

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Autumn has arrived in the northern hemisphere, while spring is blossoming in the south. These are seasons that invite us to look at nature, the forests and mountains that, in one case, are tinged with red, yellow and brown and in the other, covered with flowers of all colours. All this reminds us of the saying of the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: "A falling tree makes more noise than an entire growing forest" and this is exactly the message that this new issue of "Mariapolis" would like to offer you. The previously unpublished texts and articles that we have chosen, bring us to different countries of the world. Through testimonies, initiatives and projects, we can get to know, and above all love those Focolare communities which, without making too much noise, are living out the charism of unity.

From the first page, with the message of Margaret Karram and Jesús Morán to the world meeting of assistants of the new generations, to the conclusion, with a thought of Chiara Lubich, who invites us all to walk together towards holiness, you will find news of a network of people and community: it is the "forest" - growing.

We have only enough space to report some of the news of the communities of the Movement, of the different regions, of the little towns. But Mariapolis is one of the many channels to which you can refer; we also invite you to visit the website, www.focolare.org, the social networks and not to miss the next world appointment: the Link Up, at 12.00 (Italian time) on 27th November.

Let's go ahead and if we realize that some "tree" of our community is in difficulty or suffering, that they cannot see the sky because others block it with their foliage, let's not look the other way, let's help them by staying close to them and taking care of them.

Happy reading! And, as we said in the last issue, we await the stories, testimonies and news that you would like to share with us.

The team of the Communications Office

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NEXT APPOINTMENT:

27TH NOVEMBER, 2021 AT 12:00 (GMT + 1)

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A meeting with the President and Co-president of the Focolare

Three generations: one family

We publish what Margaret Karram and Jesús Morán said in a video message for the international online meeting of the assistants of the new generations of the Focolare Movement on 11th September 2021.

Margaret Karram:

Dear All, I am very happy to know that you are connected from all five continents, and I was very keen, we were keen to greet you personally and tell you how much this international meeting of Gen assistants means to us. The need to be united across the three generations is ever stronger. You too certainly feel it, and perhaps more than ever in the zones.

In the family, children, brothers and sisters, big and small, grow up together and are accompanied with care not only by their parents but by the family as a whole. This is how the relationship with the Gen assistants should be, and then with the whole focolare and also with the whole Movement. As we know, moreover, young people are enriched by contact with each other and by each other's example and also by each other's problems and issues, because the older ones, the teenagers and the little ones are a mutual gift.

The inspiration that Chiara had from the Holy Spirit concerns the new generations as a whole, which over time have emerged and developed with specific needs. But they share the encounter with God-Love, all that the Ideal offers and the concrete life of the Gospel. So if it is true that each generation has its own specific characteristics, it is very important that each must take an interest in the other!

I feel that, at this point, God has matured in all of us an urgent need for collaboration. Indeed he is guiding us towards finding ever more effective ways to achieve a true, deep and constructive unity among all. ... I therefore encourage you to maintain a close relationship of unity, between the zones and the Center and it might be a good idea to establish a periodic meeting.

I also want to say that I am so thankful and full of esteem for each of you. Being Gen assistants today – believe me - is a delicate and demanding task, so I really admire you. I too experienced this for many years and it is an experience of closeness and an ever new accompaniment, that opens our hearts and in any case presents a great many challenges, because it means we need to make ourselves one continuously with the person in front of us, not only because everyone is unique, but also due to their different family and cultural contexts and for the benefit of their psychophysical and spiritual growth.

I think you will agree that it is good to be formed individually and above all together, to take advantage of the heritage of the Movement and to develop a pathway with Jesus in the midst that makes it possible for the Gen assistants of the three generations to accompany children, teenagers and young people as a single team in the various and challenging stages of their life.

It think this process is already underway in some zones and this will make the transition from Gen4 to Gen3, from Gen3 to Gen2, from Gen2 to adults easier. It will make the reality of being one family stronger, a family that lives directed

towards a great Ideal; and people from outside the Movement will see that this is how we are.

I feel the Holy Spirit is urging us to take steps in this direction!

You already have precious tools, at the Gen3 - Gen4 level, as well as in the recently inaugurated GENerate platform, to draw on the wisdom of the charism.

In the zones, we can develop this process of unity between generations, one that is ever more one of affection and is practical, of mutual help that involves all the Gen, whether younger or older, in the front line, in collaboration with the adults.

The title of this meeting is: "Accompanying with Jesus in the midst"! It is a fantastic title and I wondered what it meant. Chiara's words in answer to a question at Loppiano on May 12, 1987 seem very strong to me. Chiara invited us to walk with two legs, with Jesus within us – she said "the Risen Jesus" and with Jesus in our midst. This is what she said: "We cannot walk with only one leg (...). If you go ahead on your own, you can cope, but then at a given moment you fail, you give way. Why? Because the reality outside is stronger. Then you need to fight and so two friends together, two brothers who are united are like a fortified tower. (Cf. Prov. 18:19).

I like to imagine the three generations working together as a team, like a fortified tower!

Chiara concluded by saying: "... To build the Movement, to build up the Movement, (and I would add, above all with the new generations) we must do it with Jesus in the midst. Otherwise who knows what would come out, who knows what spirituality would emerge, who knows what strange inspirations would come out! While with Jesus in the midst they can be verified and you can see things objectively."

Also from the educational point of view, I found a very beautiful thought by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who argued that teacher and pupil are both subjects in formative processes. "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is him/herself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach". For Paulo Freire "No one educates anyone, not even their own self: people educate each other through fellowship".

I assure you of my unity, and I pray that Chiara's vision will become more and more a reality in

the Movement today! I live it with you so that the young generations may be enveloped by the light of Jesus, by the light of the charism.

One last thought: the word "assistants" does not totally express what you are and all you do with so much passion. I like to think of you as Chiara once said to Luigino De Zottis, who was one of the first Italian Gen assistants, when he asked her: "What should we adults do with young people? And she replied: "You of the first generation must be for them only guardian angels, who suffer with them, rejoice with them, but then... disappear! Because they must be the ones to do everything, and be the leaders. "

Jesús Morán:

I don't know if you have read the Pope's speech of January 30, 2021 to the Italian catechists, it is very meaningful; In this message I would like to focus on some of the Pope's affirmations that seem to me particularly suitable for assistants. "Catechesis - says the Pope - is the long wave of the Word of God that transmits the joy of the Gospel in life. Thanks to the narration of the catechesis, Sacred Scripture becomes the "environment" in which to feel part of the same salvation history, encountering the first witnesses of faith. Catechesis is taking others by the hand and accompanying them in this history. It inspires a journey, in which each person finds his or her own pace, because Christian life does not even out or standardise, but rather enhances the uniqueness of each child of God." That was the Pope.

Then I thought: the Gen assistant has to take the Gen by the hand and accompany them in the history of the Word of God and of the Church, of the charism and of the Movement, enabling a journey; not walking in their place, but helping them to enter that ecosystem, the ecosystem of Jesus in the midst, as Margaret said, respecting the pace of each one, without flattening down or blending. Giving rise to a sense of the Movement (*sensus Operae*).

Then yet another quote from the Pope: The heart of the mystery is the kerygma, and the kerygma is a person: Jesus Christ. Catechesis is a special space for fostering a personal encounter with Him. Therefore it must be interwoven with personal relationships. There is no true catechesis without the testimony of men and women in flesh and blood.

In the light of this text we could say that the Gen assistant has to bring the Gen to Jesus, to the meeting with Him, which is different in every stage of life. And the only way to do this it via

a personal relationship, the testimony of our encounter with Jesus. I remember how much time my Gen assistant dedicated to my formation, he was 'wasting time' and his testimony really led me to Jesus, not to him, not to the Gen assistant. Again the Pope says that to do this is good to remember "elements which are most needed today (in every place). It has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; - you are loved, you are loved. This is the first element, this is the door – which does not impose the truth but appeals to freedom, as Jesus did. It should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical. All this demands – the Pope says - on the part of the evangeliser certain attitudes which foster openness to the message. And what are these attitudes that every catechist should have? Closeness, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental".

The Gen assistant must not impose the Ideal, but must leave the Gen free. ... It takes constant nearness, patience and acceptance.

Yet another quote from the Pope: "Therefore the catechesis inspired by the Council - here the Pope wants to emphasize this as the Magisterium of the Church - is continually listening to the heart of people, always with an open ear, always attentive to renew itself. This is magisterium: the Council is the Magisterium of the Church. Either you are with the Church and therefore you follow the Council, and if you do not follow the Council or you interpret it in your own way, as you wish, you are not with the Church. We must be demanding and strict on this point. The Council cannot be up for negotiation in order to have more of these... No, the Council is as it is."

As you can see the Pope speaks strong words. The Gen assistant is not a free shooter of the Ideal. In their work they are an expression of the Work of Mary and of a body: the Gen Center, as Margaret said before. They cannot, therefore, follow a different line to that of the Movement even in the most difficult and delicate matters.

Another quote from the Pope: "Just as in the post-Council period the Italian Church was ready and able to embrace the signs and sensibilities of the times, so too today she is called to offer a renewed catechesis that inspires every area of pastoral care: charity, liturgy, family, culture, social life, economics... From the root of the Word of God,

through the trunk of pastoral wisdom, fruitful approaches to the various aspects of life flourish. Catechesis is thus an extraordinary adventure: as the "vanguard of the Church" it has the task of reading the signs of the times and accepting present and future challenges. We must not be afraid to speak the language of the women and men of today". This completes what I said before, following the Pope's words which are very strict.

So what could we say for the Gen assistants? We could say that, as an expression of the Movement and for their task alongside the new generations, the Gen assistant - equipped with the wisdom of the Ideal and with the spirit of creative faithfulness - is called to seek new ways, to welcome the signs of the times, to find new languages and narratives. This is a great service to the Movement; we expect it from you.

Therefore faithfulness, not to be free shooters but to be capable of innovation, of languages, of new narratives . And they do this – as Margaret said this very well before - together with the Gen themselves. These new narratives, these new languages are found together with the Gen themselves.

Again the Pope: "Catechesis and proclamation cannot but place this community dimension at the centre. This is not the time for elitist strategies. The wider community: what is the wider community? The holy faithful people of God. It is not possible to go ahead outside the holy faithful people of God, which - as the Council says - is infallible in credendo [infallible in the faith]. Always with the holy people of God. Instead, seeking elitist affiliations distances you from the people of God, perhaps with sophisticated formulas, but you lose that [sense of] belonging to the Church, which is the holy faithful people of God" .

What can we say for us, in the light of this text? I would say that the Gen assistant must inspire in Gen the *sensus Ecclesiae*, as we said earlier about the *sensus Operae* (sense of the Movement as a whole) and help them to know how to interact, learn and converse with other ecclesial or non-ecclesial groups, avoiding any self-referential attitude, or feeling they are better than others or are some kind of elite.

Finally, as I have always said, you don't "do" the role of Gen assistant but you "are" a Gen assistant. Being assistants is not a personal project but a task that is entrusted to you and for which you are responsible before God and the Movement.



Life of the International Focolare Centre

Three days with the family

From September 17 – 19, the focolarini men and women who have finished the first year of their formation in the little town of Loppiano, Italy, spent three days visiting the Movement's International Centre in Rocca di Papa, near Rome. They will soon move to the little town of Montet, Switzerland, where their formation will continue.

"We felt that we were one single body of people – some of us come from the school and others are from the International Centre of the Movement – but we felt like living members of the same thing. The simplicity of the relationships and the sharing made us "touch with our hands", so to speak, the reality of Jesus' presence among us," say the 17 focolarini and 7 focolarine who attend the formation school in Loppiano, near Florence, Italy and who will soon move to Montet, Switzerland, for the second year of the school.

"The whole time I felt that we weren't listening to presentations – there was always a sense of communion and family."

The visit was eagerly awaited and had been postponed due to Covid-19. It allowed everyone to experience the beauty of being one family. For several of the participants, it was the first time they had been able to stay in this Centre that is everyone's "home".

On the morning of 17 September there was a sense of joy and expectation in the air. In the

auditorium the young people from Loppiano met the General Council of the Movement. It was not the subject matter that made the occasion special and important but simply the sharing of life that happened as each person introduced themselves. In such a small space, the whole world was contained, showing the variety of backgrounds of all the people present. Just as in a family, the enthusiasm of the younger people was obvious, the wonder of discovering a vocation and the novelty of the life that opens up if you follow this road and the maturity of those who have already travelled part of the way.



Later, there was a change of room for another hour long meeting with the President and Co-President of the Focolare. This was a time of really getting to know one another and an opportunity for dialogue. The microphone was passed from hand to hand and there was a succession of experiences, impressions, joys,



"I prayed to God and asked him to help me be as he thought of me, with the values that Chiara Lubich left within me, and so continue what she started."



sorrows and questions. Margaret Karram and Jesús Morán told of their experience when they were elected to the General Assembly. Margaret Karram said: "Thinking about the life in the focolare, I didn't join the focolare to be President, Councillor, Gen Assistant or to take on any other task... Our organization is not an organization, it is the Work of Mary. And we enter the focolare to, first of all, become saints together. This is the greatest vocation: the possibility of making a contribution to the world so that it may become more holy and more just. We are called to a collective holiness, we become holy together." And then her advice was to always be very open, "because the world is very strong and there are so many pressures." Margaret said that it is important not to be afraid to open up to each other and to ask for help along the way. "We have to be totally fulfilled and happy people."

"Chiara Lubich began, we have the same charism and are here to continue, and we will do more."

Thinking of the difficulties that may occur as life progresses, Jesús encouraged everyone by telling them about some of the things that happened to him. "Crises will always be there. They are always a chance to grow, don't be afraid. And because God has chosen us, he is always behind us. He is there," he reassured them. He invited them, "... not to neglect the details. Expect a lot of yourselves. Be demanding in unity. We are not here to have an individual experience or to pursue a personal project. We are in the focolare to have an experience of Paradise which then allows us to go and look for Jesus abandoned in the world."

The afternoon continued with a visit to Chiara Lubich's house, a direct encounter with her daily life that goes beyond the walls, furniture and objects. It was a real "heart to heart" meeting - a visit filled with many stories that illustrate the simplicity and, at the same time, the extraordinary nature of Chiara's life.

They were three intense, full days, which also included visits and meetings with the Centres of the focolarini and a visit to the city of Rome.

Carlos Mana

—



Focolare in the world

Mariapolis Lia shines with new energy

The Focolare Mariapolis, 250 km from Buenos Aires in Argentina, installed a 70kw photovoltaic system. It's a huge step towards achieving the goal of becoming completely sustainable.

In the middle of the Argentine pampas, among expanses of fields and grazing herds, something shines. It reflects the rays of the South American sun, that same sun at the centre of the South American country's blue-white flag. It wasn't there before, yet now it is, collecting all the good that comes from our star: pure energy. Like the energy in the air on the day this newly arrived 70kw photovoltaic system was inaugurated after being installed last April. It is a real turning point for the Focolare community, which began its project to become sustainable in 2015.

"When you dream alone, it's just a dream, but when you dream with others, it's the beginning of a reality" These words from Helder Camara opened the sixth edition of the Ecoferia – an annual 'ecological fair' organized by the citizens of the Mariapolis. It's an opportunity to promote awareness among many, including many young people, on themes of conservation and care of the environment. This year the fair coincided with the inauguration day of the new photovoltaic plant, signalling that from words we can (and must) move on to actions.

"It's a step forward in this process towards greater harmony with nature, making a concrete contribution to improving the quality

of life here and in the world," says Annette Loew, a focolarina who resides permanently at the Mariapolis.



When this all started close to six years ago, in thinking about this project, it seemed too complex to implement.

"A very important sign for us," explains Roberto Ramacciotti, coordinator of the project, "was knowing that while we were beginning to think about initiatives to be carried out on the ecological front, Pope Francis published the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. That made us realize that the path we had started was God's, not ours. And so we moved forward."

A initial hurdle to overcome was finding the necessary funding. But by trusting a young man, of all people, things changed.



Mariapolis Lia has always aimed to value the skills of young women and men who, coming from all over the world, come to live there for a year. And that's how it happened this time, too. Christian Röser, a young German who lived in the citadel for a while and specializes in environmental care, helped find new resources. An "ecological bridge" was created between Argentina and Germany: a German NGO, Ut Unum, financed the project.

A result of a synergy with foreign countries, but also with communities, businesses and local authorities, today the photovoltaic plant is in full operation. It produces about 30% of the total energy needs of Mariapolis – a result that can give hope for a zero-emission future. This is precisely the goal that the inhabitants have set for themselves: to become completely sustainable.

"I would like to embrace it as a symbol of the affection of all the people who have provided their energy to make it possible," says Christian, now an agricultural engineer. "It may seem a strange gesture to embrace an iron structure – hugging a tree would be nicer. But seeking this closeness to nature, renewable energy and creation is a concrete way of living for a united world holistically."

Laura Salerno

Contributions to the Mariapolis newsletter:

Dear Mariapolis newsletter readers,

You can download this newsletter in pdf format from the website (www.focolare.org/mariapoli) or receive it by email by subscribing directly on the site.

It is a free service of the Communication Office.

We are very grateful to all those who wish to continue supporting the work of the Communications Office, and contribute in this way to spreading the charism of unity.

The Editor Office

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Focolare in the world

Mariapoli in spite of Covid

This year once again Mariapoli, or "Cities of Mary", have been held in different parts of the world. Since the beginning of the Focolare Movement, these events have been bringing together people for a few days from all over the world, people who want to get to know the Focolare spirituality and way of life, encouraging them to live an experience of universal fraternity.

"We came from all over France and many were delighted to be able to rediscover relationships face-to-face and rediscover that unity can be lived in spite of the uncertain future." This is how the focolarine in France described the Mariapolis days spent at Ressins. The meeting was a live, face-to-face meeting, and it was good to see each other again after such a long period of Covid. "Gaining momentum... to live fraternity today", was the title of the event which was attended by more than 300 people. In Slovenia the Mariapolis whose theme was Love – the medicine for everything, was also held live with 200 participants. "As I was walking with my children," said Barbara, who attended the event with her three young

children and had been diagnosed with cancer a year ago, "I heard the voice of Jesus saying to me: 'I didn't send you this illness because I don't love you but because I love you even more'. The illness ignited great love between her and her husband and extraordinary trust in God. Chiara Lubich's words and the experiences shared helped them to discover how precious relationships built on love are.

In Paraguay the Mariapolis took place online. The "cries of suffering humanity", the "cry of Creation" and "the cries of the new generations" were the themes addressed. "We were able to see all the inequality and lack of tolerance in our society and how we could respond to those cries of suffering," said Silvia. The joy of the Mariapolis was not only felt by the Paraguayans who took part but also by people who joined online from different parts of the world.

In the zone of Sao Paulo in Brazil, the Mariapolis entitled New culture, creating



dialogue, took place online with more than 1300 people connected and over 4000 views on YouTube.

Here are some of the impressions: "The theme of ecology with the presentation of the Dice of the Earth gave me a broader vision of how to care for and improve our common home." "What happened to me today shows how God acts. I got up happy and ready to love more! I went to the market and on my way out I saw my sister whom I hadn't spoken to for 10 years. I didn't think I could forgive her. Instead I said my yes to Jesus and went to speak to her." Finally, in Venezuela the Mariapolis was



described as 'an oasis in the desert' because of Covid and uncertainty about the future.

The local community wrote: "It has filled us with hope and we recognise ourselves more strongly than ever as Chiara's family". "I promise to become a super hero who will always take care of the planet," said a 9-year-old boy, "help everybody and be a good citizen, setting an example with my life and always doing good." A lady who had tested positive for Covid and was following the Mariapolis from her bed said: "Here I am! I'm here too... the best experience for me at this moment has been to feel surrounded by the love of God through each of you".





Focolare in the world

Friends and saints

The beatification process of Alberto Michelotti and Carlo Grisolia completed its diocesan phase on 8 October 2021. Their story tells of a shared journey in true friendship.

How can we become “saints together”? It’s not easy. It takes time, for sure, and above all a commitment to travel in the same direction, focussing on the same source of light. This is the story of Alberto Michelotti (Genoa, 1958 - Monte Argentera, 1980) and Carlo Grisolia (Bologna, 1960 – Genoa, 1980), two young Italians, very different in many ways but linked by a great friendship and a shared desire to keep God at the centre of their lives.

The charism and ideal of the Focolare Movement drew them both and forged true sharing and fraternity between them. They both departed this life in 1980, just 40 days apart: Albert in a mountain climbing accident, Carlo in hospital of a tumour. These two friends are united in a shared process of canonization, launched in 2005 by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Archbishop of Genoa. The diocesan phase just concluded on 8 October 2021. So who are these two young men?

Alberto was a natural leader and a “winner”. But his leadership was always in the spirit of service, attentive to those around him, especially the most needy and the youth. Born and raised with his family in the port of Genoa in northern Italy, he attended the parish of St Sebastian with his parents. He was active in many aspects of parish life, including Catholic Action and later,

through Rev Fr Mario Terrile, he encountered the spirituality of Chiara Lubich. He was overwhelmed by this. During the Focolare’s summer Mariapolis meeting in 1977, Alberto embraced the ‘good news’ which transformed his life for ever, the reality of “God who is Love”. The same year he became an active member of the Gen Movement, the “new generation” of the Focolare. Here he met Carlo and found a profound unity, overcoming the barriers caused by their very differing characters.

Carlo was a shy and poetic young man. A student of agronomy, he loved reading, playing the guitar and writing songs. He was a dreamer, quite unlike the mountain-climbing, rational, mathematical engineering student, Alberto.

And yet they shared a great desire to communicate the Gospel ideal of a united world with joy and enthusiasm. And to put into practice Jesus’ message “Where two or more are united in my name, I am in their midst” (Matthew 18:15-20). Carlo had known the Focolare since childhood through his parents. He drew from the spirituality the ‘strategy’ of “becoming saints together”. When Chiara Lubich launched this invitation to the youth, Carlo took it to heart, at the time his family transferred to Genoa.

The Focolare founder called Carlo ‘Vir’, meaning “true person, strong person”, and Carlo took this as a guiding principle for his life, drawing his strength from Jesus, the only possible source of energy, as he wrote in one of his songs: “Breathe



Carlo Grisolia



Alberto Michelotti

in the air the love which comes from the new sun which opens up on you”.

The friendship between these two young men lasted just 3 years. But the sharing and understanding of their own life experiences indicate a maturity beyond their years. In their quest for authentic Love, they each discovered purity as an instrument to achieve true freedom. And they shared this ideal with their friends. We can see reflections of their deepest thoughts in letters they wrote, long before social media was available.

“This is likely to be your military service year”, Alberto wrote in a letter to Carlo on his 19th birthday. “New difficulties and new joys. A bit like today which began with a beautiful blue sky and now by 4 in the afternoon has transformed into wintry grey. But anyway we know that beyond the clouds the sun is surely there”.

Alberto and Carlo mirrored one another, recognising each other’s joys and fears, struggles and successes. Trusting in the Love that can achieve everything, they were ready to live the Gospel passage: “No-one has greater love than to give their life for their friends” (John 15:13).

Alberto lost his life in the Cuneo mountains on 18 August 1980. He fell during a climb along a glacial gully in the Maritime Alps. Carlo was not

able to attend the funeral. Two days earlier, he had been admitted for tests after some episodes of fainting and paralysis of the limbs. The results were unequivocal. The doctor did not hide the seriousness of the situation from Carlo and he was immediately rushed into hospital with advanced cancer. While there, he was told of Alberto’s fatal accident. Only 40 days would separate the two friends before they were reunited in eternity. From his hospital bed, in his last days, Carlo greeted all his visitors with a huge smile, despite being so weak. “I know where I’m going,” he said to a nurse, “I’m going to meet one of my friends who left us a few days ago in a mountain accident”. Carlo felt Alberto’s presence beside him as he looked to his own “leap into God”, as he described it to his mother in hospital. He made that leap into eternity and the home of the Father on 29 September 1980.

Today, 40 years on, the ties of friendship between Alberto and Carlo seem as strong as ever as they move into a new and quite extraordinary phase. Never before in the history of the Church have two distinct processes of beatification been considered alongside each other and for two friends. Of course, they cannot be declared blessed or saints until two miracles through their intercession have been verified. But given that they are being prayed to together, they can only be “saints together”. This indicates that a spiritual friendship can be a pathway to holiness. In their lives we perceive the fulfilment of that phrase “thy kingdom come ... on earth as in heaven” and such true joy, fruit of a prophetic inspiration expressed by Chiara: *“I pray you will become saints, great saints, and soon. In this way, I’m sure you’ll find true happiness”*¹.

Maria Grazia Berretta

¹ Chiara Lubich’s message to the Genfest, Rome, 17 May 1980



Culture and unity

The Abba School: a flower with four petals

At the beginning of 2021, following the General Assembly of the Focolare Movement, the Abba School (the Study Centre of the Movement) started off again with a new organization. To find out more, we interviewed its Coordinator, Mgr. Piero Coda, first Dean of the Sophia University Institute in Loppiano (Italy) and recently appointed by Pope Francis as Secretary General of the International Theological Commission.



You were in the first group that Chiara Lubich invited to form the “Abba School”. What are the objectives of this Study Centre? What was your intellectual and spiritual experience in contact with her thought and life?

It was most certainly a special gift from God to find myself at the beginning of this experience with Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, as early as 1989, before the Abba School officially began in 1990. From the beginning, the purpose that Chiara

entrusted to this unique Study Centre was to study and explore the theological, cultural and social implications of the charism of unity. But first of all share the experience of living the Gospel of Jesus in the light that springs from the charism. This is so important, that one of the last things that Chiara said to the Abba School in 2004 was this: “Be a cenacle of holiness!” This is the gift and aim of the Abba School: to learn to live our life, including the way we think, in that space to which we come through the presence of the Risen Jesus alive among his people, that place which is the life of God, the bosom of the Father. In accordance with the Gospel and the faith of the Church, Chiara teaches us that this life is the very life of the Most Holy Trinity, not only in Heaven, but among us: “on earth as in Heaven”.

For me it was and continues to be a unique experience. I could describe it with the words of the first letter of John: “my eyes have seen, my hands have touched, my ears have heard ... the Word of life”. The senses of your soul are turned on and experience the light of Jesus Forsaken and Risen, through which to look at reality in a new way. In this way, more than before, theology has become dynamic and fascinating for me. At the same time, since there are experts in all disciplines in the Abba School, who strive to live unity even when they share their thinking, the horizon of “inter & trans-disciplines” has opened up. What I mean by this is the discovery of the root and the common goal of all forms of knowledge

which are called to dialogue with each other in a very practical way. The theology in which I engage has been extraordinarily enriched in this dialogue, conducted not only at an interpersonal level, but also at the level of relationship between the disciplines.



The Abba School has recently undergone further development. You became its Coordinator in March 2021. Can you tell us in what this development consists?

The Abba School has existed for over thirty years and during this time it has developed in a very rich way. Over time, almost 50 people have been part of it and until 2004, Chiara was always present with a fundamental role. Then, groups related to the various disciplines grew up around the various members: psychology, sociology, politics, economics, natural sciences, art, dialogue ... at the moment these groups involve over 300 people around the world.

In conjunction with the General Assembly of the Focolare and as the fruit of a whole journey of community discernment, we realized that in recent years, the “flower” of the Abba School has blossomed in “four petals” and so we tried to give these a homogeneous and at the same time distinct, configuration, which recognizes and promotes this development at the service of the mission of the Movement.

One “petal”, (about fifteen people), is made up of those who are called to continue the specific study of the charismatic and cultural significance of the event of ‘49 as a special expression of the charism of unity in the experience lived by Chiara, Foco (Igino Giordani), the first focolarini and then gradually by all those who participate in the

charism. We conserve a precious testimony of this event of grace, written by Chiara herself. A second “petal” is the one engaged in the transmission of this patrimony of light and doctrine to the new generations: a group of 27 young scholars, with different disciplinary skills, from all over the world.

A third “petal” is made up of those who have been members of the Abba School and continue to be part of it (29 people), with a view to carrying out research projects inspired by the charism and at the service of the Movement, based on their respective skills and experience. Finally, the fourth “petal” is that of international groups according to different disciplines.



What projects do you have in mind for the future?

We have some projects in mind and are discerning together which ones to undertake and in what way. There are already some interesting things on the horizon. The first is that of giving shape to a “lexicon” of the life of unity: a kind of “guidebook” in which the main ideas emerging from the charism of unity are presented in a universal way, enriched by the light of the experience so far.

A second thing is to offer a contribution, starting from the uniqueness of the charism, to the synodal journey of the Church that Pope Francis has recently launched. We believe that there is something important here: in 1949, Chiara said that the “Soul”, this new subject, both personal and communitarian, which is born from the Pact of Unity, is “presented as Church” and is welcomed into the bosom of the Trinity. The Synod, in fact, is the expression of the Church that walks side by side with



an experience in Loppiano in offering some insights regarding how to participate in this light for everyone. It is extremely positive: also because this light, when it reaches people in different situations, with different skills and different sensitivities, arouses joy and creativity. The Abba School is not a one-way reality: in the sense that it starts only from the light that is offered. No! The light goes out and returns enriched by the experience, by the questions, by the solutions that the life of Chiara's people acquires and contributes. So, it is a virtuous circle, which must be effectively activated and promoted more and more.

Carlos Mana

everyone, starting with the poorest and most rejected and all those in whom we recognize the face and cry of Jesus Forsaken.

Then there is the great anthropological theme that challenges our time: in particular, the relationship between people and especially between male and female and between different cultures. And finally, the relationship between religions: a sign of the times and a specific purpose of the charism of unity.

A member of the Focolare might ask, how can I participate in the Abba School?

The whole Movement is Abba School! Chiara once said, the Movement was born as a school. In the Abba School, and therefore in the Movement, it is a question of placing oneself in the particular school into which God led Chiara, Foco and the first focolarini, in particular in '49.

The commitment, therefore, is that the Abba School is not a house with closed doors: it is full of open windows and doors, so that everyone can participate. For example, we are having





Culture and unity

Up2Me, educating us about affectivity and sexuality

During adolescence, young people experience physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes in a rapid and almost uncontrollable manner. The role of educators is often replaced by influencers, rappers and TV programmes that convey captivating, yet confusing and contradictory messages. The Up2Me course aims to help adolescents learn more about themselves and increase their knowledge and awareness of affectivity and sexuality.

"It was an experience of individual and collective growth. I got to know myself better, both physically and emotionally, and improved my relationship with myself and with others". This quote from Laura, 19, explain well what some of the objectives of the Up2Me educational training course on affectivity and sexuality are, which aims at the harmonious development of the person in all its dimensions.

For some years now, the Focolare Movement has been investing strength, resources and energy in understanding how best to respond to the requests for help and accompaniment that comes from so many families, educators and young people on issues of affectivity and sexuality.

On Saturday 25 September 2021 a worldwide live-streaming was the opportunity to hear the experiences and testimonies of those who have already participated in the training course.

"Up2Me draws on the relational experience of the Focolare Movement, on the pedagogical

principles inherent in the charism that animates it, referring to the indications offered by Chiara Lubich in the spirituality of unity, including "making yourself one " and "listening more deeply to the other", which are particularly effective in the educational relationship," affirmed **Margaret Karram, president of the Focolare**, who spoke during the live-streaming. "The fact that this formula is appropriate for today is confirmed by the somewhat unexpected interest that Up2me has aroused all over the world. From different continents, the local Focolare communities have asked for the training needed to start the courses, and so far about 2,000 boys and girls have participated in the programme".

Belen and David are **educators** from Ecuador but live in Spain. They both trained as Up2Me tutors. "Being able to participate in the education of our new generations", they said, "is a way of collaborating in a concrete and active way in search of a better world. You only have to think a little bit about our past to see how many of us would have liked a doctor or psychologist to explain all the changes we go through at this age, and more importantly, to have a group that has received adequate information to be able to share and discuss this information available and not through the classmate 'who knows all about it' or worse still through TV programmes, films, etc.".

Julia and Grisha from Krasnoyarsk (Russia) add: "There were three reasons why



we started the Up2Me course. Firstly, our children: we really wanted our eldest son who is 17 to do this course, especially since he was in a relationship at the time. His younger sister was also very interested for herself. Then our friends, other parents from the parish and the school. Everyone we told about the course was genuinely interested in the programme and wanted their children to take part in it. The third motivation concerned education in general. There are currently no serious activities in the current educational system that adequately help an adolescent to process his psychological and physiological growth problems during this problematic period of their life".

During adolescence, boys and girls experience transformations at all levels in a rapid and almost uncontrollable manner. They look at themselves in the mirror not really knowing who they are and often do not have a very good image of themselves.

"It's a time when teenagers want to rebel against rules, against conformity whilst simultaneously suffering from a fear of not being accepted in their originality and individuality that is still being formed," says **Prof. Giuseppe Pellegrini**, from the Department of Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento (Italy), who spoke at the global live-streaming. "It is the period in which relationships are built, sometimes the most important relationships that will remain for a lifetime. The process of forming an identity in adolescence develops through attention to oneself but also through attention to others".

One of the challenges for educators is that powerful voices and messages coming from outside which the teenager can easily access from the privacy of their room when they are alone with their smartphone are being added to the voices of those close to the teenagers (parents, teachers, catechists, educators). "Influencers, rappers, TV series carry a polyphony of interesting, captivating, confusing and contradictory messages," says **Cecilia Marchisio**, a lecturer in the Department of Education and Training Sciences at the University of Turin, in northern Italy. "The voice of an influencer and their opinions speak to the boy and girl in their bedrooms, bringing visions that are different from those of any of the adults they frequent in the real world. (...) In addition, almost all teenagers are taught about sexuality through pornography which brings with it an image of relations between the sexes that is violent, aggressive and lacking in dialogue. This is the context in which Up2Me is trying to support boys, girls and their parents. The primary objective is to increase their knowledge and thus their awareness in the field of affectivity, enabling young people to take positions and make choices on the basis of reflections and debates made together.

Lorenzo Russo



Culture and unity

The new Link Up

After a break for a few months, the Link Up is back, on a bimonthly basis and with a new format, the result of a survey that involved Focolare communities around the world.

The worldwide streaming appointment resumed on 29th September 2021 after a break that enabled us to review its objectives and renew its format. This was a process that involved the Central Coordinators for the Movement's communications and some communities of the Focolare Movement from various geographical regions. The suggestions and comments received were very helpful in guiding this process. We are grateful for each of these important contributions.

The editorial team, composed of members of different ages and nationalities, went back to look at the roots of this appointment, the "Link Up", which started in 1981. They re-read what Chiara Lubich herself had said on various occasions. This review was enriched by the freshness and competence of a group of young communication professionals, who have now joined the editorial team. It is a process that has not ended, but will develop over the next months.

From the very beginning, the objective of the Link Up was to go together in the "Holy Journey" of life, both as individuals and as a community, living together the Charism of Unity which manifests itself with the same spirit, although in various ways, in every environment. It is therefore a way to accompany one another in

translating the Gospel into life and a way to get to know the Movement better, by sharing experiences, projects and insights.

For this reason each Link Up will be like a journey, to one or more parts of the world, providing the opportunity to meet local communities; to present one or more realities of the Movement (projects, achievements, centres...); to get to know the various components of this big family; to deepen a topical issue in the light of the Charism of Unity, including a contribution from experts. It will be a journey that will visit the Centre of the Movement, to meet Margaret Karram and Jesús Morán, the President and Co-president of the Focolare and it will include a contribution from the words of Chiara Lubich. Some people might remember that the original name was "CH Link Up", where CH stood for Helvetic Confederation, i.e. Switzerland, the country from which the telephone call originated thanks to the technical possibilities





offered by one of the operators, Swisscom. Now, since the method of transmission of the Link Up has changed to streaming, the abbreviation “CH” has been eliminated, simply leaving: Link Up. The subtitle now expresses Chiara’s desire for the whole Focolare Movement: “Be a family”. It will not be longer than 45 minutes. Another novelty is the opening of a YouTube channel to facilitate the sharing of the content. In addition to following the streaming on the day of the live transmission, the individual items can also be accessed. Thanks to the network of collaborators in many countries, the YouTube channel includes translations. The latest edition is in 14 languages.

world, so that the Link Up can increasingly reflect a worldwide family connected by the Charism of Unity.

Meanwhile ... the countdown towards a new meeting of the Link Up family has already begun: the next one will be on Saturday 27th November. Take note, it will begin at 12 (GMT + 1). This time we want to give the opportunity to those who live in the East and in Oceania to follow the Link Up live.

For comments, suggestions or questions write to collegamentoch@focolare.org.

We hope to enrich the network of contributions and collaboration in different parts of the

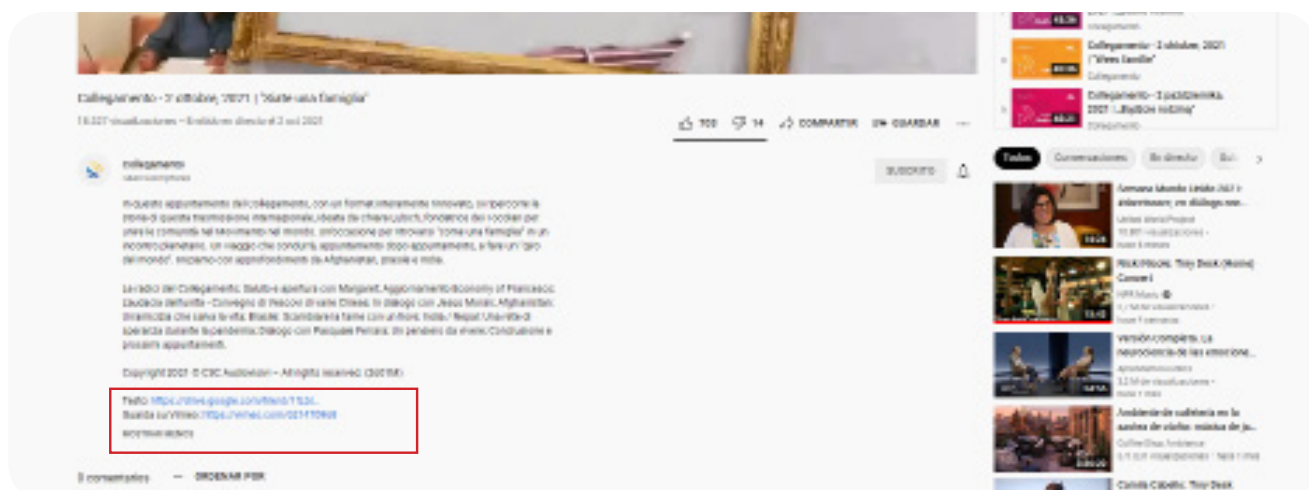
Kim Rowley

DOWNLOAD the LINK UP **full edition** or **news to share** from Youtube-canal:



www.youtube.com/c/CollegamentoFocolare_official

click on **"See more"** in the description and click on the link in the description. You will be redirected to a site where you can download news to share. In the description there is also a link to download the text.



Even in the rain

“Do to others what we would like them to do to us”. It was by thinking about the “Golden Rule” that I decided to bring some comfort to a pregnant woman in my neighborhood.



Unfortunately, she had lost her firstborn child and so was now looking forward to this birth even more. My initial idea was to bring her some food while she was in hospital. As it was the end of the month, I hoped I had enough money to do this. Unfortunately, a delay in the payment of salaries did not allow me to reach my goal. In the meantime, however, I remembered that we had learned from Chiara Lubich that everyone really has many things that they can give, such as joy or time.

This inspired me and I immediately asked my children, who also know the Focolare Movement, to join me in dancing and singing songs of joy to welcome and congratulate this new mother on her return home. It was a beautiful moment and, despite the incessant rain that day, we continued to party under the umbrellas, tireless and almost unrestrained. The woman was very grateful. The next day, even though my salary had not yet arrived, I still decided to prepare a simple meal to share with her.

Many people were coming to congratulate her. Among them was a girl. I knew that the water tap in the yard of her house was broken and needed to be fixed. At first I hesitated but I remembered the word of Jesus: “... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”.

So, in the end, I decided to repair it while the visitors were still visiting the new mother. When she was leaving, the girl was surprised to find the tap fixed and began to ask who did it. Receiving no response, to reassure her, I went over to tell her what we had done. Her thanks came from the bottom of her heart”.

D. B. - Burundi

(from Life in Communion, Eastern Africa zonal newsletter, Year II - n.4 / October - December 2021)

A “new” day

I was on my way to the office when, at a certain point, I found myself stuck in traffic. The queue of cars was barely advancing and I was in serious danger of being very late.

I began to get nervous. Then my mobile phone rang, which in the meantime had slipped down between my feet.



Although the car was moving, I instinctively leaned down to get it and, accidentally, I hit the car in front of me that had stopped suddenly.

I was very disappointed in myself for what had happened. A very nervous lady immediately got out of the car in front. I was just as nervous, but once I opened the car door, something changed in me. I went over to her, trying to reassure her, telling her that I was to blame and that I would take care of all the expenses.

In the meantime, she contacted her husband who arrived immediately and who also seemed very nervous. He was a policeman and at once he asked his wife how I had behaved: “This gentleman is very correct and kind” exclaimed the woman.

We stepped aside to understand together what to do and I decided to love him too, once again recognizing my responsibility. Right away he shook my hand and said, “Don’t worry about the car. You don’t know what you did for me today. You saved my marriage”. I was very surprised because I could not connect what happened with that sentence, then he explained: “Our marriage has not been going well for a long time, our relationship was always tense. Today, however, as soon as she saw me arrive, my wife came to meet me and hugged me, thanking me for joining her so quickly”.

Their daughter, who was travelling with her mother, was also very happy to have witnessed this scene. It was a very strong moment and the fact of not being closed in on myself after my mistake made me really experience how beautiful it is to love. This experience really brightened a day that had started badly and made it “new”.

Andrés Niño (Colombia)

The wisdom of the meek

Memories of Anna Fratta (Doni) from Lucia Abignente, an Italian Focolarina who joined her in Poland for several years. A life of complete “giving”, true to the name given her by Chiara Lubich.

“An abyss of humanity”, “a ‘maestro’ of life”, “a small great woman”. Just three of the many reactions to the news that Anna Fratta, known throughout the Focolare Movement as ‘Doni’, reached the house of the Father on 24 September 2021.

She herself would no doubt feel rather uncomfortable about these epithets, shying away as she did from any kind of praise. She was always measured in her own words, which, few as they were, came out as ‘distilled’ wisdom. Her temperament, reinforced by her life experiences, made them such. The youngest of six, in her childhood she was no stranger to the dimension of suffering, particularly when she lost one of her sisters. From a very tender age, she already began to pose profound existential questions about the meaning of life, and gradually drifted away from belief in God, seeking her answers elsewhere.

Later on, the study of medicine, which she undertook in a spirit of rebellion, showed itself to be providential. She found herself fascinated by biology, which had a significant impact on her interior progress. In nature she discovered a relationship of reciprocity and of service she could not explain, a law of love which she came to understand one night. “After a dramatic and painful interior struggle” she described how she accepted “there is a Being who contains love within”. It was a decisive turning point, followed by her meeting with God in the charism of Chiara Lubich. Not long after this, Doni perceived that God was calling her to follow Chiara in the way of the Focolare.

Doni was among the group of Focolarini doctors who, at the invitation of the Catholic Church, went behind the ‘Iron Curtain’, where she lived for thirty years (1962-1992), firstly in the DDR (former East Germany) and then Poland. She worked silently and effectively in bringing Focolare communities to life there, following their growth and progress with awe and gratitude to God. From this region which suffered from lack of liberty and the impossibility of regular contact with the Focolare Center in Rome, Italy, she was then transferred right to its heart, living in Rocca di Papa, Rome, as part of Chiara Lubich’s own community house. With Chiara, she shared profound, luminous, eventful years, accompanying her at an international level and then, with great love and dedication also through the last part of her earthly journey.



The design of God on Doni continued through her wise contribution as General Counsellor for the aspect of “spirituality and prayer life” of the Focolare Movement. At the same time, alongside Gis Calliari, Eli Folonari and others of the first Focolarine, she lived total self-giving in welcoming countless visitors to Chiara Lubich’s home, transmitting the light of the daily life they had shared with Chiara. Later she moved to the Focolare little town of Loppiano, Italy, due to an illness which progressively reduced her physical capacities.

A profound interior coherence linked all her actions. “Love, we know, disarms. Our speaking was such that anyone could listen, friends and enemies alike,” she recalled, aware that in those years behind the Iron Curtain, the secret Police followed them assiduously. “Love, love, only love, and filling my suitcases with this love. It’s all I’ll be bringing with me!” she wrote in recent years, as she prepared herself for the final journey. No wonder then, that her professional activity had earned the respect of the authorities. In the DDR she was awarded three medals in honor of the work she did and for the “collective” she built up. Even clearer how her life transmitted the love of God to many. Perhaps the secret lies in her constant intimate relationship with Mary, particularly in the Desolation and ‘yes’ at Golgotha opening her arms and heart to humanity. This was the example Doni followed.

On 15 September back in 1962, just after crossing the Berlin Wall, she wrote, “There’s nothing to lean on here. And if you don’t keep your gaze on Mary at the foot of the Cross, you’ll fall down. There are times I feel like I’m suffocating and the only thing to do is pray to Mary. It’s the only way so that slowly, slowly the emptiness becomes a fullness, and the pain is transformed into peace. These are the most beautiful, most precious moments of the day, because in suffering I find an ever more intimate and profound relationship with Mary, and through her with all her children”.

Maybe here lies the secret of her fruitfulness, of her life of complete “giving”, true to the name Chiara Lubich gave to her - Doni (“gifts” in Italian).

Lucia Abignente



Members of the Movement who have concluded their earthly lives:

25 January 2021 **Ainhoa Peñarrubia del Valle**
volunteer from Spain

13 February 2021 **Xavier Piqué**
religious from Spain

26 February 2021 **Nena Casanova**
volunteer from Spain

08 April 2021 **María Teresa Baena**
volunteer from Spain

11 April 2021 **Fermina Zambrano**
volunteer from Spain

13 May 2021 **María Ángeles Arrarte**
member of the New Families movement from Spain

25 May 2021 **Blanca Barredo Ruiz**
religious from Spain

29 May 2021 **Krisztina Erhardt**
married focolarina from Hungary

01 June 2021 **Emilio Montes de Oca**
priest focolarino from Costa Rica

15 June 2021 **Helmut Graw**
priest focolarino from Germany

19 June 2021 **Emmanuel Mijares**
priest focolarino from the Philippines

22 June 2021 **Irma Maria Sottas**
focolarina from Italy

23 June 2021 **Bruno Gerstendorfer**
focolarino from Austria

29 June 2021 **Eraldo Carpanese**
priest focolarino from Italy

11 July 2021 **Francisco de Assis Sant'Ana**
focolarino from Brazil

13 July 2021 **Mari Ponticaccia**
focolarina from Italy

02 August 2021 **Juan Bautista Alzate**
priest focolarino from Colombia

05 August 2021 **Ferruccio Gambaletta**
priest focolarino from Italy

11 August 2021 **Nunzio Morello**
priest focolarino from Italy

12 August 2021 **Nedo Pozzi**
married focolarino from Italy

13 August 2021 **Tesita Marianne Hausmann**
focolarina from Germany

15 August 2021 **Elody Pedrelli**
focolarina from Italy

18 August 2021 **Giuseppina (Pina) Peduzzi**
focolarina from Italy

19 August 2021 **Chiarama Helmut Sievers**
priest focolarino from Germany

21 August 2021 **Pierre Guilbert**
priest focolarino from France

02 September 2021 **Ettore Bastianini**
permanent deacon focolarino from Italy

03 September 2021 **José Luiz da Costa Tavares**
focolarino from Brazil

09 September 2021 **Phyllis Scaringe**
focolarina from the USA

24 September 2021 **Doni Anna Fratta**
focolarina from Italy

03 October 2021 **Mladen Slezak**
married focolarino from Croatia

05 October 2021 **Simonetta Magari**
focolarina from Italy

21 October 2021 **Maria Antonietta Antonelli**
focolarina from Italy



Saints together

Chiara Lubich: As if today were the first day

We are in times that we must walk together, in the synodal style. In this passage we are asked to put love for our brothers and sisters first, with every brother and sister, but especially with those we work with, study with, live with.

All our responsibilities can be ... summarized in helping our neighbour. This is confirmed by one of those sentences of Scripture that centre on love and that strike a chord within us: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Gal. 5:14 NRSV).

If that is how things are, then our striving towards holiness means focussing all our attention and all our effort on loving our neighbour. For us, striving towards holiness is not so much about trying to be rid of our faults one by one, as about loving, thinking of others, completely forgetting ourselves. ...

But we know that whoever loves their neighbour, whoever lives for others, soon realizes that it is no longer they who live, but Christ lives in them.

Christ lives in their hearts. And who is Christ? Who is Jesus? He is holiness. We find holiness in Him, whose presence emerges within us because we love. Our holiness comes as a consequence of loving, and we cannot reach it any other way. If we were to seek after holiness for its own sake, we would never reach it. So let's love then, and nothing else! Let go of everything, even the attachment to holiness, striving only, only, only to love. It's the only way to be able to make a gift of our holiness to Mary one day. ...

Let's set off again, as if today were the first day of our revolution of love, the first day of our Holy Journey. Let's set off again, not thinking of anything else, because love sums up everything. Let's try to love every neighbour as ourselves; and do so by “immersing ourselves” in every situation.

Chiara Lubich

(From LUBICH, C; Edited by Michel Vandeleene, Conversazioni in collegamento telefonico, Città Nuova, Roma, 2019, pp. 120-121)