they do in their parish and diocesan pastoral ministry following the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Let us recall Peter's recommendations to the elders.

This recognition is very important, above all, if we bear in mind that even for some priests and bishops, the supra-diocesan and non-parochial nature of the Movement makes it difficult for them to understand it, welcome it, and, even more so, accept the invitation to be Spiritual Counsellors when the couples do not belong to their parish or ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

Pope Paul VI urges counsellors to "do not hesitate" to offer the best of their intellectual, human, and pastoral abilities in serving married couples as pastors of the Church. Therefore, the Spiritual Counsellor's service cannot be seen, either by couples or by priests, as something isolated or merely extra work for their pastoral ministry in the Church.

3. *"Do not give in to the temptation to believe that your pastoral work is limited to a small group of Christians. Your work will be multiplied by the influence of so many couples."*

The Holy Father wisely warns against the doubt that assails so many Spiritual Counsellors who are also pastors of small or large parishes, thinking that they are wasting their time with a group of five or seven couples from the teams. Faced with this temptation, the Holy Father reminds them that married couples in the movement, in their missionary duty, will radiate among many other couples and families the spiritual goods learned and lived in the movement. The Church recognizes that, by the grace of the sacrament, Christian married couples are the principal agents of family ministry.

This has been my experience as a Spiritual Counsellor and a parish priest. The couples in the teams are now responsible for the marriage preparation course, pre-baptismal catechesis, annual retreats for parish couples, etc. I invite them because, in the teams and with the accompaniment of the spiritual counsellor, they receive a solid doctrinal and spiritual formation that not only enables them to teach, but also encourages them to be witnesses of conjugal and family love, not with theories, but by showing from experience the attractiveness of love lived in the sacrament of marriage. In this sense, conjugal spirituality and mission enrich each other.

4. *"You help them to deepen their Christian life; may yours deepen in equal measure."*

This last recommendation from the Holy Father suggests that I propose for your reflection a text from the Guide on "The Priest Counsellor and the Spiritual Accompaniment in Teams of Our Lady," when it refers to the complementarity between couples and Spiritual Counsellors:

The great progress made by Teams of Our Lady throughout the world in the light of Vatican Council II has enabled us to understand that priests and lay people can help each other progress in the knowledge of Christ's mystery. On the one hand, priests guide couples in their difficult daily discernment, on the other hand the presence of couples who pray and love each other, helps priests to exercise their ministry with more dynamism and deeper fruitfulness (p.17).

Fr Augusto
